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George Challis

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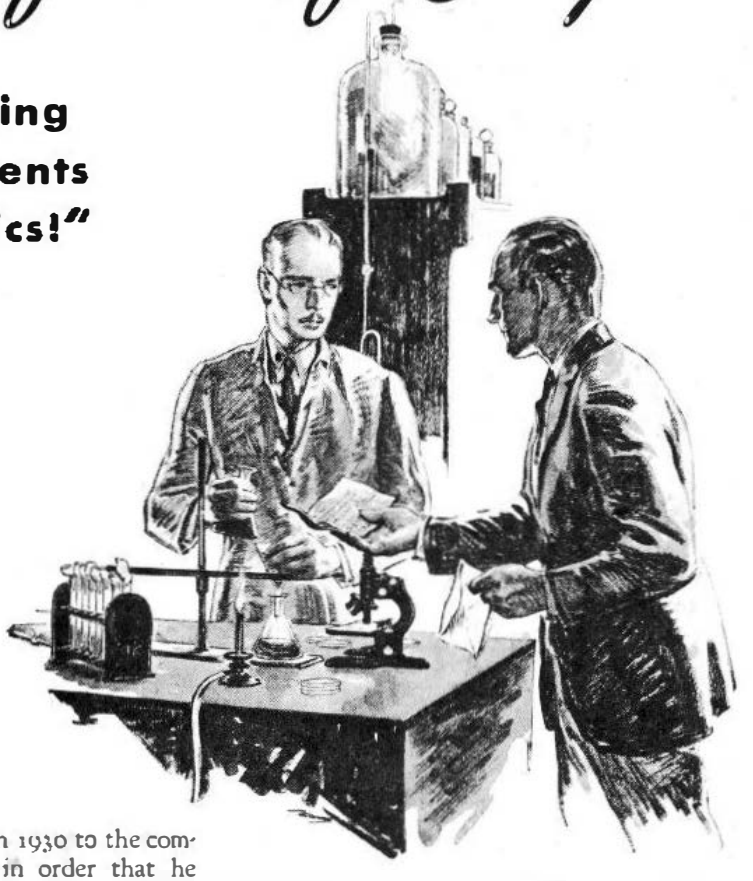

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ARGOSY

NRA CODE

Action Stories of Every Variety

Volume 251 CONTENTS FOR NOVEMBER 24, 1934 Number 4

NOVELETTES AND SHORT STORIES

SERIALS

OTHER FEATURES

This magazine is on sale every Wednesday

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The Firebrand

By GEORGE CHALLIS

Author of "The Naked Blade," etc.

The wit of Tizzo, the Firebrand, was as keen as his sword—and he needed them both in that Italian intrigue

LUIGI FALCONE at fifty-five had lost some hair from his head and some speed from his foot, but his shoulders were as strong and his hands almost as quick as in those days when he had been famous with spear and sword. Now, stepping back with a wide gesture of both sword and small target, he cried out, "Tizzo, you are asleep! Wake up! Wake up!"

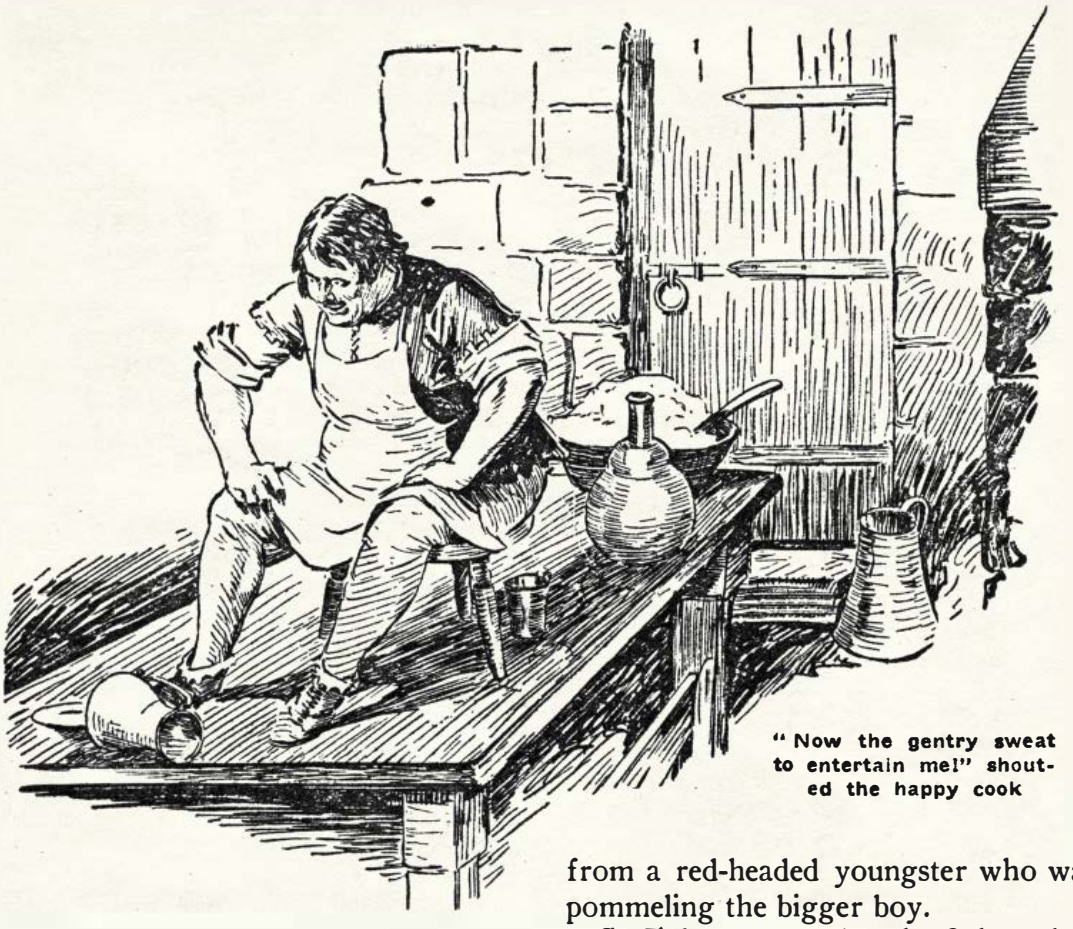
Tizzo, given this name of Firebrand because his hair was flame red and his eyes were flame blue, looked up at the blue Italian sky and then through the vista of the trees towards Perugia which in the far distance threw up its towers like thin arms.

"Well, the day is warm," said Tizzo, and yawned.

But Tizzo himself was not warm. All the exercise of wielding the strong target and the long, heavy sword had hardly brought a moisture to his forehead or caused him to take a single deep breath, partly because he had been stepping through the fencing practice so carelessly and partly because—though he was neither tall nor heavy—he was muscled as supple and smooth as a cat.

"My sword is enough," said Tizzo. "Come on!"

"The day is warm but *you* are not warm, Tizzo!" exclaimed Falcone. "God has given you nothing but a pleasant sort of laughter. You lack two



"Now the gentry sweat to entertain me!" shouted the happy cook

inches of six feet. I could button you almost twice inside of one of my jackets. Nothing but skill can make up for the lack of weight in your hand; and here I am giving you my time, teaching you my finest strokes, and yet you sleep through the work! If you could touch me twice with the point or once with the edge, I'd give you whatever you ask."

Tizzo stopped yawning and laughed that pleasant laughter which had commended him to the eye of rich Falcone fifteen years before when Luigi rode through the street of the little village. Through a swirl of fighting, scrambling lads he had heard screaming and laughter. The screaming came from a lad who had been cornered against a wall. The laughter came from a red-headed youngster who was pommeling the bigger boy.

So Falcone, stopping the fight, asked questions. The sound of that laughter had reminded him of his own childless years and empty, great house on the hill. To most Italians red hair and blue eyes would not have been attractive, but Falcone was one who always choose the unusual. That was why he had taken Tizzo home with him. The boy had no other name. Mother and father were unknown. He had simply grown up in the streets like a young wolf running along with many others of the same unmothered kind; they were the brood of war which was scattered up and down Italy.

He had been a page, a valet, and then like the rightful son of the house of Falcone he had been educated with all care. Falcone, turning from war to the adventures of the study and the

golden mines of Greek literature which were dazzling the wits of the learned throughout the Western world, had Tizzo trained in the same tongues which he himself had mastered. He was very fond of the slender youth, but that fire which had flamed in the lad when he ran wild through the streets of the village had grown dim. What he did was done well, without effort, without enthusiasm. And the big, headlong nature of Falcone was disgusted by that casual response, that ceaseless indifference.

Now, however, that old shimmer of flame blue glanced in the eyes of Tizzo as it had not shone for years.

"Shall I have the rest of the day to go where I wish and do what I please?" he asked. "If I touch you twice with the point or once with the edge, shall I have that gift?"

Falcone stared.

"What would you do with so many hours?" he asked. "You could not travel as far as Perugia in that time. What would you do?"

Tizzo shrugged his shoulders.

"But you shall have what you please and a horse to take you on the way," said Falcone, "*if* you touch me—edge or point—a single time!"

Tizzo laughed and threw the target from his arm. "What? Are you giving up before you begin?" demanded Falcone.

"Why should I have that weight in my hand?" asked Tizzo. "Now—on your guard—"

And he came gliding at Falcone.

IN that day of fencing, when men were set to ward off or deliver tremendous thrusts or sweeping cuts that might cleave through plate armor, there was generally a forward posture of the body, both arms thrust a little out. This caused stiffness and slowness, but it braced a man against every shock. It was in this manner that Falcone stood, scowling out of his years of long experience, at that flame-headed lad who came in erect and swift and delicately poised, like a dancer.

Falcone feinted with the point and then made a long sweeping cut which if it had landed, in spite of the blunted edge of the sword, certainly might have broken bones.

But the sword whirred through the empty air. Tizzo had vanished from its path. No, he was there again in flesh and laughter on the right. Falcone, growling deeply in his throat, made a sudden attack. Strokes downright and sidewise, dangerous little upcuts, darting thrusts he showered at Tizzo.

Sometimes a mere touch of steel against steel made the ponderous stroke of Falcone glance past its target, a hair's breadth from head or body. Sometimes a twist of the body, a short, lightning pass of the feet deceived the sword. Falcone, sweat streaming down his face, attacked that laughing shadow with redoubled might and in the midst of his attack felt a suddenly light pressure against his breast. He could hardly be sure for an instant. Then he realized that Tizzo had stepped in and out, moving his whole body more swiftly than most men could move the hand.

It was a touch, to be sure—with the point and exactly above the heart!

Luigi Falcone drew back a little and leaned on his blade.

"Quick! Neat! A pretty stroke! And worth not a straw against a man in armor."

"In every armor there are joints, crevices," said Tizzo. "Where is there armor through which a wasp cannot

sting, somewhere? And where a wasp can sting the point of a sword can follow!"

"So?" said Falcone, through his teeth. He was very angry. He had a dim suspicion that for years, perhaps, this pupil of his had been playing idly through their fencing bouts. "Now, try again—"

He fell on guard. There would be no rash carelessness, now. His skill, his honor, almost his good name were involved in keeping that shadow-dancer from touching him with the sword again. Well and warily, with buckler and ready sword, he watched the attack of Tizzo.

It was a simple thing. There was no apparent device as Tizzo walked straight in towards danger. But just as he stepped into reaching distance his sword—and his body behind it—flickered to this side and to that. A ray of sunlight flashed into the eyes of Falcone. Something cold touched him lightly in the center of the forehead. And Tizzo stood laughing at a little distance again.

FALCONE wiped his forehead and looked at his hand as though the touch of the sword point must have left a stain of blood. His hand was clean, but his heart was more enraged.

"Have you been making a fool of me?" he shouted. "Have you been able to do this for years—and yet you have let me sweat and labor and scold? Have you been playing with me like a child? Take your horse and go. And stay as long as you please! Do you hear? As long as you please! I shall not miss you while you are away. Cold blood never yet made a gentle knight!"

He had a glimpse of Tizzo standing stiff and straight with the look of one who has been wounded deeply, near to the life.

But the anger of Falcone endured for a long time. It made him stride up and down through his room, glowering out the window, stamping as he turned in the corner. Now and again he knit his great hands together and groaned out with a wordless voice.

And every moment his rage increased.

He had rescued a nameless child from the streets. He had poured out upon the rearing of the youngster all that a man could give to his own son. And in return the indolent rascal had chosen to laugh up his sleeve at his foster-father!

Falcone shouted aloud. A servant, panting with fear and haste, jumped through the doorway.

"Tizzo! Bring him to me! On the run!" cried Falcone.

The broad face of the servant squinted with a malicious satisfaction. He was gone at once, and Falcone continued his striding with his rage hardening, growing colder, more deadly, every moment.

It was some time before the servant returned again, this time sweating with more than fear. He had been running far.

"He is not in his room," reported the man. "He is not at the stables or practicing in the field at the ring with his lance. He has not even been near his favorite hawk all day. He was not with the woodmen, learning to swing their heavy axes—a strange amusement for a gentleman! I ran to the stream but he was not there fishing. I asked everywhere. He has not been seen since he was fencing in the garden—"

Falcone, raising his hand, silenced this speech, and the fellow disappeared.

Then he went to the room of Tizzo to see for himself.

THE big hound rose from the casement where it was lying, snarled at the intruder, and crossed to the high-built bed as though it chose to guard this point most of all. Falcone, even in his anger, could not help remembering that Tizzo could make all things love him, men or beasts, when he chose. But how seldom he chose! The old master huntsman loved Tizzo like a son; so did one or two of the peasants, particularly those woodsmen who had taught him the mastery of their own craft in wielding the ax; but the majority of the servants and the dependents hated his indifference and his jests, so often cruel.

Half the hunting dogs were ready to fly at his throat; the other half were ready to die in his defense. But when he entered the stables, every head was lifted, and a long chorus of neighing rang out to greet the master.

Falcone thinking of this, saw on the table in the center of the room—piled at either end with the books of Tizzo's study—a scroll of cheap parchment on which beautiful fresh writing appeared.

"Messer Luigi," he read, in the swift, easy, beautifully smooth writing of Tizzo, "my more than father, benefactor, kindest of protectors, it is true that I have no name except the one that I found in the street. And yet I feel that my blood is not cold—"

Falcone, lifting his head, remembered that he had used this phrase. He drew a breath and continued.

"—and I have determined to take the permission which you gave me in your anger today. I am going out into the world. I think this afternoon I may be close to an opportunity which will take me away—in a very humble service. I shall stay in that service and try to find a chance to prove that my blood is as high as that of an honest man. If my birth is not gentle, at least I hope to show that my blood is not cold.

"The wine and the meat of your charity are in themselves enough to make me more than a cold clod. If I cannot show that gentle fare has made me gentle, may I die in a ditch and be buried in the bellies of dogs.

"Kind Messer Luigi, noble Messer Luigi, my heart is yearning, as I write this, to come and fling myself at your make me more than a cold clod. If I laughed as I fenced with you, it was not that I was sure of beating you but only because that laughter will come sometimes out of my throat even against my will.

"Is there a laughing devil in me that is my master?

"But if I came to beg your forgiveness, you would permit me to stay because of your gentleness. And I must not stay. I must go out to prove that I am a man.

"Perhaps I shall even find a name.

"I shall return with honor or I shall die not worthy of your remembering. But every day you will be in my thoughts.

"Farewell. May God make my prayers strong to send you happiness. Prayers are all I can give.

"From a heart that weeps with pain, farewell!

"Tizzo."

There were, in fact, a number of small blots on the parchment. Falcone examined them until his eyes grew dim and the spots blurred. Then he lifted his head.

It seemed to him that silence was

flowing upon him through the chambers of his house.

CHAPTER II.

THE DUEL.

AT the village wine-shop, which was also the tavern, a number of ragged fellows were gathered, talking softly. They turned when they saw one in the doublet and hose and the long, pointed shoes of a gentleman enter the door; and they rose to show a decent respect to a superior. He waved them to sit again and came down the steps to the low room with his sword jingling faintly beside him.

Now that he was well inside the room and the sunlight did not dazzle the eyes of the others, they recognized Tizzo, and they growled as if they had only one mind, one throat.

They remembered him from the old days, as keen as a knife for every mischief. They remembered that he had been one of them—less than one of them—a nameless urchin on the street, a nothing. Chance had lifted him up into the hall of the great, the rich Luigi Falcone. And therefore the villagers hated him willingly and he looked on them, always, with that flame-blue eye which no man could read, or with that laughter which made both men and women uneasy, because they could never understand what it might mean.

Now he walked up to the shop keeper, saying: "Giovanni, has that stranger, the Englishman, found a manservant that pleases him? One that is good enough with a sword?"

Giovanni shook his head.

"He put them to fight one another. There were some bad cuts and bruises and Mateo, the son of Grifone, is cut through the arm almost to the bone. But the Englishman sits there in the back room and laughs and calls them fools!"

"Give me a cup of wine, Giovanni."

"The red?"

"No. The Orvieto. Red wine in the middle of a hot day like this would boil a man's brains."

He picked up the wine cup which Giovanni filled and was about to empty it when he remembered himself, felt in the small purse attached to his belt, and then replaced the wine on the counter.

"I have no money with me," he said. "I cannot take the wine."

"Mother of Heaven!" exclaimed Giovanni. "Take the wine! Take the shop along with it, if you wish! Do you think I am such a fool that I cannot trust you and my master, Signore Falcone?"

"I have left his house," said Tizzo, lifting his head suddenly. "And you may as well know that I'm not returning to it. The noble Messer Luigi now has nothing to do with my comings and goings — or the state of my purse!"

He flushed a little as he said this, and saw his words strike a silence through the room. Some of the men began to leer with a wide, open-mouthed joy. Others seemed turned to stone with astonishment. But on the whole it was plain that they were pleased. Even Giovanni grinned suddenly but tried to cover his smile by thrusting out the cup of wine.

"Here! Take this!" he said. "You have been a good patron. This is a small gift but it comes from my heart."

"Thank you, Giovanni," said Tizzo. "But charity would poison that wine for me. Go tell the Englishman that I have come to try for the place."

"You?" cried Giovanni. "To become a servant?"

"I've been a master," said Tizzo, "and therefore I ought to make a good servant. Tell the Englishman that I am here."

"There is no use in that," said Giovanni. "The truth is that he rails at lads with red hair. You know that Marco, the son of the charcoal burner? He threw a stool at the head of Marco

TIZZO

and drove him out of the room; and he began a tremendous cursing when he saw that fine fellow, Guido, simply because his hair was red, also."

"Is the Englishman this way?" asked Tizzo. "I'll go in and announce myself!"

BEFORE he could be stopped, he had stepped straight back into the rear room which was the kitchen, and by far the largest chamber in the tavern. At the fire, the cook was turning a spit loaded with small birds and larding them anxiously. A steam of cookery mingled with smoke through the rafters of the room; and at a table near the window sat the Englishman.

Tizzo, looking at him, felt as though he had crossed swords with a master in the mere exchange of glances. He saw a tall man, dressed gaily enough to make a court figure. His short jacket was so belted around the waist that the skirts of the blue stuff flared out; his hose was plum-colored, his shirt sleeves—those of the jacket stopped at the elbow—were red, and his jacket was laced with yellow. But this young and violent clashing of colors was of no importance. What mattered were the powerful shoulders, the deep chest, and the iron-gray hair of the stranger. In spite of the gray he could not have been much past forty; his look was half cruel, half carelessly wild. Just now he was pointing with the half consumed leg of a roast chicken towards the spit and warning the cook not to let the tidbits come too close to the flame. He broke off these orders to glance at Tizzo.

"Sir," said Tizzo, "are you Henry, baron of Melrose?"

"I am," answered the baron. "And who are you, my friend?"

"You have sent out word," said Tizzo, "that you want to find in this village a servant twenty-two years old and able to use a sword. I have come to ask for the place."

"You?" murmured the baron, surveying the fine clothes of Tizzo with a quick glance.

"I have come to ask for the place," said Tizzo.

"Well, you have asked," said the baron.

He began to eat the roast chicken again as though he had finished the interview.

"And what is my answer?" asked Tizzo.

"Red-heads are all fools," said the baron. "In a time of trouble they run

the wrong way. They have their brains in their feet. Get out!"

Tizzo began to laugh. He was helpless to keep back the musical flowing of his mirth, and yet he was far from being amused. The Englishman stared at him.

"I came to serve you for pay," said Tizzo. "But I'll remain to slice off your ears for no reward at all. Just for the pleasure, my lord."

My lord, still staring, pushed back the bench on which he was sitting and started up. He caught a three-legged stool in a powerful hand.

"Get out!" shouted the baron. "Get out or I'll brain you—if there are any brains in a red-headed fool."

The sword of Tizzo came out of its sheath. It made a sound like the spitting of a cat.

"If you throw the stool," he said, "I'll cut your throat as well as your ears."

And he began to laugh once more. The sound of this laughter seemed to enchant the Englishman.

"Can it be?" he said. "Is this the truth?"

He cast the stool suddenly to one side and, leaning, drew his own sword from the belt and scabbard that lay near by.

"My lords—my masters—" stammered the cook.

"Look, Tonio," said Tizzo. "You have carved a good deal for other people. Why don't you stand quietly and watch them carving for themselves?"

"And why not?" asked Tonio, blinking and nodding suddenly. He opened his mouth and swallowed not air but a delightful idea. "I suppose the blood of gentlemen will scrub off the floor as easily as the blood of chickens or red beef. So lay on and I'll cheer you."

"What is your name?" asked the baron.

"Tizzo."

"They call you the Firebrand, do they? But what is your real name?"

"If you get any more answers from me, you'll have to earn them," said Tizzo. "Tonio, bolt the doors!"

THE cook, his eyes gleaming, ran in haste to bar the doors leading to the guest room and also to the rear yard of the tavern. Then he climbed up and sat on a stool which he placed on a table. He clapped his hands together and called out: "Begin, masters! Begin, gentlemen! Begin, my lords! My God, what a happiness it is! I have sweated to entertain the gentry and now they sweat to entertain me!"

"It will end as soon as it begins," said the Englishman, grinning suddenly at the joy of the cook. "But—I haven't any real pleasure in drawing your blood, Tizzo. I have a pair of blunted swords; and I'd as soon beat you with the dull edge of one of them."

"My lord," said Tizzo, "I am not a miser. I'll give my blood as freely as any tapster ever gave wine—if you are man enough to draw it!"

The Englishman, narrowing his eyes, drew a dagger to fill his left hand. "Ready, then," he said. "Where is your buckler or dagger or whatever you will in your left hand?"

"My sword is enough," said Tizzo. "Come on!"

And he fairly ran at the baron. The other, unwilling to have an advantage, instantly threw the dagger away; the sword-blades clashed together, and by the first touch Tizzo knew he was engaged with a master.

He was accustomed to the beauti-

fully precise, finished swordsmanship of Luigi Falcone, formed in the finest schools of Italy and Spain; he knew the rigid guards and heavy counters and strong attacks of Falcone; but in the Englishman he seemed to be confronting all the schools of fencing in the world. His own fencing was a marvel of delicacy of touch and he counted inches of safety where other men wanted to have feet; but the Englishman had almost as fine a hand and eye as his own, with that same subtlety in the engagement of the sword blade, as though the steel were possessed of the nerves and wisdom of the naked hand.

Moreover, the Baron Melrose was swift in all his movements, with a stride like the leap of a panther; and yet he seemed slow and clumsy compared with the lightning craft of Tizzo. The whole room was aflash and aglitter with the sword-play. The noise of the stamping and the crashing of steel caused Giovanni and others to beat on the door; but the cook bellowed out that there was a game here staged for his own entertainment, only. The cook, in an ecstasy, stood up on his table and shouted applause. With his fat hand he carved and thrust at the empty air. He grunted and puffed in sympathy with the failing strength of the Englishman—who now was coming to a stand, turning warily to meet the constant attacks of Tizzo; and again the cook was pretending to laugh like Tizzo himself as that youth like a dance of wild-fire flashed here and there.

And then, feinting for the head but changing for the body suddenly, Tizzo drove the point of his sword fairly home against the target. The keen blade should have riven right through the body of Melrose. Instead, by the grace of the finest chance, it lodged against the broad, heavy buckle of his belt. Even so, the force of the lunge was enough to make the big man grunt and bend over.

But instead of retreating after this terrible instant of danger, he rushed out in a furious attack.

"Now! Now! Now!" he kept crying.

WITH edge and point he showered death at Tizzo, but all those bright flashes were touched away and seemed to glide like rain from a rock around the head and body of Tizzo. And still he was laughing, breathlessly, joyfully, as though he loved this danger more than wine.

"Protect yourself, Tizzo!" cried the cook. "Well done! Well moved, cat; well charged, lion! But now, now—"

For Tizzo was meeting the furious attack with an even more furious counter movement; and the Englishman gave slowly back before it.

"Now, Englishman—now Tizzo!" shouted the cook. "Well struck! Well done! Oh, God, I am the happiest cook in the world! Ha—"

He shouted at this moment because the combat had ended suddenly. The Englishman, hard-pressed, with a desperate blue gleam in his eyes—very like the same flame-blue which was in the eyes of Tizzo—made at last a strange upward stroke which looked clumsy because it was unorthodox; but it was delivered with the speed of a cat's paw and it was, at the same instant, a parry, and a counterthrust. It knocked the weapon of Tizzo away and, for a hundredth part of a second, the point of the baron was directly in front of Tizzo's breast.

But the thrust did not drive home.

Tizzo, leaping away on guard, was ready to continue the fight; but then, by degrees, he realized what had happened.

"You could have cut my throat!" he said.

And he lowered his weapon and stood panting, leaning on the hilt of his sword.

"I would give," said Tizzo, "ten years of my life to learn that stroke."

The baron tossed his own blade away. It fell with a crash on the table. And now he held out his right hand.

"That stroke," said he, "is worth ten years of any life—but I was almost a dead man half a dozen times before I had a chance to use it! Give me your hand, Tizzo. You are not my servant, but if you choose to ride with me, you are my friend!"

Tizzo gripped the hand. The grasp that clutched his fingers was like hard iron.

"But," said the baron, "you have only come here as a jest—you are the son of a gentleman. Not my service—not even my friendship is what you desire. It was only to measure my sword that you came, and by the Lord, you've done it. Except for the trick, I was a beaten man. And—listen to me—I have faced Turkish scimitars and the wild Hungarian sabers. I have met the stamping, prancing Spaniards who make fencing a philosophy, and the quick little Frenchmen, and cursing Teutons—but I've never faced your master. In what school did you learn? Sit down? Take wine with me! Cook. unbolt the door and give wine to every one in the shop. Broach a keg. Set it out in the street. Let the village drink itself red and drunk. Do you hear?

"Put all your sausages and bread and cheese on the tables in the tap-room. If there is any music to be found in this place, let it play. I shall pay for everything with a glad heart and a happy hand, because today I have found a man!"

The cook, unbarring the door, began to shout orders; uproar commenced to spread through the little town; presently all the air was sour with the smell of the good red wine of the last vintage. But young Tizzo sat at the table with the baron hearing nothing, tasting nothing, for all his soul was staring into the future as he heard the big man speak.

CHAPTER III.

TIZZO'S CHOICE.

THEY had not been long at the table when a strange little path of silence cut through the increasing uproar of the tap-room, and tall Luigi Falcone came striding into the kitchen. When he saw his protégé, he threw up a hand in happy salutation.

"Now I have found you, Tizzo!" he said. "My dear son, come home with me. Yes, and bring your friend with you. I read your message, and I've been the unhappiest man in Italy."

Tizzo introduced the two; they bowed to one another gravely. There was a great contrast between the immense dignity, the thoughtful and cultured face of Falcone, and the half handsome, half wild look of this man out of the savage North.

"It would be a happiness," said the Englishman, "to go anywhere with my new friend, Tizzo. But this moment I am leaving the village. I must continue a journey. And we have been agreeing to make the trip together."

Falcone sighed and shook his head.

"Tizzo cannot go," he said. "All

that his heart desires waits for him there—Tizzo, you cannot turn your back on it."

Tizzo stood buried in silence which seemed to alarm Falcone, for he begged Melrose to excuse him and stepped aside for a moment with the younger man.

"It is always true," said Falcone. "We never know our happiness until it is endangered. When I found that you had gone, the house was empty. I read your letter and thought I found your honest heart in it. Tizzo, you came to me as a servant; you became my protégé; now go back with me and be my son. I mean it. There are no blood relations who stand close to me. I have far more wealth than I have ever showed to you. It is not with money that I wish to tempt you, Tizzo. If I thought you could be bought, I would despise and disown you. But I have kept you too closely to your books. Even Greek should be a servant and not a master when a youth has reached a certain age. And now when you return—I have been painting this picture while I hunted for you—you will enter a new life. Yonder is Perugia. I have friends in that city who will welcome you. You shall have your journeys to Rome to see the great life there. You shall enter the world as a gentleman should do."

TIZZO had started to break out into grateful speech, when the Englishman said, calmly but loudly, "My friends, I have heard what Messer Luigi has to say. It is my right to be heard also."

"My lord," said Falcone, "I have a right of many years over this young gentleman."

"Messer Luigi," said the Englishman, "I have a still greater right."

"A greater right?" exclaimed Falcone.

"We have pledged our right hands together," said the baron.

"A handshake—" began Falcone.

"In my country," answered the Englishman, "it is as binding as a holy oath sworn on a fragment of the true cross. We have pledged ourselves to one another; and he owes me ten years of his life."

"In the name of God," said Falcone, "how could this be? What have you seen in such a complete stranger, Tizzo?"

"I have seen—" said Tizzo. He paused and added: "I have seen the way down a beautiful road—by the light of his sword."

"But this means nothing," said Falcone. "These are only words. Have you given a solemn promise?"

"I have given a solemn promise," said Tizzo, glancing down at his right hand.

"I shall release you from it," said the baron suddenly.

"Ha!" said Falcone. "That is a very gentle offer. Do you hear, Tizzo?"

"I release him from it," said the Englishman, "but still I have something to offer him. Messer Luigi, it happens that I also am a man without a son who bears my name. Like you, I understand certain things about loneliness. We do not need to talk about this any more.

"But I should like to match what I have to offer against what you propose to give him."

"Ah?" said Falcone. "Let us hear."

"You offer him," said the Englishman, "an old affection, wealth, an excellent name, a great house, many powerful friends. Am I right?"

"I offer him all of those things," agreed the Italian.

"As for me," said the baron, "the home of my fathers is a blackened heap of stones; my kin and my friends are dead at the hands of our enemies in my country; my wealth is the gold that I carry in this purse and the sword in my scabbard."

"Well?" asked Falcone.

"In spite of that," said the English-

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man, "I have something to offer—to a red-headed man."

Tizzo started a little and glanced sharply at the baron.

Melrose went on: "I offer you, Tizzo, danger, battle, suspicion, confusion, wild riding, uneasy nights—and a certain trick with the sword. I offer that. Is it enough?"

Falcone smiled. "Well said!" he answered. "You have a great heart, my lord, and you know something of the matters that make the blood of a young man warmer. But—what is your answer, Tizzo?"

Tizzo, turning slowly from the Englishman to Falcone, looked him fairly in the eye.

He said: "Signore, I shall keep you in my heart as a father. But this man is my master, and I must follow him!"

CHAPTER IV.

UNKNOWN MISSION.

THEY had a day, said the baron, to get to a certain crossroads and they spent much of the next morning finding an excellent horse and some armor for Tizzo. Speed, said the baron, rather than hard fighting was apt to be the greatest requisite in the work that lay before them, therefore he had fitted Tizzo only with a good steel breastplate and a cap of the finest steel also which fitted on under the flow of his big hat. He carried, furthermore, a short, straight dagger which could be of value in hand to hand encounters and whose thin blade could be driven home through the bars of a visor or the eye-holes. He had taken, also, of his own choice, a short-handled woodsman's ax. This amazed the Englishman. He tried it himself, but the broad blade unbalanced his grasp.

"How can you handle a weight like that, Tizzo?" he asked. "You lack the shoulder and the hand to manage it."

Tizzo, with his careless laughter, loosened the ax from its place at his saddle bow and swung it about his head, cleaving this way and that. The thing became a feather. It whirled and danced. It swayed to this side and that as though parrying showers of blows—and all of this while in the grasp of a single hand.

"Practice will make even a bear dance!" said Tizzo. And then gripping the handle of the ax in both hands, he struck a thick branch from a tree under which the road passed at that mo-

ment. The big bough fell with a rustling sound to the highway, and Tizzo rode on, still laughing; but the baron paused a moment to examine the depth and the cleanness of the wound and to try the hardness of the wood with his dagger point.

"God help the head that trusts its helmet against your ax, Tizzo," he said "A battle ax is a thing I have used, but a woodsman's ax never."

"If a battle ax were swung for half a day to fell trees," said Tizzo, "the strongest knight would begin to curse it. But a woodsman will know the balance of his ax as you know the balance of your sword, and the hours he works teaches him to manage it like nothing. I've seen them fighting with axes too, and using them to ward as well as to strike. So I spent some time with them every day for years."

They came in sight now of a fork in the road, and as they drew closer a carriage drawn by four horses swung out of a small wood and waited for them.

"There are our friends," said the baron. "Inside that coach is the lad we're taking to a safer home than the one he's been in. His name is Tomaso, and that's enough for you to know about him. Except that to take him safely and deliver him will bring us a good, handsome sum of money for our purses."

"I shall ask no questions," agreed Tizzo, delighted by this touch of mystery.

ABOUT the coach, which was heavy enough to need the stronger of the four horses to pull it over the rutted, unsurfaced roads, there were grouped a number of armed men, two on the driver's seat and two as postillions, while another pair stood at the heads of their horses. And each one of the six, it seemed to Tizzo, looked a more complete villain than the other. They were half fine and half in tatters, with a good weight of armor and weapons on every man of the lot.

A slender lad in a very plain black doublet and hose with a red cap on his head was another matter.

"Tomaso, I've told you to keep inside the carriage," said the baron angrily, as he rode up.

"What does it matter where there's nothing but blue sky and wind to see me?" asked Tomaso, in a voice surprisingly light, so that Tizzo put down the age of the lad at two or three years younger than the sixteen or seventeen which had been his first guess.

"Whatever you may be in other places," said Melrose, sternly, "when you ride with me, I am the master. Get into the carriage!"

Tomaso, in spite of this sternness, moved in the most leisurely manner to re-enter the carriage, with a shrug of his shoulders and a glance of contempt from his brown eyes.

After he was out of sight, one of the guards re-fastened the curtains that shut Tomaso from view.

"Why," said Tizzo, "he's only a child."

The baron pointed a finger at him. "Let me tell you," he said, "that you're apt to find more danger in Tomaso than in any man you'll meet in the whole course of your life. To horse, my lads. I'm glad to see you all safely here; and I've been true to my promise and found a good man to add to our party. My friends, this is Tizzo. They call him Firebrand because his hair is red; but his nature is as quiet as that of a pet dog. Value him as I do—which is highly. He will help

us to get to the end of our journey."

There were only a few muttered greetings. One fellow with a long face and a patch over one eye protested: "It's a bad business stirring up hornets and then waiting for them to sting; or making these long halts in the middle of enemy country. Already we've been noted."

"By whom, Enrico?" asked the baron. "Who would think of searching this place? And you covered the marks of the wheels when you drove the carriage into hiding?"

"I covered the marks well enough. But a dog uses its nose, not its eyes, and it was a dog that led the man into the wood."

"Did you catch the fellow?" asked the baron, anxiously.

"How could we? There was not a single horse saddled. He came on us suddenly, whirled about, and was off. I caught up a cross-bow and tried for him but missed," answered Enrico. "He rode away between those hills, and ever since, I've been watching to see trouble come through the pass at us. I was never for making the halt."

"Tush," said Melrose. "Everything will be well. Did that stranger who spied on you — did he see Tomaso?"

"He did — clearly — and Tomaso shouted to him."

"By God, Enrico, do you mean that Tomaso recognized him?"

"I don't know. It seemed that way. Very likely, too, because a thousand men are hunting for—Tomaso."

THE baron groaned and ordered an instant start. He left Enrico and Tizzo as a rear guard to follow at a little distance, out of the dust raised by the clumsy wheels of the carriage; for his own part, the Baron of Melrose went forward to spy out the way.

As they started forward, their horses at a trot, Enrico turned his ugly face to Tizzo and said: "So my lord found his red-head, eh? You're the prize, are you?"

There was enough insolence in this remark to make Tizzo quarrel but he was struck into a silent wonder by what he had just heard. It implied that the baron had gone to the village deliberately bent on finding a red-headed youth. But why, then, had he driven two of the applicants from the room? Why had he poured such a torrent of insult on the red hair of Tizzo himself?

Tizzo had felt himself on the verge of a mystery. Now he was sure that he was involved in the mystery itself. For some definite and singular purpose, the baron certainly wanted him. It was above all strange that in Italy he should be looking for red-headed young men. Might it be that he intended to use Tizzo to impersonate another character? In any event, it was certain that the baron was not a man to bother over small scruples. And Tizzo determined to be more wakeful than a hungry cat. He had a liking for the baron; he respected his strength and his courage; he hoped that through him the golden door of adventure might be opened; but he half expected that the big man was using him as the slightest of pawns in some great game.

The carriage horses dragged their burden through the hills, where the road wound blazing white among the vineyards and the dusty gray of the olive trees, often silvered by a touch of wind. The day was hot, the work was hard, and presently the team had to be rested.

As they halted to take breath, the

baron rode apart with Tizzo, and dismounting behind a tall stone wall, he pulled out his sword. "For the first lesson!" he said, and as Tizzo drew his own blade, Melrose showed him, with the slowest movement of the hand, the details of that maneuver which had opened the guard of Tizzo like a hand-stroke. For several minutes he studied and practiced that strange combination of ward and counter-stroke. He had not mastered it with his hand but he understood it with his mind before they went back to the others.

Tizzo asked him, on the way, why he had not used the irresistible force of that ward and counter earlier during their encounter in the kitchen. At this the baron chuckled. "Because I'm a fool," he said. "I was enjoying the sight of your good swordsmanship too much to want the thing to end."

"Yes," agreed Tizzo, smiling. "And besides, you were wearing a lucky buckle."

"Luck is the best friend that any soldier ever had," answered the baron. "When you learn to trust it, you have learned how to be happy. But, Tizzo, trust me, also!"

He said this with a certain gravity that impressed his companion. But when the journey through the late afternoon commenced again, there was still a pregnant doubt in the mind of Tizzo. That matter of the search for the red-headed young man—that unknown rôle for which he had been selected weighed much on his mind.

He kept his concerns to himself, however, as they drew on into the cooler evening. A wind had begun in the upper sky, whirling the clouds into thin, twisted streamers, but it had not yet reached the surface of the ground.

The carriage was being dragged up a fairly easy slope when the baron halted it by raising his hand. He reined his horse back at the same time, calling: "Enrico, do you see anything in those trees?"

Enrico, staring fixedly at the small grove of willows—thick, pollarded stumps, exclaimed: "I can't see into the trees, but I can see a dust over them that the wind never put there."

Now that it was pointed out, Tizzo could see the same thing—a few drifting wisps of dust high above the tops of the trees. If the baron paid heed to such small tokens as these, it proved the intensity of his care.

"If we go on, the road takes us straight past that place," he said, "Cesare, ride into those trees and see what sort of birds you can stir up."

But before Cesare could stir to execute the order, something whirred in a streak through the air and Tizzo received a heavy blow against his breastplate. A broken quarrel dropped to the ground, the steel point of it fixed deeply in the armor; and Tizzo heard at the same time the humming clang of the cross-bow string, which sounded from the edge of the wood. As though this were the signal, a shout burst out from many throats and the brush at the edge of the willows appeared alive with men.

CHAPTER V.

BATTLE.

THE baron shouted to get the horses turned. The team was swinging around when a full volley of half a dozen of cross-bow bolts darted from the brush and stopped the maneuver. One of the team dropped dead. Two others, badly wounded, began to squeal and plunge, dragging the

carriage to the side of the road and smashing a wheel against a rock.

"'Charge before they reload!" shouted the baron. "Tizzo! Enrico! With me, friends!"

He set the example, yelling over his shoulder: "Andrea, hold Tomaso; the rest, follow me!"

The other fellows of the baron's troop left the carriage and ran on foot to help their master, four of them sword in hand. But Tizzo rushed at the side of Enrico towards the brush. Cross-bowmen, usually lightly armored, would make easy game; but there were enemies of a different quality to deal with in the woods. For out of them rode no fewer than five men-at-arms in complete armor, lances at rest. Those on either side were equipped in the most complete fashion, but he in the center wore flowing plumes from his helmet and the evening light brightened on the rich inlay of his armor.

With closed visors, like five death's-heads, the horsemen charged, shouting: "Marozzo! Marozzo!"

It was a name that Tizzo knew very well. No man in Perugia, not even among the family of the high and mighty Baglioni, was richer than gallant young Mateo Marozzo, the last heir of his family name.

Anxiously, Tizzo glanced toward the baron, because it seemed a madness to engage, half armed as they were, with five fully equipped riders like these. Their long spears threatened quick death and an ending to the fight before sword or ax or dagger ever could come into play.

But Baron Melrose did not slacken his pace for all the odds against him. As the men-at-arms appeared, he merely stood up in his stirrups and shouted in a thundering voice: "Ah, ha! Melrose! Melrose! Strike in! Strike in!" And with this battle cry he rushed first of the three against his enemy, swinging his sword for a stroke. Enrico did not hang back; and Tizzo was last of the trio to come to action.

The spears were not so dangerous as they looked. Tizzo could see that at once. On smooth ground that charge of the five ponderous warriors would have overwhelmed the baron's men at once; but the brush, the uneven ground staggered the galloping horses and made the lances waver from a true aim. Tizzo, hurling himself toward that brilliant plumed figure in the center, grasped his woodsman's ax, rode seated high in his saddle, and at the last moment dipped low. The lance of his enemy drove over his shoulder; the back-stroke of the ax, in passing, glanced off the polished shoulder armor, and descending on the mailed arm of the rider, knocked the spear from his grasp.

As he turned his horse, Tizzo could see the cross-bowmen in the shrubbery struggling energetically to reload their weapons, but they were armed with those powerful arbalasts whose cords were pulled back by the use of a complicated tackle of pulleys and rope. The fastest of them still did not have a second quarrel in place as Tizzo reined in his horse and flung himself again at the knight.

He saw, as he swerved, that Enrico's horse was falling; injured by a misdirected thrust of a spear; and big Baron Melrose had engaged with his sword two of the men-at-arms. As for the three fellows on foot, they had paused. They saw their master overmatched, one of his best fighters already dismounted, and the battle definitely lost, it seemed.

Those two glances were enough to discourage Tizzo. But, if he were to die, he was determined to die fighting. The plumed knight, wheeling toward him, had unsheathed a long sword and now drove in his horse at a trot, wielding the sword with both hands.

"Marozzo!" he was shouting. "Marozzo! Marozzo!"

And Tizzo answered with a yell of: "Melrose! Long live Melrose!"

Then he swung up the ax head to meet the terrible downward sway of the sword. A sure eye and a swift hand made that parry true. The sword blade shattered with a tinkling sound, splintering and breaking at the point of impact.

But Marozzo—if this were in fact he—was still full of fight. He could see his fourth companion whirling and running his horse at a gallop to come to the rescue, so the knight of the plumed helmet snatched a mace from his saddlebow and drove at Tizzo.

The first ax-stroke had glanced. The second would not, Tizzo swore—not if he had truly learned from the woodsmen how to strike to a line. He aimed at the central one of the three plumes and then struck like a whirling flash of light.

The blow was true and deep and good. As the blade bit in, a savage hope came up in Tizzo that he had cloven the skull of the leader of the ambuscade. But it was only the crest that he shore away, while from the heavier, conical steel of the helmet itself the ax glanced a second time.

The weight of that blow made the helmet ring like a bell; and Marozzo fell helplessly forward on the pommel of his saddle and the neck of his horse.

The course of the battle was instantly changed.

The trotting horse of Marozza moved him from the next stroke of that flashing ax, which certainly would have been a death blow. And as Tizzo swung his own horse about, with his cry of "Melrose! Melrose!" the four men-at-arms left off their individual battles and rushed to the rescue of their leader, who was sliding helplessly out of the saddle, stunned.

"Away!" shouted one of the ambushers. "Rescue the signore! Away, away! If he's dead, our necks will be stretched for it! Cross-bowmen, cover us! The signore is hurt!"

In a moment the men-at-arms were withdrawing, one of them supporting their hurt master and the other three reining back their horses in the rear to keep a steady front against a new attack. The cross-bowmen—there were eight of them in all—issued from the woods and fell in behind the riders, keeping their quarrels ready for discharge but making no offer to loose them at the baron's men. Quickly the entire troop was lost among the trees.

From the mêlée, two horses were left dead and one dying, but, what seemed a miracle, not a single man had received so much as a scratch. Luck had been with the baron and the plate armor of the men-at-arms had saved them. Only the leader had been injured to an unknown degree.

IT was dusk before the dying horse was put out of pain; the carriage was abandoned; and with Tomaso mounted behind Melrose the party started on through the hills. The twilight gradually grew more and more dim and yet there had been light enough for Tomaso to look long and fixedly at Tizzo with a curious expression of admiration and hate in his brown eyes.

Baron Henry of Melrose was in

high spirits in spite of the loss of the carriage. He said to Enrico: "You see what a red-headed man is worth, Enrico? And that was the famous knight Mateo Marozzo, you understand? Tell me, Tomaso! Was it not young Mateo? You ought to know his voice and he was shouting loudly enough until Tizzo tapped on his head-piece."

"I don't know," answered Tomaso.

He kept his one hand on the shoulder of the baron and the other gripped the high back of the saddle while Tomaso looked dreamily off across the hills.

"Answer me, Tomaso!" commanded the baron.

"My lord," said Tomaso, in his musical and quiet voice, "you could not get an answer from me with whips. Let me be quiet with my thoughts."

This calm insolence seemed very strange to Tizzo; it was still stranger that the rough baron made no retort; but perhaps that was because the spirits of Melrose were naturally very high since their lucky escape.

Luck was the theme of his talk—luck and the swift hand and the courage of Tizzo—until the falling of night left them all in silence except for the steady creaking of the saddle leather. Finally Tomaso began to sing in a pleasant but oddly small voice, to which Tizzo listened with such a singular pleasure that he paid no attention to the words; the voice and the music fed in him a hunger which he had never felt before.

Presently on a hill top vague towers loomed against the sky and toward these they made their way, entering the streets of a ruined village such as one could find frequently throughout Italy. Fire had ravished the place and all of the smaller houses were tumbled this way and that while grass had begun to grow in the streets. The castle which topped the height was only partially destroyed during the sacking of the place ten years before, and it was here that the baron intended to spend the night. In the courtyard they built a fire and roasted meat on small spits, like soldiers. Some skins of wine, warm and muddy from the jostling of the day's riding, were opened. And

TOMASO

while they ate, Tizzo kept looking from the pale, handsome face of the silent Tomaso to the upper casements of the castle which stared down at the firelight with dark and empty eyes.

MELROSE said briefly: "One more good night of watching, my friends, and we shall be far away from the grip of the Baglioni with our treasure. This night—and afterwards we shall be at ease. Keep a good ward. Tizzo will be here in the court until midnight, and Enrico at the door of Tomaso's room. At midnight I'll take the watch here. Tizzo, be wary and alive. If you hear so much as a nightingale's song, call me. Up,

Tomaso, and follow me. You sleep in one of the rooms above."

"Why not here in the open, where it's cool?" demanded Tomaso.

"Because the night air might steal you, my lad," said the baron.

And he led Tomaso from the court and through the narrow black mouth of a postern door. Tizzo listened until the footfalls and the muffled chiming of steel had ceased.

But in his heart he had companionship enough. He had memories of this day which seemed to outweigh all the rest of his life. Two things stood out above the rest—the sword of the Englishman arrested in mid-thrust at his throat and that instant of incredible delight when the plumes had floated away from the crest of Marozzo and the steel helmet had rung with the stroke.

This was only a beginning. He stifled his own laughter as he walked back and forth, turning the corner of the court as he made each round, now and then sitting down on a fallen coping stone from the outer wall to think, to dream, and to enjoy the taste of the future.

It must have been close to midnight when, as he turned the corner of the wall of the keep, he saw a slender shadow that trailed like a snake from an upper casement. He looked again, startled, and made sure that it was a rope of some sort which had just been lowered from the room of Tomaso!

CHAPTER VI.

FLIGHT.

HE found what the rope was by a touch—blankets cut into strips and twisted. And this fragile, uneven rope-end began to twitch and jerk suddenly. When he looked up, he saw a form sliding down the rope from the casement above.

Tizzo pulled the dagger from his belt and waited. He had that insane desire to laugh but he repressed it by grinding his teeth. Overhead, he heard a voice call out, dimly: "Tomaso! Hello—Tomaso!"

That call would not be answered, he knew, for poor Tomaso was sliding, as he thought, towards a new chance for liberty. There was courage, after all, in the pale, brown-eyed boy. There was an unexpected force in the creature in spite of the undue softness of voice, whether in speaking or singing.

He kept his teeth gripped and grasped the dagger a little more firmly, also. He would not use the point; a tap on the head with the hilt of the dagger would be enough to settle this case.

Above him, the calling became that not of Enrico but of the baron himself, who shouted: "Tomaso! Where are you?"

Then Baron Melrose was bawling out the window above: "Hai! He is there! He is almost to the ground. Enrico, waken every one! Down to the court or the prize will be gone. Run! Run! Our bird is on the wing!"

The descending form, casting itself loose from the rope as it heard this cry, dropped the short distance to the ground that remained—and the arm of Tizzo was instantly pinioning the figure.

Tomaso, with the silence of despair, writhed fiercely and vainly; the head went back and the wild eyes stared up into the face of Tizzo.

And suddenly Tizzo breathed out: "Lord!" and recoiled a step as though he had been stabbed. Tomaso for an instant leaned a hand against the wall

—the other was pressed to his breast. That hand against the wall carried a glimmer of light in the form of a little needle-pointed poniard.

"Listen, Tizzo!" stammered the voice of Tomaso. "You're only with them by chance. You're not one of them. Save me—and my people will make you rich! Rich!"

"Damn the wealth!" groaned Tizzo. "Madame—how could I keep from guessing what you are?—madame, I am your servant—trust me—and run in the name of God!"

Overhead, there were rapid feet rushing on the stairs; and "Tomaso" ran like a deer beside Tizzo around the corner of the keep and towards the horses, which had been left in a corner of the yard to graze on the long grass which grew through the interstices of the pavement. Some of them were lying down, others still tore at the grass.

"Can you ride—without a saddle?" gasped Tizzo.

"Yes—yes!" cried the girl.

He was hardly before her at the horses. Two bridles he found, tossed one to her, and jerked the other over the head of the best of the animals, a good gray horse which the baron himself had ridden that day. When that was on, with the throatlatch unsecured, he saw the girl struggling to get the bit of the second bridle through the teeth of another horse. He took that work from her hands, finished it with a gesture, and then helped that lithe body to leap onto the back of the gray.

VOICES had burst out into the court, that of Enrico first of all. And he saw the forms running, shadowy in the starlight.

"Ride!" he called to the girl. "Ride! Ride!"

And as the gray horse began to gallop, Tizzo was on the back of the second bridled charger. The moment his knees pressed the rounded sides, he recognized one of the wheel-horses, the slowest of them all; and he groaned.

"What's there?" big Enrico was calling. "Who's there?"

"I!" he cried in answer. "Tizzo—and fighting for the lady."

It was too late for him to drive the horse through the gateway of the ruined courtyard; they were already on him, Enrico running first.

"The red-headed brat—cut him to pieces!" yelled Enrico. "The horses—get to horse and after her!"

And he aimed a long stroke at Tizzo, who caught it on his naked blade and returned a thrust that ran through the shoulder of the man. Enrico fell back, with a yell and a curse. Two more were coming; but in spite of its clumsy feet and bulky size, Tizzo had his horse in motion, now. He could hear the loud voice of the baron shouting orders as the heavy brute cantered through the gateway and then slithered and slid down the steep way outside, threatening to fall with a crash at every instant.

The girl was there—she was waiting just beyond the threshold of the first danger, crying out: "Are you hurt, Tizzo?"

She had heard the clashing of the swords, no doubt.

"Not touched!" he answered.

And they swept down the dangerous, bending way together. The huddled ruins of the town poured past them, like crouching figures ready to spring. They issued into the open country; and already the roar of pursuing hoofs sounded through the street of the village behind them.

Tizzo began to laugh. He sheathed

his sword and waved his arm above his head. "Forward! Forward!" he shouted. "We have won!"

It seemed to him in the wildness of his happiness that he could pluck the brightness of the stars from the sky. But under him he felt the gallop of the carriage-horse already growing heavy. It would not endure. The poor brute was as sluggish as though running in mud fetlock-deep.

The girl had to rein in her light-footed gray to keep level with Tizzo.

"Go on!" he called to her. "This brute is as slow as an ox and they'll overtake it. But you're free. You've won. Ride for safety—go on!"

"If they find you, they'll kill you," cried the girl. "I won't leave you. If they catch you, Tizzo, I'll let them catch me, also!"

"They'd never spare me for your sake!" he shouted in answer. "Ride on!"

"I shall not!" came that clear voice in reply.

He drew the blundering horse closer to hers and leaned above her.

"I have started the work. Let me hope that it will be finished!" he exclaimed. "For God's sake and for mine, save yourself!"

As though to reinforce his words, the uproar of hoofs left the dull, echoing street of the village and poured more loudly across the open country.

"If they find you—" she protested.

But he laughed in that wild and happy voice: "They'll never find me. I have a lucky star—do you see there?—the golden one—it is favoring me now. Farewell! Tell me where to find you—and ride on!"

"Perugia!" she cried in answer. "You shall find me in Perugia. My name is—"

But here their horses thundered over the hollow of a bridge and the name was quite lost to him.

AS they reached the roadway beyond, with loosed rein she was already flying before him, farther and farther in the lead; every stride that the fine gray gave carried her distinctly away from him. At the next bend of the road she was gone; and the flying hoofs from the village poured closer and closer behind Tizzo.

There was no use continuing on the back of that sluggard. He drew rein enough to make it safe to leap to the ground and then let the heavy blunderer canter on, diminishing speed at every jump, while the liquid jounced and squeaked audibly in its belly. Tizzo jumped behind a broken stone wall and lay still.

It seemed to him that his breathing had hardly become steady when mounted men were pouring past him. He could hear the voice of the baron shouting out promises of reward if either or both of the fugitives should be caught. He could see the men straining their utmost to get their mounts forward. But that noble gray with such a featherweight up would surely carry the girl safely away.

When the flight had passed him, he ran up to the top of the nearest hill, but the light was too dim for him to see anything. Only the noise of the galloping poured up to him from the darkness of the hollow, rang more loudly off the face of the opposite hill, and then dipped away and disappeared beyond.

Tizzo folded his arms and shook his head.

His heart was not altogether gay when he thought of what lay behind him and before. He had left the kind home of Luigi Falcone and shame

would keep him from returning to it—like a whipped dog that already had had too much of the world.

Behind him lay his promise to Baron Henry of Melrose, also. He had offered a great section of his life to that big swordsman; and perhaps to such a man it did not matter that he had misnamed even their first adventure together. But one thing was very certain—Tizzo could not lend his hand to the abuse of a woman, even of a girl no matter how nameless.

He smiled faintly when he remembered that the baron had told him that Tomaso was more dangerous than any man he would ever meet! Yes, in a way, certainly more dangerous than any *man!*

But, ah, what a fool he had been not to see the truth before! Of course all of the others had known what she was. That was why their eyes had dwelt upon her in a certain way, following her hungrily. But he, Tizzo, had not known. And yet no matter what a fool he had been there remained in him an abiding resentment against the baron.

Neither was it all resentment, either. The heart of Tizzo poured out in admiration of that rash and valiant man who had set his single hand against such powers as those of the house of Marozzo. For with the name of Marozzo went that of Baglioni; the whole of Perugia was dominated by that noble family.

From Falcone, from Melrose, he had cut himself off. And if he went to Perugia—well, was it not likely that he would encounter the eyes of any one of the dozen men who had seen him with unvisored face in the battle of that day?

That did not matter. He knew that it was folly, but he also knew that nothing under a thunderstroke could keep him possibly from the town of Perugia.

She had made a handsome boy; she would be a gloriously beautiful woman. It seemed to Tizzo that there was nothing in the world he wanted so much as to hear, once more, her singing of that song which he had heard in the evening.

He walked down the hill, took the first road, and stepped along it at a brave pace toward distant Perugia.

CHAPTER VII.

IN PERUGIA.

IT was a day of heat and of showers; and the old beggar at last drew in under a projecting cornice which kept him dry. His withered face was full of both malice and patience, and his throat was sore from the whining pitch at which he had been singing out his appeals for mercy since that morning. He had in his purse enough to buy him a good cloak, and wine and meat and bread for half a month, but he was disappointed because he had not picked up enough for an entire month.

He had worked at his begging trade for so long that he felt like an honest laborer in it; it was rather an art than a profession, he felt, and therefore he begrudged the time he had to spend at this precious occupation. He begged so well that he felt honestly offended when people refused him their money. When he was turned away he often felt a strange sort of a pity in his soul, as for those who are incapable of feeling truth or seeing beauty. He composed his speeches so well that he never doubted his ability to get money if only his listeners had enough intelligence to appreciate his eloquence.

Old Ugo, secure under the cornice, leaning on his staff, was about to step out into the street again in spite of a slight continuing of the rain, but here a sprightly young man with a sword at his side and his hat cocked jauntily at an angle paused suddenly beside him and said:

"Father, have you lived a long time in Perugia?"

"I have existed here for a little course of years, some fifty or sixty," said Ugo.

"Your face is old," said the young man, "but your eye is still young enough to remember pretty faces. If I describe a lady to you, shall you be able to tell me her name?"

"And she comes from Perugia?"

"She does."

"Try me," said Ugo. "But first why not advertise your name?"

"Because she has never heard it."

"She has not heard your name—but she will be glad to see you?"

"I hope so—I pray so—I earnestly believe so," sighed the young Tizzo.

"Well," said the beggar, "this is like something out of an old story. Perhaps love at first sight, love in passing, a look between you—and now you are hunting for her around the world. Describe her to me."

"I describe to you," said Tizzo, "a girl of about nineteen or twenty. She has eyes that are brown and big—gold in the brown like sunlight through forest shadows—and a sweet, pretty, perfect, delightful face—about so wide across the brow and with a smile that dimples, do you hear—"

"I hear," said Ugo, smiling steeply down at the ground.

"A smile that dimples in the left cheek only. The left cheek, you understand?"

"Perfectly, signore."

"Are you laughing at me?"

"I? By no means, signore. I was simply remembering certain things. Old men cannot help remembering, you know. Tell me more about her."

"The top of her head comes to the bridge of my nose. Her nose, by the way, is not exactly a straight, ruled, stupid line. It is altered from that just a trifle. It is tipped up a shade at the end. Just at that slight angle which makes smiling most charming. Do you understand me?"

"Perfectly, signore."

"Her complexion," said Tizzo, frowning as he searched for the proper words, "is neither too pale nor too dark. A trifle pale now, because of a little trouble, but with radiance shining through. She is slightly made. Not thin, do you hear; slenderly made but rounded. In her step there is the lightness of a cat, the pride of a deer, the grace of a dancer."

"Ah?" said the beggar.

"Do you recognize her?" asked Tizzo.

"Almost!" said the beggar. "Tell me a little more."

And he kept on smiling down at the ground.

"HER voice," said Tizzo, "is singular. Of a million ladies, or of a million angels, there is not one who can speak like her. And when she sings, the heart of a man grows big with joy and floats like a bubble. Do you hear? Like a golden bubble!"

"I hear you," said the beggar.

"Her hands," said Tizzo, "are small but not weak. They are hands which could rein a horse as well as use a needle."

"Ah?" said the beggar.

"And—I forgot—on her face, be-

low the right eye, there is a little mark —not a blemish, you see—but a small spot of black; as though God would not give to the world absolute perfection or, rather, as though He would place a signature upon her; or as though through one fault he would make the rest of her beauty to shine more brightly. Am I clear?"

Ugo, the beggar, looked suddenly into the distance, squinting his eyes.

"Ah ha! You know her!" said Tizzo.

"I am trying to think. I shall go to see, signore. I shall go to a certain house and make sure. And then where shall I find you?"

"At that inn down the street. The one which carries the sign of the stag. I shall be there."

"Within a little while, I shall be with you, signore, and tell you yes or no."

"What is your name?"

"I am called Ugo, signore."

"Look, Ugo. You see this emerald which is set into the hilt of my dagger?"

"I see it very clearly. It is a beautiful stone."

"I swear to God that if you bring me to the lady, you shall have this stone for your own."

A faint groan of hungry desire burst from the lips of Ugo. In fact, he seemed about to speak more words but controlled himself with an effort.

"At the Sign of the Stag—within an hour, I hope, signore."

And Ugo turned and strode up the street like a young man, because it seemed to him that, when he saw the emerald, he had looked into a green deeper than the blue peace of Heaven.

He continued on his way until he came to a great house where many horses were tethered and where there was a huge bustling from the court. Into this he made his way and said to the tall porter at the door: "My friend, carry word that Ugo, the beggar, has important word for Messer Astorre. It is a thing that I dare not speak in the streets or to any ear except to that of Messer Astorre himself."

Then he added, "Or to my lord, Giovan-Paolo."

At this second name the porter stopped his smiling.

"Messer Astorre," he said, "is engaged in talk with an important man. If I break in upon him, I must give some excuse."

"It shall be this," said Ugo. "Tell him that there is a beggar who is not a fool or crazy, but who dares to demand immediately to speak to him."

THE porter hesitated, but the eye of the old man was burning with such a light that after a moment he was told to wait at the door while the porter went to announce him.

This was the way in which Ugo, after a time, passed through a door of inlaid wood and came into a room lighted by two deep windows, in one of which sat the famous warrior whose name at that time was celebrated throughout Italy—the great Astorre Baglioni. First the beggar glanced hesitantly and covetously all about him at the rich hangings which covered the walls of the room and then towards a pair of magnificent paintings done in the gay Venetian style. Afterwards he approached the noble Astorre, bowing profoundly and repeatedly.

"Your name is Ugo," said Messer Astorre, "and you have something to say to me?"

The second man in the room, a tall, darkly handsome fellow who had been

striding around in an excited manner, shrugged his shoulders and looked out the window as though he could hardly endure the interruption.

"What I have to say is for the ear of my lord alone," said Ugo.

"Whatever is fit for me is proper for my friend, Mateo Marozzo, to hear," said the warrior.

"Messer Astorre," said Ugo, "it is a thing that concerns your sister, the Lady Beatrice, I believe."

Mateo Mazorro whirled about suddenly, with an exclamation and Ugo shrank a little.

"Be quiet, Mateo," said Astorre. "Don't frighten the man."

"The word was," said Ugo, "that the noble lady your sister was gone from the town, stolen away from it by thieves hired by some of the cursed house of the Oddi. But this very day a young man spoke to me in the street, described her, and offered me a jewel if I could find her for him."

"So?" said Astorre, smiling.

Then he added: "My sister has been returned safely to the town. Who is this man who asked for her?"

"I do not know his name, my lord. He is a young man with red hair and eyes of a blue that shines like the blade of a fine sword, or like the blue underpart of a flame."

"Astorre!" Mateo called. "It is the man! It is the man! Give him to me!"

"Well, no doubt you shall have him if you want," said Astorre. "But who is he?"

"He is called Tizzo. I heard his name called out in the fight. He is the Firebrand. And it was he who knocked the wits out of my head with a lucky stroke of his battle-ax."

"Ah?" exclaimed Astorre. "Have the Oddi become so bold as this? Are they sending their agents like this into the middle of Perugia? Are they searching for Beatrice to steal her from us again? By God, Mateo, if we can catch this fellow, you *shall* have him. And if you don't tear out of him s o m e information about the Oddi plans, call me a fool and a liar! My friend, where is this fellow?"

"At the Sign of the Stag," said Ugo, beginning to tremble in body and voice as he realized that he had struck upon great news indeed.

"He is yours," said Astorre to Marozzo. "Go take him and do what you will with him."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

STRANGER *than* FICTION

By JOHN S. STUART

TOADS FOR WEAK HEARTS

CHINESE doctors who prescribed powdered toads for heart trouble were really administering adrenalin, which is now found in certain glands of these toads.

DOG HAVEN

THE Isle of Dogs, in the River Seine, formerly a nest of thieves and brigands, is now a canine cemetery. It is claimed to be the largest dog cemetery in the world, and on August 6th the 20,000th dog was buried there. Little white tombstones mark the graves, bearing affectionate inscriptions, but Biblical quotations are forbidden.

GAMBLERS FROM CHILDHOOD

CHINESE love to gamble. Even the children when they are old enough to count, venture a cash or two on the chance of winning a sweet or cake from the itinerant bankers who set up crude roulette wheels on the street corners. Old and young pause to watch the luck of the youthful participants.

CHINLON FOOTBALL

CHINLON, or Burmese football, is really that. It is played by five or six barefooted lads, and the object of the game is to keep the ball in the air as long as possible without touching it with the hands. The wickerwork ball, five inches in diameter, is knocked up with the knee, caught on the heel, thrown up with the head and foot, caught between cheek and shoulder, and passed from one player to another by these methods with astonishing skill.

STRANGE EATING

SQUAB-GROWERS in France pre-chew the pigeon feed consisting mainly of millet and peas. The chewed feed is blown from the man's mouth directly into the mouth of the squab. These pigeon feeders (Graveur des Pigeons) have fed as many as 2,000 pigeons in a day.

INSURANCE BY BEETLES

IN Bechuanaland, South Africa, they use beetles for life insurance. The species of beetle used is very hard to kill, and natives think it will furnish protection from death. So a beetle is put on a string and hung around a child's neck, where it will live for about a month.

BATHYSPHERE WINDOWS

AN eight-inch window pane of glass cost $160. Quartz windows for the Bathysphere are being used by Dr. William Beebe in his undersea studies. The Bathysphere windows are eight inches across, but they are three inches thick to withstand the enormous water pressure below the surface. $160 may seem high for rough windows, but due to the difficulties of fusing quartz their cost is considered low by engineers.

SIX OF ONE—

THERE are prize hens that have laid an unusual quantity of eggs in a short space of time and others that lay unusual sizes of eggs, but in Bethany, Connecticut, there is a leghorn that lays eggs half *white* and half *brown*.

Isle of Destiny

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "The Deathly Island," "Deadman's Chest," etc.

Leagued against each other, two and two, these four derelicts sailed their way to a strange haven

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

THE STORY OF SHANGHAI CHARLEY.

AFTER the *Quimper* went down, there was no rain at all and the wind had ceased blowing great guns, though it was strong enough. There was a terrific sea on, however, and the lightning was almost continuous. It was one of those incredible electric displays that occur only between the South African coast and Madagascar—bolts, balls of fire, lightning running in sheets and waves over the sky, enough to scare the wits out of any man.

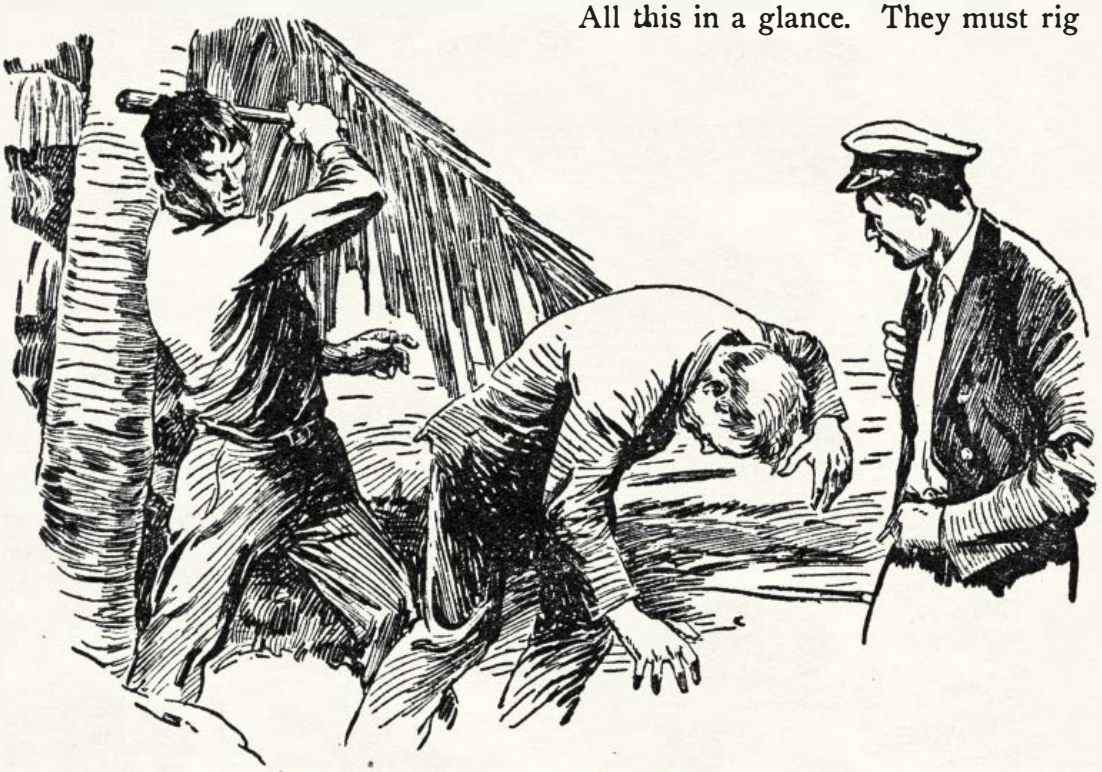
In the boat that was whirled away just before the ship went down, were four people. A woman and three men. There was the handsome French mate, Sainterre; the horrors he had just witnessed had shattered his nerves. The tremendous seas, the fearsome lightning all about, left him terrified; he gulped brandy from a flask and did not turn over his hand. The Breton seaman, Keradec, was a sullen rascal, unafraid, scowling savagely, but doing nothing. He had somehow hurt himself in getting away and the left side of his head was a scarlet blotch.

Wardell was hurt too, but said nothing about it. There was a rain-thinned red smear on the breast of his white jacket. A passenger; the last man you would have expected to emerge a hero. An old man. His square-clipped beard was white, his

hair was gray, he did not look powerful or exceptional in any way, except that his eyes were clear and keen. It was he who had shipped the steering oar and kept them all from drowning.

The girl eyed him admiringly as he stood there, braced, keeping his balance as by some miracle, for the boat was whirled about like a leaf. Now seemed ethereal as she sat on the after thwart and eyed the waters, no fear in her eyes. She wore nothing but a silken slip, pumps, and the torn half of a cloak about her shoulders. Her wet black hair framed her features; they were like old ivory, sweetly beautiful. A mere girl, well under twenty, thought Wardell, but somehow older than her years.

All this in a glance. They must rig



Keradec came from behind the palm tree

swirling up a giant sea, now dropping down again into a gulf, slueing around until the wind caught her high bow again. And through it all, Wardell caught the gaze of the girl, and a smile touched his lips, and his eyes warmed to her, so that she laughed and nodded to him. The wind was enough to keep them wordless.

There was something fresh and unspoiled and lovely about Gloria. That this was her name, Wardell knew, nothing else. In the almost continuous bluish glare of lightning, she the mast forward, and a rag of sail. Without this Wardell knew they might broach and go under at any moment. He looked at Keradec, up forward. The man was half conscious, no more, hurt, obviously useless for the present. Then he looked at Sainterre, who was fast getting drunk from his flask. Wardell's eyes hardened.

He knew already the black heart of this man; it had been revealed to him, there at the last horrible rush, when Sainterre struck down the women, shot someone, clawed his way into the boat

as it fell. An officer, yes; but the veneer had been stripped from him in horror and terror. Only one way to deal with such a person. Wardell opened his lips. Even above the whistle of the wind, his voice reached the girl, startled her, drew her gaze.

"Gloria!"

Wardell motioned, and she understood. He did not ask if she could do it; his gesture was imperative. As a matter of fact, he took her to be one of those people who can summon up courage and skill to do anything, in a desperate pinch. Many people are like that. Afterward, they marvel at themselves, and shrink from the thought of what was done.

Gloria obeyed. She joined him, took the oar. For a moment Wardell watched her. He saw that she knew at least how to handle it, and then he started forward.

He stood before Sainterre, shouted at him, motioned. The officer shrieked out something and lifted his cognac flask. Wardell seized it, tore it loose, and tossed it over the rail. Sainterre half started to his feet. Wardell struck him across the face with an end of rope he had picked up—struck him again and again, mercilessly, frightfully. Passion overcame terror in the younger man. An unheard oath burst from him. As the boat surged down from a wavecrest, his hand darted to his pocket.

Wardell's boot caught him under the chin, lifting back his head His hand came out with a pistol. Wardell grasped this, wrenched it away. The agility of this white-bearded man, his savage ferocity, was something incredible. Sainterre cowered. Wardell lashed him again, repeatedly, until he came to his feet, reeling. Sainterre stumbled forward past Keradec and began to break out the lashed mast and sail.

Wardell pocketed the pistol. He returned and took the steering oar again. His bright, keen eyes showed no emotion, as they warily watched the seas. The black eyes of the girl rested upon him in wonder. When she would have gone back to her thwart, Wardell's hand checked her; there was plenty of room for them both.

Sainterre got the mast stepped at last. He was a good enough man, knew his business, but the spirit was warped somewhere in him. Handsome, trim, black mustache and a devil with the girls; you could see that all over him. Keradec even wakened enough to lend him a hand with the scrap of canvas.

AND all the while, the boat was whirled about, tossing high and falling low, with the long hissing roar of the water answering the shrill howl of the wind. But Wardell, that old man, held the steering oar tirelessly, and his square-clipped white beard did not hide the thin line of mastery formed by his lips. His eyes blazed and glittered keenly, joyously, as the eyes of one who after long years comes back into his own, and finds it good.

"It is you who have saved us," murmured the girl when she wakened, hours later, to find that the night had come. The stars were out, and the boat was climbing and falling steadily now to the thrust of the monsoon. Wardell laughed a little.

"Steer," he said, and the girl obeyed. "Hold her steady by that star—"

Rubbing his stiffened limbs awake, he showed her the star and the masthead, and then clawed the salt out of his beard.

There was a scramble, a muttered oath. Sainterre was coming aft. Wardell stood up and stretched himself. He was not even curious about these other people; he was weary and done up. Twenty years ago, he thought, it would have been different, but the years take toll.

"You are one of the English passengers, yes?" said Sainterre, sinking down on the after thwart. "I remember seeing you aboard. Well, you have done wonders. I forgive you for your actions. I will take over the command now."

Wardell laughed abruptly. It was a clear, ringing laugh, strange in so old a man, and it held a certain joyous vibrancy like the tone of a bell.

"You'll stay for'ard," he said. "Speak English, do you? That's good. Does that chap up there talk English, too?"

"No, he is a Breton, an animal. He obeys me," said Sainterre. He was jaunty again, getting out a cigarette and lighting it. Not offering to share the case. "You understand, I am afraid. I am the surviving officer."

"Exactly," agreed Wardell. "I suppose you know where we're going?"

"No. How should I know? We are somewhere in the Mozambique Channel, somewhere north of Madagascar. You are heading north, and we must go south and east to pick up Cape Amber."

"We stay heading north," said Wardell. "I know where we are going, my friend. I was a master in sail before you were weaned."

"Possibly." Sainterre was a little incredulous. "But by law I am in command, and I must ask you to get forward. We need food and water—"

"And you want to get into the locker, eh? You won't. You're not in command. You're a damned yellow cur, and you'll stay where you belong. Get for'ard."

A new note in the old man's voice now, one that struck like a blow. He had the pistol out. In the starlight, Sainterre could see him thumb off the safety catch.

"Look out! I tell you—"

Wardell cursed him in mingled French and English. Cursed him vigorously, profanely, completely, and then stooped.

"Quick, you dog! For'ard, or I'll put a bullet through your foot—"

The voice bit like acid. Sainterre hastily retreated, then halted and started to speak again. Wardell fired, and the bullet came close enough so that Sainterre ducked and went stumbling back.

"You'll eat and drink when I'm ready," said Wardell. "Which will be at sunrise. Shut up and make the best of it!"

"*Mon Dieu!* He is a madman," said Keradec from forward. "Let him alone."

Sainterre subsided. Wardell sat down again beside the girl.

"Did you need to use such language?" she asked. He laughed softly.

"Tut, tut! Remember you're a man, my dear; doing a man's job, sharing a man's fate. Now I'm going to sleep. Go on and steer. Waken me if either of them come aft. I'll relieve you at midnight."

She swung the heavy oar. He had not asked if she could; she had no choice. The men snored up forward. The mast-tip rocked against the stars for uncounted time, until she could have cried in sheer exhaustion. Wardell wakened and stirred, sat up, took the oar from her, put his arm about her and drew her against him.

"You're cold. Sleep."

But she did not sleep; the warmth was not enough. Presently they fell to talking in low voices. Each of them had been alone aboard the *Quimper;* they had none to sorrow over. She had been going to relatives at Capetown. It was her only mention of herself, and Wardell asked no questions, except whether she were hungry. She laughed and held him closer.

"I'll eat and drink in the morning; why worry?" she said. "Where are we going?"

"To an island called Aldebaran, a reef."

"Is it near here?"

"Thirty miles or so."

"How do you know? How can you find it?"

"It is graven on my heart," he said slowly, but she did not laugh at the words.

"That is strange. You have been there before, then?"

"Eighteen years ago I was there, yes."

"Tell me. You were a sailor then?"

Wardell was silent for a space. Strange, how the stars and the heaving seas pulled them together! All the usual reticences were blotted out; caution, reserve, inhibitions were all departed.

NOT so strange either, perhaps. They had come together through death and horror and tempest. Still more, they two were here together in this boat, leagued together against the two in front. Wardell, who alone knew what faced him thirty miles away, craved this given companionship with a heart-hungry loneliness. The girl beside him was like true steel; he could sense it, he could feel how she went out to him. She, too, felt this loneliness and dread, between the stars and the sea. She sensed what stuff was in this old man, and clung to him.

All these, and many unuttered things, pulled at his brain.

"Did you ever hear of Shanghai Charley?" he asked in a low voice. To her quick breath, her one word, he thrilled with astonishment.

"Yes!"

"Where, in heaven's name?" he demanded in surprise.

"My father has spoken of him, has said he was a fine man."

"Oh!" Wardell sniffed at this. "Stuff and nonsense. I didn't mean that at all. I mean do you know who Shanghai Charley was, what he was?"

"Yes. A pirate on the China coast."

"A bloody murderer," Wardell said savagely. "A thief. No romance about piracy on that station, my girl. It's shoot to kill and then grab the loot. Yes, he was a bad 'un."

"My father knew him once, or met him," Gloria declared. Her voice was low, rich, soft with starlight and hushed heart-pulses. "He says he had some great qualities."

"Bosh! He had to have some iron in him to do what he did, of course. A rascal, none the less. He was a criminal; he looted ships as they're still doing today. He killed, d'you understand? He led Chinese, yellow devils, against his own people. Even those devils of his were afraid of him; he was that kind. He had a scar on his cheek shaped like an X. And they never did catch him. He had just married a girl, a Russian girl from Harbin, when the war broke. She was with him—a young girl of noble blood. Her name was Tatiana. Same name as one of the Czar's daughters had."

His voice trailed off into silence for

a little while. Under his arm, the oar moved a little now and then, the rocking mast-tip held straight between two stars.

"This Shanghai Charley turned to and helped the French capture a German raider," he went on presently. "It cost him something; he lost his ship and most of his men, but he did it. You don't remember how it was, back in those days; everything was swept away except the war. Even so, the British would never have pardoned him, but the French did. They made a silly ruddy hero of him, took him and his girl wife to Saigon, gave him a hurry-up job down in Madagascar—an important post in the shipyards at Diego Suarez. He had to get there quick. They sent him on a cruiser. On the way, his wife died. She asked him to bury her ashore; the cruiser was just passing this island of Aldebaran. There was smoke on the horizon—a German raider, they thought. Two had been reported in these waters. Still, the captain was a kind-hearted chap. He sent a launch ashore.

"Shanghai Charley took his wife. She was dying. She died as they lowered the launch. Shanghai Charley took her ashore. No time to bury her; he promised her dead eyes that he'd come back for that. The cruiser fired a gun for her. He left her there, above high water mark, wrapped up decently, but unburied. And—and there was another with her," added Wardell. "Another who died with her."

He was silent again. The girl's fingers pressed his arm silently, tenderly. They were very close together in spirit just then, these two.

"Well," and Wardell drew a deep breath, "it was a German raider, sure enough, and the cruiser took after her and missed her, and Shanghai Charley got to Diego. Two weeks later he left in a Mauritius beef boat and went back to bury Tatiana. And she was gone. She had been left there lying on a cot, decently wrapped. All of it gone, gone into the sea! The island is not much more than a reef. Some tidal wave, perhaps, or some tremendous sea had swept in and washed her body off."

"Were there no people on the

WARDELL

island?" queried the girl, after a moment.

"No. Just pandanus scrub and a couple of brackish wells where ships could fill breakers at a pinch. The Said Abdallah company, that concessionaire over at the Seychelles which has a lease on so many islands, had started plantations of some kind, but everybody had quit at Aldebaran. Perhaps on account of the war. Trees set out and withering."

He ceased speaking, with an air of finality.

"I suppose," said the girl, "it hurt him awfully."

"It did," Wardell assented. "It broke him all up. Of course, he knew she was dead, but to have her disappear like that, and with the other too! Into the sea, into a shark's maw—"

"Don't!" broke in Gloria quickly, and shivered. "Don't! That's rather horrible, really. And after all, she was dead. What became of Shanghai Charley?"

"He died too," said Wardell. "A year later, it was. The Chinese had never ceased trying to find him; a lot of Chinese traders in Madagascar, you know. Well, they found him, all right! And one night they put a knife into him. One of their secret societies—the White Lotus, it was—had run him down at last. He had looted a lot of Chinese merchants, you see. And that finished Shanghai Charley. The papers were full of it on the China coast, even with the war news and all. I hear the yellow devil who knifed him collected a big reward—yes, he got away, too."

His voice died again. There fell a long silence. The boat rose, climbed, dipped as the water hissed out from under her; she was going almost dead before the wind now. Then Wardell fished in his pocket and produced a silver case and a lighter.

"You smoke? Then let's have a cigarette to keep us going. It'll keep down hunger."

"If you're hungry, too, why wait for daylight to look in the locker?" she asked.

"I'll tell you why. I'm scared to look, and that's the truth!" Wardell said. "These blasted French boats have no inspection, no regulations, nothing! They just don't give a damn. We're likely to find nothing at all in that locker, or maybe an empty water breaker, a noggin of cognac, and biscuits ten years old. Or we may find everything we should have. I'm scared to look, that's all."

The lighter snapped alight, and the girl lit her cigarette and drew her head back.

"Oh! That *is* good," she breathed. "Just what we need. Tell me something, please, about Shanghai Charley! Suppose he had not died after all, but had recovered from the stab and lived. Would he have had to keep it quiet lest the Chinese look for him again?"

"Of course, of course," assented Wardell. "Even if he had recovered and gone away to another part of the world, he would have had to lie low. Those yellow devils never give up, you know. However, he died and the papers were full of it, and so forth."

"I see," said Gloria, and pressed his arm again. "And I suppose you were with him when he came back to this island, eh? Perhaps you were the captain of that boat he came in—what kind of a queer boat did you say she was?"

"A Mauritius beef carrier. Yes, that was it," and Wardell smiled in the darkness. "You hit it on the head, my girl. I was the master of that craft. Now finish your cigarette and try to get some sleep."

She obeyed, and after a time her body relaxed, and Wardell knew she was asleep. The boat rocked and swayed over the hissing seas; the following wind was pushing her ahead fast. And thirty miles was not so far, either.

CHAPTER II.

CORAL REEF.

"IF you're so blasted wise," said Sainterre scornfully, "how do you expect to find that reef? Come on, talk! And I'm a navigator, understand."

Wardell's eyes rested on him lightly, without interest.

"So am I, my friend. For reasons

you would never comprehend, I know the exact position of that reef. And I was in the wireless house when the S.O.S. was sent out, so I know the exact position of the *Quimper* when she sank. Being a navigator, you will see that no more is necessary. We shall raise the reef very soon."

"You talk of miracles," and Sainterre laughed harshly.

Wardell made no response. Keradec was sitting between his knees; he was cleansing and bandaging the man's hurt head. It was a bad gash, but the skull was uninjured.

"That is very curious," muttered Keradec in French. "You have tender fingers, m'sieu, like a woman."

Gloria, who was steering, smiled at this and gazed at Wardell's strong profile for a moment, as though she understood many things.

Morning had broken, glorious and unclouded. Except for the heavily running sea, not a sign of tempest remained. The wind was light but steady.

In the watertight compartment, Wardell had found everything; food and drink, supplies of all kinds, in generous quantity. One breaker of water, no more, but it was sweet and good. When he found all this, he paid an ungrudging mental tribute to those whom his forebodings had maligned. Rather, to their souls.

Sainterre sat on the midships thwart, staring aft. His olive features, handsome, aquiline, showed the marks of the rope end—dark streaks. He had the knack of always looking natty; even now, his uniform was apparently fresh, he even wore a necktie. Strange contrast to the crumpled, water-stained whites of Wardell. His dark eyes drank in the figure of the girl, greedily.

There was, perhaps, some excuse for this. Her legs were bare to the knees, and the silken slip clung to her like a glove, revealing every line and curve of her lovely slender body. The torn piece of a cloak about her shoulders offered little concealment. Wardell finished his task, glanced up, and caught the look in Sainterre's eyes. He smiled grimly.

"There, Keradec," he said. "Go for'ard, take the sheet, and be ready when I give the word. We shall change the course presently."

"Thank you, m'sieu," said the Breton, and obeyed. Wardell held the pistol in his lap, warily, until the man had passed by Sainterre. Then he looked down at the compass he had taken from the locker and nodded. His gaze lifted, and fastened upon Sainterre. The latter read strange things in that look, and stiffened slightly.

"My dear Sainterre," Wardell said calmly, "I believe you wear underclothing?"

"But certainly," said the officer in surprise.

"Then you have need of nothing else. I am about to request that you take off your trousers and shirt, and bestow them upon this young lady. You may keep your coat."

"No, no," broke in the girl quickly. "I do not need them—"

"Be quiet." Wardell did not look at her, did not take his gaze from Sainterre. "You are taking orders, my dear, not giving them. Well, Sainterre?"

"Name of the devil! You are mad. She is not naked."

"She is too naked for you to look at; besides, I did not ask you to argue the matter. It would give me great pleasure to shoot you if you refuse. However—"

Wardell stood up. About his right hand he wrapped the end of the short line whose marks still showed on the face of Sainterre. The pistol was in his left hand.

"Hurry," he said. "Do I have to repeat last night's lesson?"

In his voice, in his manner, was something indescribably menacing. It was, of course, merely the iron will of the man showing through—the character of him. He stood poised to the lurch and swing of the boat as though part of it. Sainterre rose, masking his anger.

"You are an old man," he said. "I cannot brawl with you; I have a respect for age. You may be mad, but perhaps you are right in this matter. Mademoiselle, it gives me great pleasure to offer you protection against the sun."

Wardell laughed harshly, but made no comment. Sainterre stripped off his garments, then put on his coat again over his underwear.

"Now," said Wardell in French, "both of you face forward. If either of you glances around, I will kill him on the instant. That is a promise."

THE two obeyed, Sainterre with one swift glance that showed the hatred in his soul. Wardell sat down and took the steering oar.

"Put on the clothes," he said to the girl. "You cannot steer and dress at once."

This was his only apology, his one excuse; his calm voice made its force apparent. She gave him a slight, smiling glance of understanding, and reached for the garments.

"There is blood on your shirt," she said quietly. "Can I help you dress the hurt?"

"No. It is only a scratch from the knife of a lascar. Of no consequence."

She stood up and threw aside the portion of cloak. The silk slip was all torn and split, and the wind blew it away from her figure. But Wardell was looking off across the heaving waters, to the north. His voice came, steady with restraint, but piercing.

"Keradec, stand up, be very careful not to look this way unless you want to die, and see if there is a cloud in the northeast."

The Breton got forward of the mast, clung to it, stood there as the boat climbed a sea. Again she climbed. Then his voice came, vibrant and deep.

"No cloud, m'sieu, but land! We are not heading for it. We are pointing too far north."

"As I thought. All right, now. Mind the sheet. You may turn around now."

Gloria was finishing. After her one quick glance at Wardell, her flush died away; he showed no interest whatever in her. She sat down again, buttoning up the shirt. The oar bit, the boat swung, the canvas flapped and then caught again. The boat leaned to the side thrust of the breeze, changed her motion.

"One does not see far from a boat," said Wardell. "The horizon is but three or four miles. We are close to the reef."

"What do you expect to find there?" asked Sainterre, his voice edged with sarcasm.

"Ghosts," said Wardell, looking at the horizon.

Gloria took the oar from him, met his glance with a smile that expressed much. He gave it to her, placed the pistol in her lap, then sighed and curled up at her feet. His eyes closed, for he was weary and stiff, and he slept almost at once.

Sainterre turned around after a while, looked at the girl, and smiled. She nodded brightly to him as though in thanks. He smiled again, and twisted his mustache, and half rose, evidently to move aft.

"Be careful," she said in a low voice, and put her hand to the pistol. Sainterre looked astonished for an instant, stared hard at her, then shrugged and got out a cigarette. As he lit it, he gave her a sharp, alert glance, found her calmly watching him, and his white teeth flashed in a smile.

"You cannot help being very lovely," he murmured. Under his gaze, a little color rose in her cheeks. He said no more, but turned on the thwart and then stood up, watching.

They were running straight toward the island, which grew with each moment. From a blue patch it developed into a green line that lay low indeed, not more than ten or twelve feet above highwater mark.

The island was little more than a reef of very irregular shape, five miles long by three wide, and, like most reefs in the Indian Ocean, of coral. As the boat drew closer, however, the girl could see the feathery tips of palm-trees breaking the skyline, and she frowned in some wonder. This did not seem to be the island described by Wardell.

"Better wake him up," said Sainterre coolly. "If he knows the place, we'll need him. Looks like reefs awash dead ahead, and from the south end also."

Gloria looked down at the sleeping man, and her eyes softened. He seemed so old, so frail and worn, as he lay thus relaxed at her feet. Then she stirred his arm with her foot, and the bright, keen eyes looked up at her suddenly, and he smiled as he sat up.

"Eh? Getting close, are we?" Wardell rose. She made room for him beside her, and as he took the oar, she held out the pistol. He shook his head.

"Keep it—and take good care of it," he said under his breath. Neither of the others were regarding them. "In your pocket."

She slid the pistol out of sight. Wardell's voice cracked out at Keradec, who obeyed promptly and cast off the sheet. The boat swung about clumsily, the canvas caught and filled, she lay over and darted north again.

"Reefs," Wardell said. "Watch for coral, Keradec. The best landing is on the east side, but that's too far around the reefs. Boats can come in on the northwest, which is closest for us. There's a good landing cove there, sheltered from the surf."

"Is that the same one?" asked the girl softly. Wardell started slightly, glanced at her, and then smiled.

"The same, my dear. And somewheres in these waters—"

"Never mind. That's a morbid reflection," she broke in. "My mother died three years ago. My father's an upcountry commissioner, in India. Well, she was carried off by a tiger. But one has to be sane, horribly sane, about such things."

Wardell knew she was right, and said so. The habit of years was hard to break, however. He looked at the sea with eyes of hatred, at the approaching island with a certain dread and shrinking. This cove was the same at which he had landed with the launch and its burden, eighteen years ago.

"You are old for your years, my dear. Eighteen?" he asked.

"Just," and she nodded gravely. "Yes. Life hasn't been any too kind, since mother died."

"You have a sweetheart?"

Her face hardened a trifle. "I had, or thought I had. But that was a mistake. He preferred bazaar girls."

That was definite enough, thought Wardell, faintly amused. A whole narrative in four words. She had depths, this girl.

Now his voice lifted again; Keradec, used to small boats, was ready. They came about and headed straight for the island. The spume of seas

GLORIA

breaking over half visible reefs swirled in angry white lines off to their right. Sainterre kept quiet, conscious of his rather ridiculous appearance.

Wardell eyed the island in keen astonishment. It was not the same by a good deal as when he had last seen it. The palms were high, cocopalms, and a lot of them, well grown. Plenty of pandanus scrub, true. All this shore of the island was wild and unkempt, behind the white curve of the coral sand for which they headed.

"Listen to me, Sainterre," said Wardell quietly, firmly. "Get no false ideas into that half-baked brain of yours. I'm in command, and I stay in command, afloat and ashore. If there are people here, be careful. I could tell a few things about how you got into this boat, remember. Not that I would; but I could. You'd find things damned unpleasant later. And I could also shoot you, and would be very glad to do it."

It was a mistake, this threat of telling things; he realized it instantly, but too late. Sainterre would be afraid of that, always—afraid to have the truth come out. But he only turned and eyed Wardell, and smiled a little.

"You are ungracious," he said in his soft voice. "I apologized to you."

"Damn your apologies, and you too," said Wardell bluntly. "That's all."

The dark, glittering eyes of Sainterre rested upon him for a moment, then flitted away.

CHAPTER III.

GHOSTS OF MEMORY.

THE boat drove up on the white coral sand, snow white, alive with millions of sand fleas that flickered up like mist as one walked. Wardell's eye roved the beach.

"Up with the boat!" he exclaimed. "Fall to, both of you. Gloria, stand aside."

"My job too," she said, and took hold with the other three. The boat was run up above highwater mark. Then Sainterre turned and looked at Wardell, who forestalled him.

"Sainterre, take your choice. Stay with us, share in the food and water in the boat, should we find the island deserted, and take my orders. Or leave us, if you like, you and Keradec. In which case, we part definitely."

Sainterre bowed, half mockingly, and with grace despite his costume.

"I stay, my dear captain, in order to get back my garments later."

Gloria broke into a laugh at this,

and Wardell nodded. Setting foot ashore had given them all a new and better feeling, perhaps; a readjustment back toward normal. But Wardell regretted, more and more, that he had uttered the threat to Sainterre.

Now he forgot the man, however, as he looked about this place. A rush of emotion came into his mind. He wanted to be alone here; he looked at the others, struggle in his eyes, and then spoke, hesitantly. His voice lacked decision, lacked command.

"Sainterre, will you and Keradec take a look about? Said Abdallah used to have this island leased. Perhaps they have a manager here, native workers. Besides, I wish to rest."

Sainterre's brows lifted slightly. His dark eyes narrowed and glittered. He caught the uncertain note, but he misunderstood it. Possibly he thought this old man had gone to pieces, now that the strain was over.

"Very gladly," he said. "Mademoiselle, perhaps, will assist us to explore?"

"No, I'll stop here," said the girl, with a smile. Sainterre bowed and turned, with a word to Keradec, who joined him. The two men strode away up the slight rise, and so were gone. Gloria came to Wardell, put her hand on his arm, looked into his eyes.

"I understand," she said. "I'll leave you alone for a little while. I'll not go far."

Wardell nodded, patted her hand, said nothing. He did not look at her. She turned and slipped away down the beach and in among the scrub brush.

Left alone, Wardell sat down on the high bow of the boat. His head drooped, so that his square white beard brushed against his chest. His gaze was fastened upon the first bit of rising ground, dead ahead—a shelf of coral rock. In his eyes grew an incredulity, a hopeless agony; now, as on the last time he had been in this spot, he could not understand it, he could not comprehend how it could have happened.

The spot was well above high water, well above any possible spring tide wave's reach. Unless some creature had come up out of the sea—even now, the bare thought tormented him horribly. His hands twisted and untwisted as he sat there staring. Even so, the other things should not have vanished. Her body might have gone, but not the other things. The iron cot, to which had been lashed the corners of the tarpaulin that covered her, the jewel casket between her feet, the glorious necklace of emeralds about her neck, the crucifix of ivory and rubies in her hands. He had taken that crucifix from an archbishop, not without blood; the rubies in it were worth a king's ransom. All these things had been left here, and had vanished into thin air—or into the sea.

"I'd have buried the jewels with her; but how did the rest disappear, even the cot? Only a tidal wave of some kind," he muttered. Bitter lines seamed his features, and his sharp keen eyes were blurred now.

"Well, Tatiana, you were right about the jewels," he went on in a dull, flat voice. "I was repaid; aye, God or the devil paid me out, and broke me, and brought me down to my knees, and ruined my life. The sunlight died when I left you here. And now I have come back. They say ghosts linger about the place of burial. Is that true, Tatiana, my dear? Well, well, it may be so, but I have never seen any except the ghosts of memory, and these are more terrible and more beautiful than any others could be."

So he mused, forgetful of time and tide. And while he mused, a strange thing had happened to Sainterre and Keradec; but a still stranger thing had happened to Gloria.

THE girl started down along the curving shore, and then mounted the little rise to the higher ground, and turned to look out at the sea. The boom of surf came continuously in a low thudding roll of sound. She glanced toward the boat, but a projection hid it and Wardell from sight, though she had scarcely come a hundred yards.

She heard a sound close by, whirled, saw a man standing there looking at her, and with a sudden quick cry of fright, started back. A bit of scrub caught her foot. She plunged over sideways and fell on her face, and lay quiet. Across her shirt sprang a little trail of red, and another from her temple, for coral rock is very sharp.

With an exclamation of dismay, the man sprang forward, and knelt beside her.

He was a young fellow, so browned by the sun and wind as to appear a native, except for his crisp, curly yellow hair and gray eyes. His features were finely cut. He wore only belted shorts and shoes. The faint, light hair on his arms was like spun gold.

Turning over the senseless figure, he examined the slight cut on the temple, then tore open the shirt. He started abruptly at discovering this was no man; then, smiling a little, glanced at the long scratch just below her breasts, and buttoned up the shirt again. No harm done after all. He stared down at her face, and touched it lightly with his fingers, gently.

"You lovely thing!" he murmured, in English. She opened her eyes, quietly, looked up at him for a moment, then a smile touched her lips. Her hand went to her shirt front.

"That was very nicely said. Then I am not hurt, after all?"

He flushed a little. "No. You are like a rosebud. Shall I help you up?"

"I am comfortable, thanks. Who are you?"

"Alec."

"You must be English. Is this your island?"

"Yes. That is, it belongs to us, to my mother and me. I saw the boat coming and came across to meet it. Was a ship wrecked?"

She nodded a little. Her eyes were curious as they studied him.

"Four of us got away. So you live here. I thought Said Abdallah had leased the island?"

He laughed at this. "You seem to know a lot about these things. We took over the lease years ago. Twice a year, men come and work the trees and take the turtle shell; they will not come now for a week or two. We live alone except when they come."

"Alone? But you have servants?"

"We have no need of servants. What is your name?"

"Gloria," she said. "But you have not been here always?"

"Always. Oh, a year at school now and then; in the Mauritius, in Diego Suarez, even in Capetown one year, but always this is home. There is plenty to keep us busy, and keeping busy is the key to happiness, mother says."

"She must be wise."

"She is, very. She is blind."

"Oh!"

Gloria sat up. He put an arm about her shoulders and whisked her to her feet, lightly, like a feather. She winced and touched her breast.

"It is only a scratch," he said. "Hardly broke the skin. Will you come along to the house with me?"

"Let us get him first—Captain Wardell," she returned. "He wanted to be alone for a while. Sainterre and Keradec went on across to explore the island. He stayed by the boat. He has been here before, and that place has very sad memories for him."

"Come along, then, which way?"

They went down to the beach and strode through the firm snowy coral dust, the myriad white sandfleas rising from before their feet. The girl, without seeming to do so, noted the finely set head of Alec, the corded brown shoulders and arms, the tapering waist. Perhaps she thought of Sainterre's chest, with the mass of curly black hair about his singlet, and his strong hairy arms.

They drew near the boat, with the slumped figure seated on its gunnel. Wardell saw them and stood up. He shook himself and turned to them, as though putting away all the dark thoughts that had consumed him. He looked at Alec, and smiled as the girl spoke, eagerly.

"Captain Wardell, this is Alec. He lives here. All alone with his mother. They've leased the island. Shall we go along home with him?"

"Yes." Wardell shook hands with the young man. "Mr. Wardell, my dear, not cap'n. Glad to meet you, sir."

"Thank you," said Alec gravely. "Your daughter fell and got scratched on the coral. No great matter. You must let us take you in—we've room and to spare."

Wardell nodded. "Not my daughter, though. Another passenger; to my great regret. Gloria, it's really too bad you're not my daughter."

"Yes? I'm tempted to think so, too," and she laughed brightly, gaily, as she caught his arm. "Come along. Lead the way, Alec! And if you can find me a jumper and a pair of those shorts, I'll make Sainterre happy by returning his trousers and shirt."

Alec turned and started off. She held Wardell back for a moment, whispered to him.

"Careful. He says his mother's blind."

The young man caught her whisper and turned, smiling amusedly.

"It's all right, really; she's not a bit sensitive about it. That's one reason we've always lived right here. She knows every inch of the place, over there. So don't worry. She's a fine, sensible woman, and the loveliest I've ever seen—until today."

His gaze touched on the confused Gloria for an instant, then he was on his way again. Wardell chuckled softly.

"Splendid looking chap. His brain's alive, too. Eh? What's the matter?"

"The pistol!" she exclaimed in dismay. "It must have slid out of my pocket when I fell—it's gone!"

"No matter, my dear. We've no more need of it, now. Back to normal, I trust, and all that silly tension lifted." Wardell patted her shoulder. "Run along, talk with our guide, and leave me to follow at my leisure. I'll not miss my way, you know."

She obeyed, and Alec greeted her with a radiant smile. Three miles to go, he said, and no use hurrying in the hot sun. They talked together, eagerly, each of them drinking in the youth and health and personality of the other.

Behind, Wardell paused to light a cigaret. They never noticed that he was not with them; they were absorbed in each other. Wardell, smiling,

watched them draw out of his sight, and seemed content to let them go.

"If only they knew how short life can be—and how long!" he murmured, as he inhaled his cigarette and paused to watch a glaring, pugnacious sand crab. "Isn't that so, you ferocious, harmless old devil? And how true it is that on a coral reef in the middle of the ocean, all the inhibitions of civilization fall away—eh?"

The crab glared, rattled its claws, and slowly backed away. And Wardell failed to note that he had just uttered an axiom which was only too fatally true, in more ways than one.

CHAPTER IV.

MADAME TRENT.

ON the east side of the island was the sheltered anchorage; a tidy little cove with a far-stretching mass of reefs vanishing away to east and south. At low water, these were little more than vast lagoons where green turtle and sea-slugs and other loot might be garnered, and where death lurked in many guises.

There were sheds, go-downs, drying platforms, down by the water. Up a little way was a long, low house nestled under the cocopalms and shrouded by masses of red bougainvillæa vines. The veranda under the vines, fronting the water, was wide and long, fitted with comfortable chairs.

Sainterre and Keradec sat here, relaxed and at their ease, sipped the cool drinks their hostess had furnished, and talked with her. Rather, Sainterre talked. He was no longer self-conscious of his attire, having learned that Madame Trent was blind; and as she spoke either French or English with equal ease, he was entirely at home.

"The other two, madame," he said, "will come later. A young English girl, very charming, and an old man, a M'sieu' Wardell, who is, unfortunately, slightly touched in the head. Poor fellow! I do not blame him for hallucinations. The experience was terrible."

"You poor men!" said madame gently. She was knitting, unhurriedly, deftly; a tall, deep-bosomed woman, touched with a singular mature loveliness. She was, one would judge, in her forties, and wore a dove gray which made her look older. Her eyes, at a casual glance, gave no hint of her infirmity, and were a deep violet blue. About her head was knotted a great mass of hair, once a rich golden hue, now touched and streaked with gray.

Her features were singularly gentle, unlined, untroubled, very calm and yet proudly dignified.

"What a frightful time you must have had!" she said, and dropped her knitting in her lap. "And the poor souls who perished, only yesterday! It is incredible. God rest them," and she crossed herself, but not as Keradec would have done. Her gesture caught the Breton's eye, and he stared, then muttered something in puzzled wonder.

Sainterre paid no heed. He would not have known whether one made that gesture from left to right, or from right to left. And yet it mattered most vitally, to all of them.

"So you live here alone with your son?" he said negligently. She assented, telling how a schooner came twice a year to load and unload. Sometimes she and her son went away and came back in some months. Her husband was long dead; away back during the war.

"If you wish to refill your glass,"

she said, " there is a bottle on the sideboard, inside, with a dish of limes and cold water in the tap. We have a small electric system and have put down a very good well."

" Thank you, madame," and Sainterre arose. " Your glass, Keradec?"

He went inside the house. Madame spoke with Keradec. He was a dull fellow, terribly superstitious like all Bretons, but a certain native wit underlay his crudity. And he had strong passions, with greed foremost.

After a long time Sainterre appeared. He was white as a sheet, and wore the dreadful expression of one who has just seen something past all reason or belief. He made Keradec a gesture of repression, gave the Breton his glass, then sank into his chair again. He was about to speak, when voices were heard and around the corner of the house came Alec with Gloria, laughing and talking.

" So you found the place!" she exclaimed brightly to Sainterre, as she came up the steps. "I'm afraid Mr. Wardell fell behind; but he'll be along —oh!"

Madame Trent rose. Her son introduced Gloria to her, and the older woman touched the girl's face briefly with her fingers, then more lingeringly, as though she found this face singularly fascinating.

" My dear, you are welcome," she said. " What can we do for you? What do you need?"

"Clothes!" the girl exclaimed. " Alec is going to give me a jumper and shorts—please don't offer me dresses! I don't want them, really. I'd much sooner be free and unconfined. And if you'll let me use your kitchen, I can honestly cook for all hands. Don't you bother; just let Alec show me where everything is."

Laughing, Madame Trent resumed her chair and her knitting.

" My dear, the place is yours. Alec! Here are two other guests. Now that you are here, I'll let you play the host."

Alec shook hands with Sainterre and Keradec, then led Gloria into the house. After a moment he came back outside, and flung Sainterre a laughing glance.

" You'll have your clothes back in a moment. Yes, mother?"

Madame Trent had risen and put down her knitting.

" Alec, I can't have that young woman taking charge of my kitchen and getting things all mixed up. If these gentlemen will excuse me, I'll go out and help her with luncheon. I wish you'd come and get the good linens out of the chest for me."

THEY went inside together. Keradec looked up sharply at Sainterre, who extended his empty glass to the Breton.

" Take the glasses in, as an excuse. Look for yourself."

Keradec hesitated, scowling, then came out of his chair. With the two glasses, he went into the house. He was gone for some little time.

Then he came stumbling back outside. Sweat was running down his cheeks; his dark, brutish face was all ablaze with passion, and his eyes were dilated. He muttered under his breath and then halted, staring at Sainterre.

" So you, also, saw!" said the latter. " Then it was all real. Come, my friend! If there were some sure way, some certainty—"

" It is incredible, past belief!" burst out Keradec, but under his breath. He was breathing hard, as though from long effort. Sainterre frowned, and spoke sharply.

"Sit down, fool! Control yourself. Leave all this to me. Sit down! Let me think."

Keradec resumed his chair. He sat there tense, hunched over; then he began nervously to pull at the fingers of his big red hands, cracking the joints loudly, one after the other, repeatedly. His excitement was still visible in his face.

"Control yourself!" snapped Sainterre, and the Breton leaned back in his chair, making an effort to obey.

Gloria appeared, with her quick, lithe step. The jumper was too big for her; it folded about her upper body, hiding the womanly lines; the shorts left her legs bare, deliciously bare. She tossed the shirt and trousers to Sainterre, and glanced down at herself.

"Soon I'll be burned like a lobster, eh?" she exclaimed laughingly. "Thank you for the garments; I'll repay you with an excellent luncheon. Don't get impatient!"

Sainterre's eyes lit up as she departed. What the man failed to realize, was that her gay vivacity, her friendliness, was not for him at all; that he was as far removed from any personality in her thoughts as a dog whose head she would stoop to scratch. With a pleased, jaunty expression Sainterre flung off his coat and got into his shirt and trousers again.

"Ah!" growled Keradec. "She has the jolly little legs, eh? Well, m'sieu, have you thought of anything?"

Sainterre nodded, a flash in his black eyes.

"Yes," he replied. "A number of things. But there is no hurry; there must be none. This afternoon, I want you to go back to the boat, my friend. Bring me the wooden plug out of her bottom."

"Eh?" Keradec stared at him. "The plug? But yes, certainly. What for?"

Sainterre thumbed his mustache. "For the success of my plans. Is that enough?"

Keradec shrugged. At this moment Wardell came around the corner of the house, walking in leisurely fashion, and ascended the steps with a pleasant nod.

"So we are at home," he said, and dropped into a chair. "Ah! That feels good. Where are the others?"

"Inside. The ladies are getting something to eat," Sainterre said amiably. Wardell gave him a glance, noted his clothed figure, and smiled slightly, then gave a weary nod and closed his eyes.

Keradec scowled at Sainterre as though in alarm. Perhaps he feared lest Wardell go into the house and see what they had seen there. Sainterre, making him a gesture of caution, shrugged and hummed a gay little tune under his breath.

Madame Trent appeared suddenly in the doorway, and came out on the veranda.

"If you gentlemen will go inside," she said, "you'll find a bite to eat nearly ready. I'll join you presently."

At the sound of her voice, Wardell opened his eyes and looked up. He came to his feet. His face wore a strange expression, as though something had indescribably startled him; he stared blankly at the woman. Sainterre turned.

"Madame, the last of our party has arrived. Here is the M. Wardell whom I mentioned."

"Oh, yes!" Madame Trent smiled. "Very well. There is plenty of room for all."

Sainterre and Keradec passed into the house. Wardell had not moved. He looked at Madame Trent as she went to her chair. Then he spoke in a low, strained voice.

"Madame, it is very singular. You —you bear a rather extraordinary resemblance to a person whom I once knew."

His voice died out. She faced toward him, frowning slightly.

"Indeed? Your voice has a certain familiarity, sir. Perhaps we have met somewhere in the past. I am sorry that I cannot see your face."

"Your name, madame?" exclaimed Wardell sharply.

"It is Trent. My husband was Captain Trent. He was killed during the war, God rest him!" And as she spoke, she again crossed herself from right to left, in the Russian fashion.

Wardell's eyes dilated. For a moment he stood absolutely motionless; then he reached gropingly for a chair-back. A trembling seized upon him; a convulsive trembling that was beyond control. His face became livid as death. His breath escaped in a low, tremulously sobbing catch. The woman caught the sound and glanced up.

"What is the matter? You are not hurt? Oh, I remember—"

Sainterre had said this man was a little mad. She went on, gently.

"My son has not met you? You will find a meal about ready inside, and he is there. If you care for a drink, there is gin and ginger beer, or what you would."

Wardell started to speak, swallowed hard, and caught his breath.

"Thank you," he said uncertainly. "Thank you. Yes."

He went to the door, passed inside, and came to a halt. His eyes closed. Clenched hands at his breast, his eyes closed; an agony of emotion swept his countenance, his heart, his very soul, for a moment. Then he became calm. Gay voices reached him. He opened his eyes and looked around.

He stood in a large, pleasant room with an alcove at one side. Curtains shut off the rooms beyond. The first thing that he saw was a large framed photograph. The sight of it came like an actual blow; he stood staring at his own face.

Not that it looked in the least like Wardell. It showed a far younger man with a very eager, cleancut and cleanly shaven face, a crossed scar upon one cheek, in a French uniform.

"Then—then it is true!" he murmured. "Oh, my God—it is true, it is real, I am not out of my head—I have seen her, spoken with her!"

He glanced about wildly, whirled as though to rush outside, halted. A groan broke from him. The alcove caught his eye and he turned to it. His brain was in a tumult of agitation, emotions swept upon him; yet somehow the will of the man found itself and was crystallized in the one word that escaped his lips.

"No!"

He must not rush out there to her. This consciousness grew and grew within him. He had received a terrific blow; rather, blow upon blow! Now he thought suddenly of the young man, Alec. Her son, she had said. That could have but one meaning; his son as well.

How could it have been possible? An anguish of new emotion surged upon him, but he fought it down. And suddenly, as he stood in the alcove, he became sensible of what was before him. He had been looking at it for some moments before the meaning of it, the realization, broke upon his mind.

A table and a chair, that was all. But upon the table were a number of cups bedded down with cotton, holding each a few little round globules of different sizes. And upon the table, evidently placed there for sorting into the cups, a shimmering mass of these round objects, small and large. Pearls.

CHAPTER V.

TREACHERY.

ALEC came into the room, saw the old man standing in the alcove, crossed to him. "Hello, Wardell! We've got a meal ready. Oh, looking at my pearls, are you? They're beauties. I found a bed over in the far reefs; a virgin bed. This is my take for the past six months. Know anything about pearls?"

"Eh? Yes, yes." A shaky laugh escaped Wardell. He turned to Alec, put his hands on the shoulders of the surprised young man, looked into his face. "My boy—well, well, I have something to ask of you. First, look at the photograph on the wall. Who is it?"

Alec glanced around. "Eh? Oh, that's my father! I never knew him, of course. He died just before I was born."

"So?" Wardell's fingers tightened their grip. "I must ask your help—with her. With your mother. Tell her you have learned from us that Captain Trent was not really killed after all, that he is still alive—"

Alec suddenly caught his arms, broke loose his grip, stared into his eyes with a sharp rush of perplexed anger. All the laughing good humor had fled from his face. He was alert, suspicious, resentful.

"You—are you mad?" he cried in a low voice. "It is impossible. It is simply untrue. How dare you lie about such things, to us?"

Wardell smiled slightly. "My boy, I don't lie. Upon my honor, this is the truth. Your father supposed that she was dead. He came here, looking for her; she was gone. Then he was badly hurt. It was given out that he was dead; to save his life from other enemies, this was never denied. All this is true. I know it. The girl in there—Gloria—knows it."

"Gloria!" That name struck the younger man like a blow. Nothing else could so have impressed him. He drew a deep breath. "Good heavens, Wardell! If this is true—"

"Tell her, and do it now," said Wardell. "It must be broken to her gently. You alone can do it. Do you understand?"

"Yes." Alec nodded, his eyes suddenly shining. "You don't know what it will mean to her, Wardell! More to her than to me, of course. Always, she has lived in her thoughts of him—"

"Oh, I know better than you would imagine," and Wardell broke into a clear, ringing laugh. Then he clapped Alec on the shoulder. "Good! Go along with you. By the way, where can I find a razor! I don't want to eat. I want to primp a bit. You know, us old fellows—"

Alec smiled and led him to one of the bedrooms, opposite the dining room and kitchen. He left him there and started for the veranda, on his errand; not an easy errand.

Wardell found what he wanted. And, as he worked, there was laughter in his eyes and a gay bubbling tune of joyous exultation on his lips. The incredible had happened; he was realizing it all to the full, now, and was carried out of himself.

After a time, Alec came back into

the dining room. Sainterre and Keradec and Gloria were at the table. Keradec was gobbling, Sainterre was sparkling with talk, the girl was amused. Back to normal now, she no longer discerned danger in him, and he could be a very amiable fellow when he desired. Alec joined them and shook his head to the girl's query.

"No, my mother will come in presently; just now, she is in the mood for listening. She likes to listen to the surf booming on the reefs. She can tell many things by that sound, queerly enough; the weather, a coming storm, the tides."

The curtains were flung back. Wardell stood there.

"Oh!" With the one word, Gloria sat staring. So did the others. With the beard gone and his white hair roughly shortened, Wardell was a new man, a different man, a man from whom age had suddenly dropped. The white cheeks and chin and lips were incredibly strong. Even his eyes looked younger, more alive, alight with laughing, leaping spirits.

ALEC looked at the man, met those dancing eyes, saw the crossed scars on the cheek, and turned white as death. He half rose from his chair. Wardell made him a gesture that checked him, and came forward to the table, smiling. He met the gaze of the girl, knew that she, also, had seen the scar, and bowed slightly.

"A beard makes so much difference, eh?" he observed, and leaned forward to pick up a sandwich. His personality had suddenly taken command of the room. "Well, my friends, I shall take a bite and no more. Come, come, Alec! Do I look so strange, then?"

"No," stammered the young man. "But you—you—"

"Exactly, I!" and Wardell laughed joyously. "I am younger, you perceive. Yes, that is true. But it is very impolite of you, my boy, to be so taken aback by the change in me. By the way, may I speak to you for an instant, in the other room?"

Alec rose and stumbled out. The curtain fell behind them. They stood looking at one another, until Wardell smiled and passed his arm about Alec's shoulders.

"Ah, my boy!" he exclaimed under his breath. "Yes, it is true. But say nothing of it. We must get acquainted. For you, there is surprise, but no emotion. We need not pretend, eh? It is for me that all the emotion springs—and for her. Did you tell her?"

"Yes," said Alec awkwardly. "You are the same as the picture; my father. I do not know what to say."

"Why try?" Wardell pressed his arm, then turned. "Talk to Gloria. And you had better put those pearls out of sight, too."

"Nonsense! No thieves around here," and the other laughed.

Wardell went out to the veranda. In the doorway, he paused, trembling again; Madame Trent was sitting there, looking out at the sea, and the sight of the emotion in her face made his pulses leap and quiver.

"Who is it?" She had heard his step, and turned.

"It is I; Mr. Wardell," he said, and came toward her. "So Alec told you?"

"Oh! Then it was you who told him about my husband!" she exclaimed eagerly. "Come here, sit down, tell me, quickly! Are you sure there can be no mistake?"

"None," he responded. "I was speaking with him very recently. He had absolutely no idea that you were alive. He came back here to find you,

soon after leaving you, and every sign of you had vanished from the island."

"Oh! That is true," and her voice was like a moan. "A schooner stopped in for water; her captain's wife was aboard. They found me alive, took me with them, nursed me. Later, I came back here—I was never more than ten or fifteen miles away, all the time! And afterward I heard that he was dead—"

"He has lived only for you ever since then," said Wardell. "Rather, for your memory. I must tell you—"

"Wait!" she exclaimed. "Come here. I wish to feel your face."

Wardell obeyed; and once again, for the last time, he was trembling like a leaf.

In the dining room, which was at the back of the house, Keradec finished his meal, and at a gesture from Sainterre went out the rear door and disappeared. Sainterre turned to Alec and proffered a smiling request.

"Could you provide me, my dear host, with some glue and paper? I am going to occupy myself making toy boats, an art in which I was once proficient as a boy. It will amuse me and will, perhaps," he added, with a sly laughing glance at Gloria, "keep me out of mischief."

"Oh, very easily! We happen to have some glue, if it is not dried up," said Alec, and presently found what was required. Sainterre sauntered out and wandered down the palm grove.

Left alone, Alec turned to Gloria with an eager question.

"He said that you knew. Is that so?"

"Yes." She nodded, her eyes alight. "Come, let's go and see if it's true—"

She caught his hand and pulled him. Like two children they crept softly into the big front room, went to the door, peered cautiously out on the veranda. They saw Wardell there, kneeling, his arms about Madame Trent; and her fingers were toying with his white hair, and her face—

"Ah!" said the girl, when she had drawn him back. "She is like an angel, Alec!"

"But she is crying. Why?"

"You are too young to understand."

"Bosh! I'm older than you are—I'll be eighteen next month!" he exclaimed, laughingly, then caught her by the shoulders. "You lovely creature!" he said, softly, as he looked into her face. "I have a present for you, something that has been waiting for you, growing for you, a long time. Come over here."

He took her to the alcove and showed her the pearls, and began picking out the finest to make a necklace for her. After all, the discovery of a father whom he had never known, was of minor importance. As Wardell had said, rightly, it was not a matter to cause him great emotion, particularly at the present moment.

FOR an hour or more Sainterre, down in the shade of the palm grove, worked away with his paper and glue; but he was not making toy boats. Not by a good deal. He waylaid Keradec when the latter returned, and from the Breton took the plug.

This was a round oaken plug made to fit tightly into the hole in the bottom of the boat, so that she could easily be filled with water while in the chocks and then drained, and the seams kept tight. Sainterre sent Keradec on to the house, to do what might please him, then inspected the plug he had made from glue and paper. A little more work, and he had it an exact counterpart of the other in size.

He started back across the island, whistling a gay tune, and by the time he reached the boat, his imitation plug had dried hard. Keradec had been forced to turn the boat half over in order to hammer out the oaken plug. Sainterre put his own in place, drove it in hard with a lump of coral, and inspected the job. It looked perfect.

He righted the boat, then stood up, and with a whirl of his arm flung the oaken plug far into the brush.

"Admirable!" he exclaimed, enthusiasm lighting his flushed face and his dark eyes. "That animal of a Breton knows nothing; therefore, he can tell nothing. Admirable! Truly an inspiration of genius. For an hour, two hours, the boat will float—until the glue softens and the plug dissolves, at least."

Smiling, he lit a cigarette and retraced his steps toward the house. As he approached it, Keradec met him. The Breton was a prey to great agitation. He halted Sainterre, talked rapidly to him. Sainterre whistled in astonishment, and then broke into a laugh and clapped the man on the shoulder.

"No, no, my friend!" he said, in great good-humor. "It does not spoil things for us—not in the least! On the contrary, it makes our task all the easier. So he is her husband, eh? Excellent, upon my word; it could not be better for us. Now, listen to me."

He, in his turn, spoke at some length. The dark, savage Breton nodded, and an ugly smiling grimace twisted his lips. "I understand. You may depend on me," he rejoined.

Sainterre went on to the house. He mounted to the veranda, jaunty, smiling, at ease, and there found the others assembled. There the great news was imparted to him; he congratulated madame and kissed her hand, he laughed with Wardell—and he joked amiably with Gloria and Alec. In short, he was agreeable and pleasant all around.

But Sainterre did not know what the two women knew. What the older woman, no doubt, had forgotten long since, and what the younger woman cherished as a secret. This knowledge made her eyes sparkle when she looked at Wardell; for she saw him now as he had been long ago, and she understood what a deathlessly cruel spirit had upsprung in him to save all their lives, there in the ship's boat.

Sainterre sought a drink of water, merely as an excuse. The pearls were still on the table in the alcove. The afternoon was half over. It was time to act.

Not that there was any great rush, of course. The point of his scheme was the offshore breeze that arose just after sunset. Upon learning of this curious fact, he had at once visualized what he might—and would—do. He turned back to the veranda.

Madame Trent had been telling of how those jewels that her husband had meant to bury with her corpse, had been sold to pay for her lease on this island, with the improvements and other expenses. Emotion, excitement, had told upon her. Wardell took her to her own room, and presently came out again to the dining room, where Gloria was clearing things away with Alec lending a hand. Wardell mixed a drink as Sainterre came in, and wolfed a sandwich and another. He was hungry now, laughing, exultant.

Sainterre came up to him. "Will you come out for a little stroll with me, m'sieu? There is something I would like to talk over with you. A private matter of some importance to us all."

"Why, of course!" Wardell took his arm; in this moment of supreme

happiness, all men had become as friends and brothers. "Of course! Come along. These young folks don't need us, anyway."

Sainterre smiled at this, but to himself.

They went outside, down to the palm grove where the feathery tips waved far overhead, where there were palm trees, high trees. There by an orange tree, Sainterre halted and cut short the eager bubbling speech that came from the older man's lips. Wardell checked himself with a nod.

"Oh, yes! You wanted something—what was it?"

"Two things," said Sainterre. "First, about that pistol. You see, it was a present to me from an old friend. I should like to have it back."

Wardell shook his head. "Sorry. It was lost in the sand, over there where we came ashore, Sainterre. We might be able to find it; I doubt it, though. What was the other thing?"

"Pearls," said Sainterre, so that Wardell suddenly fastened full attention upon him. He took out a cigarette, put it between his lips, held a match in his hand, waited. "You see, I was in a pearling lugger a couple of years, my friend. I know something about those little round gems. In the house, yonder, lies a fortune. Not a small fortune, either, but one that many a person would go to great lengths to get."

"And what of that, Sainterre?" said Wardell, his gaze keen and penetrating. The other shrugged.

"I merely mention the matter," he replied, and struck the match, and held it to the cigarette between his lips. Wardell frowned at him, rather perplexed.

The blow was quick and sharp. Struck above the ear, Wardell collapsed and lay quiet. Keradec came from behind the palm tree—a carefully selected tree, being out of sight from the house—and toyed with the wooden club in his hand.

"It was not a very good crack," he observed critically.

"It answers the purpose. To work!"

In five minutes they had the wrists of the unconscious man lashed fast, and Keradec looked up.

"What if he shouts?"

"They can hear nothing; the surf roars like ten devils. As soon as he wakens, walk him over to the boat. Tie him securely to the midships thwart. Then throw that tarpaulin over him and wait. I'll bring the other one in half an hour; he's the one we have most to fear. He will fight if he has any chance. I'll tell him this one is badly hurt. When he comes and leans over the gunnel of the boat, let him have it. I'll lend a hand, too."

CHAPTER VI.

THE OAKEN PLUG.

IT was still lacking nearly an hour of sunset, when the tarpaulin was jerked off.

Wardell had been sweating under that canvas, with a rag tied about his mouth. He had heard Alec come, had heard what followed. Now, as the tarpaulin was thrown off, he saw Alec lying in the bottom of the boat, face down, smeared with blood, but breathing. Sainterre untied the rag, sat on the gunnel, and met the blazing eyes of Wardell with his slow smile.

Keradec stood nearby, tenderly exploring a lumpy jaw. Alec, obviously, had fought.

"What's the meaning of this deviltry?" snapped Wardell.

"Pearls." Sainterre waved his cigarette airily. "And, I should add, the young woman."

"You are mad!" exclaimed Wardell. "You, an officer! You mean to murder us?"

"Certainly not, my friend. I have learned the interesting fact that a little after sunset, an offshore breeze arises that lasts until after midnight. Well, I set you afloat with the canvas spread. The breeze wafts you northward. By morning you should have worked free of your bonds, or the young one will waken and set you free. The two of you will have food and water, a boat, and destiny to guide you."

A ghastly cold hand settled on Wardell's brain.

"Sainterre! You can't do this—you can't!" he cried out. Sainterre smiled.

"My friend, I like that young woman. Also, there are the pearls. We are not in the world any more; we are a thousand leagues out of it. I might, of course, murder you two gentlemen here and now, but I prefer not. And Keradec does not desire to have the sin of murder on his soul. He has religious scruples at times."

Wardell felt the beads of sweat spring on his forehead. He knew himself absolutely helpless. Yes; this man would do as he had said. There was none to stop him, now. The agony of realization wakened in Wardell's heart.

"Sainterre! Listen to me—you cannot do this frightful thing!" he said frantically. "You know what has happened. That this boy here is my son. That after all these years I have found those whom I love. You cannot do this, no man would have the heart! You cannot send me drifting away from here—I would never get back—"

"No, you would not," agreed Sainterre, pleasantly, but there was a devil in his black eyes. Wardell shivered. He saw that this man was actually enjoying his frightful suffering, was deliberately adding to it.

"Then take the pearls!" he broke out. "You may have them; they are yours. You can take my word of honor on the matter. But do not wreck her life and mine—my wife's and mine—"

Sainterre smiled and leaned forward.

"You forget the young woman, my friend," he said. "And you forget something else. Do you see these welts across my face?" And he lifted his fingers to the marks left by the rope end. "Well, you will think of them frequently, tonight. And in a few days Keradec and I, with perhaps the young woman, will take one of those fine whaleboats over by the house and go to Diego Suarez. And the pearls will go, too."

He drew back, momentarily satisfied by the acute suffering he saw in the face of his victim. Wardell, at these words, perceived that pleading was useless. His white, agonized features settled in thin, harsh lines.

Suddenly his voice lashed out, vitriolic, cursing the man who smiled, until Sainterre laughed, leaned forward, and struck him twice across the face, heavily.

"Blood for blood, eh? But I do not murder you. I merely set you adrift, you see."

This was the terrible thing. This was what burned into Wardell more than anything else—to be sent drifting away from this island, from this woman whom he had found again. He knew nothing of the deeper reason for Sainterre's smile.

"Keradec!" At Sainterre's call, the Breton slouched over. "You have your club? Then stand by. I am going

to loosen the line about our friend's wrists and arrange it so that he can work free of it. At present, it is far too tight."

"Suppose he works the boat back here?" growled the Breton. Sainterre laughed.

"Without a rudder or oar, he cannot. The breeze will carry him to the north. We will keep the oars here. Besides, there are other factors of which you, my good Keradec, are not aware. Stand by, and if he tries any tricks, smash him over the head. Hard."

Wardell knew it would be done. He closed his eyes and remained motionless.

Sainterre detached the line and then knotted it loosely again, so that Wardell could move his hands slightly but would be unable to get free for some considerable time. This was, of course, a mere refinement of his cruel enjoyment.

He knew very well that even before Wardell could get free of the rope, the glue and paper composing that imitation plug would have begun to disintegrate.

As he finished, there came a sharp exclamation from Keradec. "Ha! Look quickly, m'sieu! It is she!"

Sainterre straightened up. Gloria, indeed, was approaching with her free, lithe step. He strode out to meet her, and she called to him.

"Where are they, do you know? Have you seen Alec?"

"Yes, he's here," said Sainterre, smiling. She came up, eyed the boat, which concealed the two victims from her sight, and then looked at him, puzzled, startled.

"What do you mean? Where's Alec?"

With a laugh, Sainterre reached out and caught her. He need do no explaining; his eyes did that for him.

NOT until Sainterre pressed his lips to hers did the girl actually realize his intent. Then a gasp broke from her, and she began to fight. Dealing with this sort of man, the mistake was fatal. Sainterre, with vicious enjoyment, treated her as he might have treated some vixen of the waterfront. She reeled under his open-handed slaps, blood sprang from her cut lips, from her face, but she still fought him in a frenzy of fear and hatred—fought him until the strength fled out of her, until his fist bruised her cheek and struck her down in a moaning, limp heap.

Sainterre, laughing, gathered up her body in his arms and again pressed his lips upon hers, and carried her over toward the boat.

"M'sieu knows how to handle them," said Keradec approvingly.

Sainterre set the girl on her feet. She flinched from him; he shook her savagely until her head reeled and her eyes closed.

"Look at me!" he snapped, thrusting his face close to hers. She obeyed. "Come, my little dove; that's enough of your fighting, understand? You're mine, and you'd better realize it."

She could look into the boat now. She saw Alec there, face down, motionless, and Wardell, grimly gazing upon her, twisting and straining uselessly at his bound wrists. She fell into a tremble.

"Oh!" she gasped. "You—what are you doing—"

"They are sailing away, my sweet, in a little while," said Sainterre, and thumbed his mustache jauntily, as he held her in the crook of his arm. He did not see the horror in her eyes

change to a swift alertness. "They are leaving us. You and I remain here, sweetheart. So you want to say goodby to them, eh? Then say it quickly."

"Yes, yes!" she panted. Her hands pushed against his breast with pitiful lack of force. "I must say goodby to them!"

Sainterre laughed and let her go. She scrambled into the boat, flung herself upon Alec, turned him half over, then a cry escaped her.

"Oh! You have killed him!"

"Bah! He'll be all right in no time." Sainterre, confident now that he had conquered her, was assured and gay, despite his scratched cheek. "Better take those oars out of the boat, Keradec, and get the mast stepped."

The Breton obeyed. Gloria, letting Alec's senseless figure down again, threw herself upon Wardell in a frantic farewell.

But Wardell had seen the look in her eyes. He smiled grimly as he felt her hot trembling fingers work at the knots, as he felt the loosened rope give still more. Then Sainterre reached over the gunnel and caught her by the shoulder, and wrenched her away.

"That's enough!" he cried gaily. "He's too old to appreciate your kisses, my dear. Come, give a few to me before the moment comes—the sun's going fast and the breeze is coming—"

She stumbled over the gunnel, half fell in the white coral sand, and Sainterre's arm checked her fall. He caught her up to him, kissed her avidly; she was all unresistant now, but as he kissed her he saw her eyes widen, heard her quick, sharp word.

"Oh! Look! A ship, a ship!"

Sainterre turned his head. She pushed him suddenly, broke clear of him; then, whirling, she was gone like a deer down the beach. With one angry oath of comprehension, Sainterre took to his heels, darting after her.

Keradec, who had just lifted the oars out of the boat, stood holding them, staring after them, a laugh upon his savage features. He watched them run, saw the girl mount the coral rise and dart in among the pandanus scrub, saw Sainterre hurl himself after her in swift pursuit. Absorbed, he did not see Wardell rise to his feet and step out to the sand, but he did hear the step, and turned.

HIS eyes dilated, his jaw fell. At sight of Wardell's face he stood absolutely motionless, stupefied by those blazing eyes, by that white and terrible countenance. Then the heavy oars fell from his hand, as Wardell's fist landed.

Keradec took the blow, staggered, and whipped out his knife. Being a Breton, he could not use his fists, but he could use a knife like the devil himself. He let out a wild, roaring cry that Sainterre heard, even above the booming of the surf. Wardell's fist drove into him again, sickeningly.

Keradec dodged, whirled about in the sand, struck, struck repeatedly. Mere ferocity would not have touched him, but the awful set face of Wardell bore death itself, and gave him frantic terror. A Breton is used to blows; these fists, however, crunched into him like steel hammers, and shattered him. He screamed once, when his nose was broken, but that was the only sound he uttered.

Wardell's left forearm was slashed, spouting blood. Suddenly, swiftly, the knife drove home, gritted against bone, was wrenched from Keradec's hand. A terrific blow caught him

squarely between the eyes, at the base of his broken nose. He stood with feet planted wide apart, and his hands fell, and a shiver ran through his body. Then his knees were loosened and he fell forward on his face and lay there, uttering low insensate groans with every breath.

Wardell, panting a little, saw Sainterre running up the beach toward him, like a madman. He put a hand to the knife, but blood was running over his fingers and his grip slid along the haft. The knife was in his left breast. He tried again, and a sobbing grunt was wrenched from his lips as the steel came clear. It fell from his hand. There was a rush of blood over his white shirt and coat, and he staggered. Everything was a red blur before his eyes—and through this red mist hurtled Sainterre, with a wild oath.

Wardell went down under the impact. He went down, true, but both hands found the throat of Sainterre and clenched there, and the thumbs sank in as the two of them thrashed about in the sand. Sainterre struck and clawed, but that grip on his throat sank farther in. He lost his head, fighting in a wild frenzy. He could not get his hands inside those blood-slippery forearms to break the grip. His face became purple. His hands flopped about in blind, useless effort. Then he relaxed, and his tongue protruded.

Wardell felt himself pulled away. He came to his feet; Gloria was there beside him, in her hand the pistol that she had lost earlier this day.

"I found it, I found it!" she panted out.

"Good."

Wardell's brain was clear now. He took the pistol from her hand, threw off the safety catch, and stooped a little, placing it against the ear of the senseless Frenchman. Then the horrified girl knocked his hand aside, stood facing him angrily.

"No, no!" she cried out. "You can't do that—you must not!"

Wardell regarded her calmly. "Don't be a fool," he said. "Go and take a walk—"

"You must not!" She screamed out the words, then fell quiet. "Oh, please! Can't you see? It would be murder, murder!"

"They are not men, but beasts," he said. "It is not murder, but justice."

"Think!" Suddenly she caught his face in her two hands, looked into his eyes. "Think! What happened years ago; perhaps that was justice, too. Punishment. If you do this thing, if you become the sort of man you were then—think! Now they are beaten, helpless to do more evil. If you deliberately take this awful crime on your soul—think! You dare not!"

Wardell shivered. Then he lifted his head. "You are right. I dare not," he said, and the pistol fell from his hand. After a moment he stooped and picked it up, wearily. He stripped off his coat. "Help me. Before I lose too much blood. My shirt—use it."

A little cry broke from her, and she fell to work. The sun was just sinking behind the dark rim of the bowl that was the ocean horizon.

Presently she had Wardell bandaged. He sat with weakness upon him, while she somehow dragged Alec out of the boat, and bathed his head with the water lapping at the boat's stern, and revived him. Then Keradec stirred, and sat up, blinking around, but Sainterre did not move. He was breathing in gasps, unconscious.

"Stand up, Keradec!" said Wardell, and his voice bit. "One move,

and I'll kill you! Obey my orders and keep quiet. Put those oars in the boat, then lift Sainterre in. Move!"

The pistol leaped in his hand, as it exploded. The bullet whistled past the ear of Keradec, who leaped to his feet and wiped the blood from his eyes and mouth.

"What are you going to do?" cried out the girl. Wardell looked at her sternly.

"I am going to send them away, as they would have sent us," he said. "But I shall give them oars. They have food and water. They will not lack. Directly north they will be in the track of ships. You understand, Keradec? Head north."

Gloria, holding the battered head of Alec in her arms, made no objection to this. Keradec looked at Wardell and muttered assent. Then he stooped to the oars.

Presently he lugged the unconscious Sainterre into the boat, dumped him amidships, and stepped the mast. This heeled the boat over more. Alec came to his feet and in silence lent a helping hand.

There was no surf here. The boat slid out. Keradec waded out with it and they got it turned, and then he stepped in and sat in the sternsheets. The offshore breeze was just puffing out. It filled the canvas, sent the boat rippling away across the cove toward the open water. All in silence.

Then Wardell came to his feet. Alec took his arm, and he smiled at the younger man.

"All right, are you? Good boy. Come along—to her."

They mounted from the beach, the three of them, and started across the expanse of scrub-studded higher ground.

The sudden tropical darkness was already creeping across the waters; the sail of the boat had receded, was drifting away into the night. Wardell's foot struck against something. He halted, and stooped painfully.

"That's curious," he said, holding up the object. "Curious! Wonder where that came from? Looks like an oaken plug."

He tossed it away, with a laugh, and the three of them went on together.

THE END

Dog Daze

By EUSTACE L. ADAMS

"Mad dog!" rose the cry and up rose the balloon—with three unwilling passengers

The dog leaped for the basket—went in

FISH GAGE, chief demonstrator for the Apex Airplane Company, was on the water wagon. Except for a few bottles of beer at every short pause in the conversation, and a sufficient medicinal hoot of Hennessey's Four Star Brandy to enable his astonished system to withstand the shock of relative abstinence, he had become a strict teetotaller. If this comparative sobriety, which had lasted almost three days, had been beneficial to his health, said benefits were not visible to the naked eye. The only change was to his disposition, which was very much worse.

Even now, with one ample foot resting upon the brass rail of the Airport Beer Parlor, with a foaming beaker of brown brew before him and a generous commission check in his pocket, he contemplated his crash-scarred visage in the fly-blown mirror before him with profoundest melancholy.

"I got so much beer in me," he confided moodily to Horace Humphrey, star salesman for the Apex Company, "that I make a swishing noise when I walk. But do I feel good? I do not. I feel terrible!"

At this point a regrettable interruption occurred. A sleek young man, clad in the conventional monkey suit of a flier, spoke from the other end of the counter.

"If you'd stop looking in the mirror," he suggested, "maybe you'd feel better."

Fish Gage started convulsively. The young man with the nifty mustache was a balloon pilot, and Fish, who had flown airplanes since they resembled box kites, had always harbored a feeling of contempt for all who rode lighter-than-air ships. Now, at the Midwest Airport, knowing himself to be in a rendezvous of balloon men, and feeling very low in his mind on account of the beer, Fish had felt free to express his opinion that of all humans who traveled in, on, or above ground, balloon men were the most obnoxious.

They were, he had stated in spite of Horace's efforts to shush him, wens on the neck of civilization, and it was high time that something should be done about it.

Fish bent a sultry stare upon his traducer, who returned the look with a sneering grin that caused Fish's always unstable temperature to rise a dozen degrees.

"Gagging at me, you big blimp?" Fish demanded.

"Yes, ape," said the balloon man.

Fish cleared his decks for action. Ignoring Horace's discouraged protests, he shucked his coat. He opened his mouth and, with the deftness born of long practice, removed a set of glittering white molars, which he slipped into his pocket for safe keeping. Then he advanced upon the balloon man with enthusiastic truculence.

"I'm going to slap you into a flat spin," he announced happily.

BUT at that point the bartender, accustomed to the strange belligerences of airmen, produced a bungstarter with such an air of determined ferocity that even the embattled Fish paused to give heed.

"One wave outa you, Gummy," the bartender announced, "and I'll rivet your beak to your back bone."

Fish looked at him with interest, his animosity toward the balloon man momentarily forgotten.

"Come on, Fish," Horace said hastily, "we got to take off for New York."

Fish put on his coat and, blowing lustily upon his dusty teeth, slipped them back into place. Reaching for another stein of beer, his roving eye caught a glimpse of the smooth green airport, framed in the open doorway of the saloon.

He scowled with displeasure, for there, directly within his line of vision, was a billowing, bellying bag which looked like a playground ball afflicted with elephantiasis. Around the balloon, as it was being made ready for a flight, clustered a dozen helpers busily engaged with disconnecting its gas line and hanging more and more sand bags upon its wickerwork basket.

Fish shuddered. He transferred his gaze to the pilot who had insulted him. "You flying that thing?" he asked.

"Practicing for the International Races next month," the pilot nodded without a trace of shame.

Fish excused himself, went into the telephone booth where, safe from Horace's accusing eyes, he helped himself to a prodigious shot of Hennessey's Four Star Brandy from a flask which was said to be the largest in the world. Having thus repaired the damage done to his system by the beer, he marched back into the main room, feeling much refreshed.

"Any man who flies a gas bag," said he to the balloon man, "is a sissy."

"Yeah?" snarled the other. "Try it some time, if you ain't yellow. I seen many a windy crate-pusher talk like that before."

Fish blinked. He had been called many things during a long, hard career, but it was a new experience hearing himself called yellow. Horace grabbed his hard muscled arm and the bartender fondled the bungstarter suggestively.

"Listen, gas bag," Fish said, "I've flown everything that's mounted an engine in my day. The thing ain't gone into the air that I'm afraid of. One hundred brings half a grand you can't show me anything to scare me. Take me and my buddy up and make your gallopin' onion do its stuff."

"Hey, I don't want—" Horace began, outraged.

"A hundred brings five, eh?" echoed the balloon man, a trifle thickly because he was on his sixth whisky sour. "Lay the jack on the line, funny face. My old buddy, the bartender, will hold stakes. Come on. Might as well take you two kiwis as a load of sand. Let's go."

"Hey, I'm not going to—" Horace protested weakly.

"Shut up," Fish snapped, "or I'll fan your nose around behind your ears. Here's the bundle, bartender. Five C's. And give me half a dozen bottles of beer to take with me."

"No bottled stuff. Give you a couple of growlers, if you want."

"Oke."

FROM the ground beneath the shadow of the great, swaying bag, Horace knew a sudden tremendous urge to go away from there at once. He did not particularly like flying even at its best, in a big transport plane with all modern conveniences. It was just a queer trick of fate that he should have a flair for selling airplanes when he did not like them at all and had never been able to master the intricacies of the pilot's art. Were such a thing possible in his business, he would never fly any higher than he could jump from a standing start. But he had managed to conquer his aversion for the air to some extent while flying with Fish. Drunk or sober, Fish was a master at the controls.

Now, however, the only alleviating fact was that the unpleasant young balloon man appeared to know his business. While Fish stood weaving slightly on his feet, watching everything with an expression of alcoholic contempt on his hard-bitten face, the other bustled from one side of the basket to the other, ordering bags of sand hooked here, there and elsewhere, others removed from this place or that. Horace's hands and feet felt clammy. There was perspiration upon his forehead. But he knew that it was useless to refuse to go. With Fish in his present mood, Horace knew he would pres-

ently fly, conscious or unconscious. And he preferred to be conscious, even under these unfortunate circumstances. And besides, somebody had to look out for Fish.

A sudden queer sound from the vicinity of Fish's feet drew the gaze of the two prospective passengers to the ground.

"Tell me, quick, Horace," Fish begged anxiously, "do you see what I see?"

Horace did. A large dog of indeterminate ancestry had nosed the cover from one of Fish's tin beer containers and was lapping with noisy enjoyment at the foaming contents. The head of the animal was mostly collie, while the body was partly police dog, with a soupçon of greyhound and a dash of Airedale tossed in for seasoning. To have called the rear quarters those of a mastiff would have been unduly specific; yet more than anything else, perhaps, the strain of mastiff predominated.

"Now *there,*" said Fish, instantly captivated, "is a dog after my own heart! Imagine, a beer-drinking dog!"

The dog lapped the bottom of the can clean, then rolled a raffish eye at the speaker. His nose was so covered with foam that it resembled a sudsy shaving brush. He grinned at Fish with his eyes, ears and tail. Then he sat down and scratched himself reflectively, as if considering what he would do with the rest of the day. He lurched to his feet and began to walk away, but he staggered perceptibly. He looked back at Fish, and there was a sheepish expression in his big brown eyes. Fish roared with laughter, and the dog, unwilling to make a further spectacle of himself, sat down and expressed his unconcern by yawning.

"I know," said Fish understandingly, "just how he feels."

The dog brightened. His tail patted the ground appreciatively, but he appeared to have no wish to walk again.

"All aboard," cried the balloon pilot, clambering into the wicker basket.

HORACE'S heart sank. Somehow he had been hoping against hope that something would happen to prevent the flight. But now his hope of escape was gone. Fish pushed him toward the basket. Reluctantly he rolled over the high side and sat weakly upon a seat to be out of the way of the gimmicks and gadgets that seemed completely to fill the walled enclosure. He was surrounded by a fence of unpleasant faces as he glanced hopelessly at the ground crew who stood around the basket, holding it down against the upward tug of the gas.

Fish threw one leg over the edge, and the basket, just aweigh, sagged slightly. There was a feeling of instability about the entire thing that caused Horace's heart to clog his epiglottis and to conflict with his breathing. There was a smell of gas all about and a queer, rustling noise from the silken bag above.

There was a sudden commotion. The faces which surrounded Horace were all turning away, all staring in one direction.

"Mad dog!" somebody squalled.

The basket tilted. Two of the ground crew who had stood close to Fish released their hold on the grip ropes and bolted. There was a chorus of shouts and yells. And then everything happened at once. The dog, copious quantities of beer suds still clinging to its nose and mouth, leaped for the edge of the basket and cleared it

by six inches, landing almost in the lap of Fish, who, caught off balance, toppled, with loud cries of dismay, into the basket, landing amid the litter of ropes and packages which cluttered the floor.

The balloon pilot cast a single horrified glance at the foaming dog. Precipitately he jumped overboard. The basket, lurching upward, was torn from the hands of the demoralized ground crew. It swayed breath-takingly. Horace, trying to swallow his heart, grabbed at the wicker edge. Before his eyes was a revolting sight. The airship hangar, the edge of the field and the water tower were all slipping swiftly downward; instantly, it seemed, they had disappeared below the rim of the basket and there was nothing left but blue sky and the dim horizon.

"Fish!" he shrieked. "We're going up! Stop her!"

Fish was making incoherent sounds, trying to push from immediate juxtaposition with his face the ardent and beery nose of the dog, who was making frenzied efforts to lick his cheek with a tongue of prodigious length and wetness.

"Go away!" Fish shouted. "You feel like a bar rag! Go away, I tell you."

Presently Horace, jerking his popped eyes from the swiftly-sinking panorama of Ohio, found strength to seize the nearest leg, which happened to be that of the dog, and to jerk lustily. There was a howl of protest from the dog, who sat down and glared reproachfully at him. Fish hauled himself to his feet and looked about with an expression of bewilderment upon his hard-chiseled features.

"We're in the air, Fish!" Horace bleated. "Get us down, quick!"

Fish stared overside toward a ground, which was fading away into the dim distance as a balloon floated smoothly upward. He glanced at the altimeter, whose pointer was moving implacably across the figured dial. He shuddered and, with a gesture that was entirely automatic, reached into his inside pocket, produced his flask and helped himself to a drink that made up for his three days of comparative abstinence.

"Wah!" he choked. He looked at Horace and scowled. "How come you got me into a mess like this, bag ears?"

"Me, get you into this?" Horace echoed indignantly. "Listen, just get us down and then we'll argue!"

Fish looked around vaguely. "How would I do it? Seems to me I heard there was a string you pulled."

HE fumbled around the basket, studying the numberless ropes and cords which led upward to the rustling silken bag. He tweaked one or two experimentally, but nothing happened. The altimeter, which had, but a moment before, indicated eight thousand feet, moved up a full thousand while Fish toyed with the ropes.

At last he found one which looked promising. He gave it a tug. From the mysterious fastnesses in the bag above there came a gentle sighing sound. The floor of the basket descended with appalling haste. The dog raised his foam flecked nose and howled to high heaven. Horace's stomach spun around three times and then turned over twice. He knew he was going to be a very sick man—if there was time before he hit the ground.

"Stop her, Fish!" he yelled. "We're falling!"

Fish, his bronzed face turning a grayish green, whipped out his pocket

knife and fell to slashing at the ropes which held the twenty or thirty sand bags to the side of the basket. He had just severed the fifth bag when the balloon came slowly to a stop in its precipitate descent and, after a moment's hesitation, began to rise with a haste which made its original ascent seem laggard to the point of laziness.

The dog, sitting mournfully upon the floor, redoubled his lamentations, his eyes fixed reproachfully upon Fish.

"Shut up!" said Fish churlishly.

The dog's tail patted the floor doubtfully and his yipping died to a low-voiced moan which told as plainly as talk that the animal's faith in human nature had been violently shattered.

The balloon still pursued its earnest course toward the stratosphere. The pointer on the altimeter crossed twelve thousand feet.

"I'm cold!" said Horace. "Do something, Fish."

"Want me to pull that string again?" demanded Fish unpleasantly.

"Nuh-nuh-nuh-no!" chattered Horace faintly. "You th-th-threw off too many s-sand bags!"

There was an odd sound like that of gently vibrating castanets. Horace, alarmed, looked about and finally traced the noise to Fish, whose teeth were chattering audibly. He was just in time to see the pilot remove his glittering white chinaware and put his artificial molars in his pocket. Now his face looked queerly shrunken, but there was no more clicking noise and Fish appeared to feel better. The altimeter registered fifteen thousand feet. The dog moved close to Fish and pressed against him for warmth.

"Itsh time for a drink," Fish said thickly, on account of his missing plate. "Better have one. Good shtuff."

Gratefully Horace accepted the flask. Never a drinking man, he now poured a generous quantity of the potent liquor down his unaccustomed throat. He coughed, fought for breath When he could finally see again, Fish was making a survey of the instruments, boxes, packages and odds and ends that filled the basket.

"I figured zhere might be eatsh here," said Fish triumphantly, unwrapping a neat packet of sandwiches.

HORACE was now warm and happy. His stomach felt as if some one had built a bonfire therein, but on the whole it was very pleasant. Suddenly it seemed to him that floating through the air silently, comfortably, in a nice wicker basket, was the finest, the most memorable experience of his life.

He heard a strange, lilting voice singing, and he was about to tell Fish to stop it when he recognized it as his own. He stopped singing, somewhat abashed, but the impression that life had new and more beautiful meanings persisted. He saw the dog shivering, and an immense compassion took possession of him.

"Dog needs drink, too," he heard himself saying in a lilting voice. "Put drink on san'wich. Give him."

Fish was staring strangely at Horace. Remembering, perhaps, all the times when Horace had censured him for drinking, Fish shook his head in unbelieving astonishment.

"And what a bundle you've got!" he murmured, uncapping the flask and applying his shrunken lips to the orifice.

"Gimme," said Horace severely. "Never do to get drunk now."

Violently he grabbed the flask from Fish's fingers. He took one of the meat sandwiches, poured a copious supply

of the brandy upon the bread and offered it to the dog, who accepted it with pathetic eagerness and bolted it down without an instant's hesitation. The dog blinked, hiccupped twice, rose and shook himself briskly. Then he began to gambol around within the tiny confines of the basket, caroming against Fish's legs, and Horace's, and against the numberless gadgets which occupied the crowded floor.

"Whoopee!" cheered the exhilarated Horace, inspired by the dog's infectious gayety. "I'm not as cold as I was. Another drink'll make a new woman out of me!"

He giggled hysterically. Fish gazed at him with strong disapproval. Always, in the past, it had been the earnest young salesman who had put the hush on Fish when the latter was tempted to go gay. Never had Fish known Horace to take even one drink of hard liquor. And now Horace was acting like a soft-shoe dancer, which did not go well with his bulk, nor with the studious, almost clerical expression on his face. Fish's sense of the proprieties was outraged, and his drink was dying within him.

"I like balloons
And I like saloons,
But I never will eat
Any more prunes!"

Horace's lilting voice, extemporizing to the refrain of "Frankie and Johnny," caused even the dog to pause in his play and to regard Horace with a growing doubt in his big brown eyes. He glanced inquiringly at Fish, then sat down and carefully looked away from the indecorous salesman. He scratched himself thoroughly, then with the attitude of one who finds the entire experience distasteful, he curled himself up on the floor, yawned twice, and went thoroughly to sleep.

"Good idea, Suds," said Fish, approvingly. "Nush-nothing to do up here. Don't dare fool with gimmicks. Balloon mush come down shome time. We got no date anywhere. Shleep. Zh-that's it."

Ignoring Horace's protests at being left alone in joyous wakefulness, Fish adjusted his lanky figure to the most comfortable posture possible and closed his eyes.

The strangeness of his situation did not bother him greatly; uncounted hours in the air had accustomed him to floating through the uncharted skies. The fact that he was not sure where he was, nor where he was going, nor how he was going to land, bothered him scarcely at all. Horace's singing bothered him, however, and the only sure way to forget that was in sleep. Presently he slept. And the balloon, drifting through the calm sky, continued on its southward course, its bulging fabric rippling to the impact of Horace's caroling voice.

WHEN Fish next opened his heavy lids, it was as dark as the inside of a derby hat. He was confused in his mind and his head contained a noise not unlike that of a crockery store falling down a flight of stairs. There was a taste in his mouth like a fisherman's boot. He did not know where he was and he hoped never to know. At that moment death would have been a blessed surcease from the agony of his hangover. But instead of death came a slow return to full consciousness.

The noise in his ears was not born within his head. It was the sound of a jazz band from very close at hand. He winced and tried to go to sleep again. Instead, he put out his hand and groped around, trying to find out

where he was by sense of touch. His exploring fingers bumped against the wicker edge of the basket and, continuing, found one of the many support ropes which held the basket in place beneath the great bag. Next they touched a bundle of rough, shaggy fur and recoiled as if they had encountered a snake. Meanwhile the radio, concealed somewhere amid the duffel on the floor, blared on, beating out a barbaric tom-tom of jazz from some hotel roof.

"Now I remember," said Fish gloomily. "Where's Horish?"

Hearing himself lisp, he recalled having pocketed his teeth to prevent them from chattering. He removed them from his pocket, rubbed the dust from them on his trouser leg and slipped them into his mouth. Next he found his flask, refreshed himself and began to feel better right away. With the true instinct of a pilot, his first thought was for his position in the air. Looking over the edge, he saw the black ground less than fifty feet below him. Fortunately the balloon was sliding serenely across level country; the slightest undulation below would have snagged the low-hanging basket.

Reassured, Fish lighted a match and inspected the other occupants of the tiny compartment. Horace, breathing stertorously, was curled up on the floor, and Suds, the beer-loving dog, was sleeping just as noisily, his affectionate head burrowed under Horace's chin.

Music from the raido died in a blue note and a man's harsh voice spoke through the darkness.

"General police alarm. The armed band of desperadoes which blew the safe of the Wheaton Bank of Industry are thought to have escaped toward the southward in a high powered motor car. A filling station at Springfield, Illinois, was robbed an hour ago by a group of six men whose chief interest was apparently in obtaining gasoline. It is supposed this is the same band, and that they are heading toward the Missouri or Kentucky lines. All police officers are warned that these men are dangerous, are equipped with machine guns and will shoot on sight. A reward of two thousand five hundred dollars has been offered for—"

FISH yawned and snapped off the radio, whose switch he discovered just beneath the circular seat which bordered the inner wall of the basket. He wished he knew where he was. It would be possible to make a landing anywhere along here, but Fish was no one to invite himself to a long walk. It was his theory that a man should never stand when he could sit, never sit when he could lie down, and he abhorred walking in all its forms.

If, as, and when he saw a city, he would bring his wandering bag to earth just as close to the outskirts as possible, and then wait for a motor car to carry him to town. So he took another drink and waited for something to happen. Nothing happened except that more and more black earth flowed beneath the floating basket. The silence and the loneliness became unbearable. He aimed a lusty kick at Horace and missed. His boot landed on the ribs of the snoring Suds, who awoke with a shriek of protest. The dog scrambled to his feet, which found themselves exactly upon the face of the recumbent Horace.

"Go 'way!" Horace cried in a voice that was strangely muffled because the front left foot of the dog was in his open mouth. "Go 'way, or—"

There was a hollow thump, and Suds's lamentations echoed across a dozen square miles of sleeping countryside. The dog took off from Horace's face and almost upset Fish, who was at that moment braced for a more accurate kick. The basket shimmied so violently that it took all the play out of Horace, whose stomach was in a very delicate condition.

"Goop!" said Horace, gloomily. He sat up and waited for the spasm to pass. "Where are we? Oh, never mind. It doesn't matter."

"I wouldn't know, anyway," Fish said, conscious that the drink he had just had was doing him a lot of good. "You were pilot while I took a little nap." He took one more drink, to act as a sort of frosting for the cake. Then, brightly, "You know this gas bag racket isn't so bad. For two cents I'd see could I set a new record."

"You're going to," Horace told him, clenching his fists in the darkness. "You're going to set a new record for quick landings, and—if you want to live an hour more—for gentle ones, too. If you shake me up any, I'll be tight as a tick all over again."

"Might change your luck," said Fish hopefully.

Horace's fist clouted Fish athwart the right ear. For a brief instant Fish considered the complete destruction of his partner, but even through the clouds of alcoholic fumes which flitted pleasantly across his brain, he realized that Horace was his meal ticket, so he forbore to bear down.

"Oh, all right, all right," he said, fumbling around for the valve rope.

Just then both men in the basket became aware of something very strange that was happening elsewhere in the silent night. From far away to the northward came the unmistakable rattle of a machine gun, followed by a series of heavy barks from service revolvers.

Looking in the direction from which the firing had come, Fish and Horace could see the bright dots of motor car headlights, together with thread-like stabs of blue-green gun-flame.

"You might know," said Fish resentfully, "that the only two cars I seen in ten minutes would be too busy to give us a lift to the nearest town."

AT that moment the moon, which had been hidden behind high banks of cumulus clouds, slid out into clear sky and flooded the prairies with its silver light. On every side, for dozens of miles, was nothing but corn fields, with not a single house in sight. To the right, directly in the path of the slow-floating balloon, was the gleaming white slash of a concrete highway, clearly etched against the darkness of the fields.

"They're coming down that road!" exclaimed Horace breathlessly.

The two cars were roaring down the road at tremendous speed. Now the leading pair of headlights seemed definitely to be gaining on their pursuers. The burst of gunfire had died away; only the snarling of their engines ripped through the silence of the night.

Fish's eyes, accustomed to gauging speed and distance, glanced from the approaching headlights to the ribbon of road ahead.

"We'll be going over that road just about the time those dizzy goofs pass under us!" he estimated. "If it was any one else, we could yell down to 'em and ask 'em for a lift to town."

"Me," said Horace uneasily, "I'd just as soon be somewheres else when they pass."

He looked down at the ground, which was now scarcely forty feet below, and at the two cars, which were eating up the distance in great, noisy gulps. He felt his back hair prickling at the malignant sound made by the engines. Something told him that things were about to happen. In a sudden panic he reached over the side and unhooked one of the sand bags which he had seen Fish use to lighten ship.

"Hey, dizzy!" Fish exclaimed, grabbing the bag from Horace's hand. "I thought you wanted to land!"

Now the leading car swung around a slight turn in the road. The reflected light from its headlights bathed the low-drifting balloon in a swiftly increasing light. In one moment Horace could just see Fish's lean face in the white glow. In the next Fish seemed to be washed in radium paint as he stared down at the leading motor car, now scarcely a hundred feet away. Fish had been right; balloon and car would reach the same point on the road at the same moment.

The dazzling beam of a windshield searchlight swiveled up from the first racing car and focused directly upon the floating bag. Suds barked frenziedly. A sudden darting flame leaped up from the speeding car. Something sounding like a dozen angry bees buzzed close by Horace's startled head.

"What the—" began Fish, outraged.

Then Horace saw an astonishing thing. Fish's face, bleak with rage in the blinding light, stared down at the first car, which was almost under the basket, not forty feet below the floorboards. Fish's two hands, the sand bag between them, were poised directly over his head. The hands, and the bag, swung downward in a swift arc, and the hands came away empty.

Horace found strength to peek over the side, just in time to see the ballast bag fall directly upon the top of an open touring car. The car swerved, teetered on two wheels, righted itself, and then bounced across a drainage ditch into the corn field, where it rolled over three times before coming to a stop, a crumpled mass of metal with oddly inhuman bundles of cloth scattered about the wreckage.

"Quick, Horace!" shouted Fish, aghast at the sudden catastrophe he had caused. "Gimme a hand on these bags."

EARNESTLY Horace joined him in tearing loose one after another of the sand bags. With cold fear clutching at his heart, he tossed the bags down into the darkness, grateful for the sudden surging upward of the basket. There was an odd smell of gas, a smell which enveloped the two in the balloon like a sea fog, but they were both too busy to notice. They saw the lights of the second car come to a stop at the point where the first car had hurtled from the road, but there was no time to watch what happened. Each had no thought but to go away from there just as fast as the balloon, aided by a friendly wind, would take them.

"You flap-eared flea, now you'll go to the chair!" Horace panted. "And I'll be there to see 'em turn on the juice!"

"Yeah!" Fish retorted breathlessly, as he scooped up everything on the floor and pushed it overboard. "You'll be waiting for your turn in the hot seat!"

The gas bag had risen, but not with the exhilarating swoop that had marked its first ascent the afternoon before. Instead, it lifted heavily, like a fat old man climbing a stepladder.

Feverishly the two men threw everything over the edge that they could lay their hands on, yet the balloon was not more than two hundred feet from the ground.

Suds, deciding that all this activity meant something exciting, bounced about, getting in Fish's way, squirming under Horace's feet and barking so lustily that the sound of his bass voice could be heard for a dozen square miles.

Fish, casting a fearful glance at the headlights across the darkened fields, tried to capture the dog's nose to stifle his barks, but Suds playfully avoided his clutching hands, thinking this to be a new and very fine game invented for his own amusement.

Now the balloon was undeniably sinking. The two men had stripped the basket bare, had tossed out all the sand. There was nothing to do but to wait for the ground to reach up and end the flight.

"Lookit!" said Fish hoarsely. "That car's chasing us!"

Horace, following the line of his pointing arm, saw the headlights swing around, progress down the road at tremendous speed.

"When we land," he said acidly, "I'm going to take off and run. If they find me I won't know you. Any guy who goes around throwing sand bags on automobiles—"

Fish made no answer. His flask was pointed toward the moon and he was making queer glugging noises as he took aboard personal ballast to carry him through the evil moments to follow.

The basket struck the ground, upended and spewed men and dog into the growing corn. Horace shook dust from his left ear and bent a malevolent gaze upon Fish.

"I'm going, now," he said coldly. "I didn't have a thing to do with it."

AND then he was gone, a faint waving of the high corn marking his hasty exit from the scene. Fish and the dog eyed the approaching motor car, which had already come to a stop on the shoulder of the road, a hundred yards from the slowly hissing bag whose envelope had been pierced by a score of bullets. Absently, Fish kicked at something on the ground beneath him.

It was the remains of the packet of sandwiches. He looked at Suds, who was sitting on his haunches, looking up at Fish with an expression of undying adoration.

"Well, old timer," said Fish, "we'll have one more little snifter before we go to the jug."

Saturating one of the sandwiches with brandy, he fed it to the dog, who blinked, choked and began to wag his tail emotionally.

"Hey, you in the corn!" came a harsh voice from the direction of the road.

Fish ducked instinctively, but Suds, overcome by a notion to be a big, brave watch dog, barked ferociously. It was as foreign to his amiable disposition, that bark, as if he had suddenly taken to mewing like a kitten. But it served its purpose.

Presently three men, all carrying shotguns and wearing badges that glittered in the moonlight, appeared through the corn. Instantly Suds became his usual self, albeit slightly exhilarated, and pranced and capered with joy.

"You the guy that threw a bomb on that car?" demanded the leader of the approaching group.

"Wasn't a bomb. It was just sand,"

Fish said defensively. "They shot at us."

Suds suddenly turned and pointed toward a spot in the corn field behind Fish. He barked his watch-dog bark. One of the officers instantly hurried to that spot.

"Come out of there," he snarled, "or I'll blow your head off!"

A dejected figure came out of the corn. It was Horace, who had crawled back to see what was happening to Fish. Suds greeted him with ecstasy.

"Who's that guy?" demanded the leader of the officers.

"My partner," purred Fish.

"He's in luck!" said the officer, his manner warming. "Did you guys know who you were stopping? It was the band of outlaws who've been raising hell all over the State to-night. You're in line to split a two thousand five hundred dollar reward with us. You get half of it for stopping the car; we get half because we captured the four who lived through the wreck. Nice, huh?"

"Sweet doggie," said Horace, reaching down to pat Suds's head.

Fish turned slowly. Horace's posture, as he bent to fondle the dog, was entirely too much temptation. Aiming carefully, he punted his partner headlong into the dusty corn. Then, with the air of one who has done an act of charity, he turned to the officers.

"The pup," he said, a trifle thickly, "gets a quart of good liquor as his reward. Good dog, that. Let's—whoop! Pardon me!—Let's go places!"

THE END

Birds Use Shock Absorbers

POWERFUL-FLYING and high-diving solan geese, or gannets, that live and breed on the coasts of Newfoundland, actually use natural shock absorbers by which they prevent injury to themselves in amazing and terrific dives into the sea from remarkable heights. These gannets are equipped with novel sacs on their chests which they voluntarily fill with air prior to their "speed swoops." These, when fully inflated, act as pneumatic cushions that completely and safely absorb shocks of water contact. Without these unique safety contrivances, the solan geese would meet quick and crushing death.

Clarence M. Fink

"A flick, and you're a dead man," Slate said

Samuel Slate Collects

By J. ALLAN DUNN

Author of "Shaman's Trail," "Two Days to Live," etc.

Novelette—Complete

Harold Brightly's home was a fortress, but Samuel Slate was going to get in—and collect a mere $5,000,000

CHAPTER I.

THE AVENGER.

SAMUEL SLATE sipped his highball that Abu had just made for him, reading the article upon philately. He knew that men had curious hobbies and often expensive ones, but he was amazed, and pleased, to learn the prices fetched by certain rare issues of stamps.

A stamp of British Guiana, for instance, original value, unused one cent, of the issue of 1856, had been sold in Paris for close to forty thousand dollars, four years after the War. A two-cent stamp of Hawaii, commonly known as the "Missionary" issue of 1851, had brought half that.

He set the pamphlet down, studied another one on forgeries. Last of all, he made up a list of leading dealers in New York City.

Slate was not interested personally in stamps. Save to use them as a lure in the affair he had in mind.

He had dined that night with excellent appetite. He was feeling especially fit and well, despite the recent verdict of the expert doctors he had consulted, concerning certain symptoms that had at times annoyed him.

The year before, Slate suffered severe injury while rescuing Abu, then acting as his shikar, from a hostile hill-tribe in Indo-China that had tried to plunder the camp in Slate's absence. He had returned in time to save Abu's life, and with his eternal fealty; but he was badly hurt in the hand-to-hand fighting.

Now, after recovery seemed complete, the experts informed him that he had thrombosis, that a thrombus, or blood clot, was in his veins. Excitement, strong heart action, even sudden movement, might clench it from the venal wall, release it in the blood stream.

Then, instant death might follow, as the thrombus reached the brain, or clogged the heart.

No more might he and Abu follow wild danger trails; where the death of the leader might mean the destruction of the whole safari. But the following out of the experts' advice left Slate little worth living for. And he had found adventure right at home, on the Island of Manhattan, to the full as perilous as any in the bush of Borneo, or the cannibal isles of the Pacific.

The human brutes were more cunning, better-armed, more deadly than wild beasts or savages.

One of these, ruthless and devouring, Slate was preparing to destroy, or render harmless.

A man who was no less than a bandit, though he did not belong to the underworld; a pirate who did not shed blood with his own hands, but who preyed upon the helpless and the innocent; responsible for human suffering and death.

Brightly, of "Brightly's Enterprises," the shares of which had been bought by hundreds of thousands, who had watched them soar like brilliant rockets, only to fall like sticks! They had lost, but Brightly had blithely juggled finances, given out watered stock in exchange for the shares he cashed; incorporating each enterprise separately, bleeding it of capital; leaving these scuttled ships of his to sink, while he lived in luxury on his Long Island estate. There, it was said, he maintained a private harem; or took round-the-world trips on his two-million-dollar yacht Narwhal—and collected stamps.

A particularly vicious and unclean beast, Brightly, in Slate's estimation.

ABU, in attendance, knew his master was well pleased. He knew the symptoms. Once, they had been manifested when word was brought of a rogue elephant, a man-eating tiger, or some tribe that had broken out to go head-hunting; preferably the heads of white men.

In his own country, Abu was first and foremost a shikar and a hunter. He could smell adventure in the air.

Beneath his turban his eyes gleamed, his nostrils quivered.

"There will be hunting, tuan?" he asked as Slate called for a cheroot.

"There will be hunting, Abu."

This was not the first of their forays into Manhattan jungles.

Slate smiled at Abu as the latter withdrew the straw from the center of the cheroot, and carefully held a match. He had known Abu, close beside him, in the midst of a forlorn hope, chanting his battle-cry of "Allah-il-Allah!"—laying about him with

his kris of inlaid steel, while blood flowed fast, men fought savagely, and died.

That kris was named for Fatima, daughter of the Prophet, for Abu was a Mohammedan, he had made the pilgrimage to Mecca, he had kissed the sacred stone—the kaaba—and had the right to wear a green turban. Son of a petty but noble rajah, he considered it an honor to serve Slate, to share his destiny.

"I shall write letters, Abu," said Slate. "I do not need you any more tonight."

In his own room, Abu drew from its sharkskin sheath his shining, serpentine weapon, Fatima. It was a tool to delight the soul of a warrior, elegant of shape, perfect in balance, its blade hard as a diamond. The wavy, sinister steel was damascened with lucky markings, its edged curvings were uneven in number; and it was inlaid with fluted channels for the flow of blood. It could cut through bone like a hot knife through butter. The tally of its victims was forgotten, for it had been made in the days of Genghis Khan, and had come down to Abu through many fighting generations.

Abu breathed upon the blade, wiped his vapor off with a silken cloth, and crooned to the kris.

"Soon you shall kiss and taste blood, Fatima! You shall count another in the list of lovers. An infidel shall die of thy caress. If Allah wills. Bismillah!"

By Abu's standards, Slate was infidel. Slate knew no gods but the red gods that stir the souls of adventurers. But there are rites that bind men together. Slate and Abu had gazed together into the bleak eyes of Death, and defied him. They had shared bread and salt.

Slate finished his letters, finished his cheroot, his plans decided upon. Before he went to bed he examined his own weapons.

Tools of blued steel, modern automatic pistols that shot precisely in his hand. They were always well oiled and cleaned but Slate liked to handle them, to practice with them, making sure of draw and aim.

He was using other methods with Brightly, but he knew that the issue might have to be settled by force of arms. Brightly was a good deal of a voluptuary these days; but he was far from a fool. He believed as fully in protecting himself as he did in despoiling others.

"Altogether," Slate said to himself, "it promises to be interesting, very interesting. I think the Hawaiian stamps, if I can get hold of what I want, will prove the best bait for Brightly. The swine probably pays more for one stamp to complete a set than would keep one of the families he has ruined for a year."

His face grew grim as he mentally stalked Brightly's back trail. Ambitions crushed, homes broken up, evictions, suicides.

Slate remembered a Chinese bandit staked out one night by a better, bigger bandit; face down upon a shoot of bamboo. The next morning the green tip had grown through the victim's belly, showing itself beside his spine.

"Such things are not done in these United States," Slate murmured. "It seems, at times, a pity."

BRIGHTLY read through the letter with eyes that kindled above the sagging hollows under them.

The engraved paper of the Vortex Club, exclusive and limited; the signa-

ture, endorsing the integrity of the proposition. The writer did not claim authenticity for the find he mentioned.

Brightly consulted a " Who's Who " and confirmed his idea of Samuel Slate's importance. For all his ill-gotten wealth, he had never been able to cross the portals of such a select institution as the Vortex. Now—there were possibilities—if he handled the matter properly, made a friend of Slate.

He read the letter through once more.

> I have been shown a full set, or what is said to be a full set, twelve in all, of stamps of the Sandwich, or Hawaiian Islands, issued October 1st, 1851. They include both types of the two-cent issue.

" Good Lord," breathed Brightly, sucking his lips. " There are only three copies of the second type known to be in existence! I wonder if he has any idea of what they are worth, those two?"

Enthusiasm was shadowed by cupidity in the pale-blue, piggy eyes with their light lashes. In many ways, visual, mental and physical, Harold Brightly resembled a well-nourished hog.

> It is claimed this set was discovered in an early issue of Thrumm's Hawaiian Annual which had been stored and forgotten. The stamps appear to be in good condition; the volume was kept dry and they have not faded.
>
> I do not claim to be any judge of such matters, nor can I offer any guarantee, aside from the circumstances of the discovery in Honolulu, as understood by me.
>
> The owners, none too well off at present, are desirous of obtaining the best cash value. I have learned you are keenly interested in such a matter, as an expert, and willing to give a fair price for unique specimens, such as these appear to be.
>
> May I have a personal interview and an opportunity to submit these to you with the idea of a quick sale, or a decision you are not interested.
>
> Sincerely yours,
>
> SAMUEL SLATE.

In that letter Slate had been careful to tell the exact truth. All he wanted was a private interview with Brightly in the latter's own home. He had no scruples. Brightly had none. He posed as an expert. *Caveat emptor.* Let the buyer beware. And he rather doubted if it would ever come down to an actual sale.

Brightly was a specious, cautious scoundrel. He was well within the law, as the law functioned for those who could afford to hire clever counselors. Brightly had employed such all through his nefarious career.

His victims had largely accepted their losses as part of the depression. But Brightly had known his enterprises would fail when he robbed them of capital. He milked them, sold his shares at the peak, left them holding the bag.

They had no funds with which to fight. No spirit. They had lost homes partly paid for, their children had been forced to give up their education, their careers. Pride had been broken by poverty, and Brightly had battened, ghoulishly, on the midden heaps of their misfortune.

There was no question that many of them had died, some of broken hearts, some more violently. That was a matter of record.

Let Brightly beware! Their hundreds, or thousands of dollars, invested because they trusted him, believed in him, had made up his millions. The man deserved no mercy. He had trapped others with specious prospectuses, glowing promises, manipulation on Exchange.

Now Slate proposed to trap him, as

a fly is trapped on sticky papers, with unused stamps, the gum still unlicked.

A slight matter, but Slate had seen man-eating tigers trapped with leaves smeared with birdlime.

CHAPTER II.

SLATE GETS IN.

BRIGHTLY hated to see planes hover over Brightly Manor. He cursed and his ground-guards shrugged their shoulders. The sky was free. At a ceiling of a thousand feet, the autogyro maneuvered easily. It carried a pilot and an expert cameraman, hired by Slate.

Pictures of Brightly Manor had appeared from time to time, in various publications. Brightly did not object to this exploiting of his wealth, so much as the idea of any one being able, at will, to overlook his affairs. Such pictures as were published, revealed a spot laid out by expert landscape gardeners; but none of them began to show the details of the skygraph Slate had ordered.

It showed every path, every contour of the grounds sloping to the water; the buildings, terraces, the famous "Maze," the deepwater pier, off which lay the yacht Narwhal; it even indicated the channels, the shoals, approximate depths. It was as complete as any map ever made over enemy lines by an ace-observer.

That was on Wednesday. Thursday, Slate studied the developed and assembled graph, approved the lighting, which would appear much the same on Saturday night, beneath a full moon. That same evening, Claude Painbred, an aviator famous as much for the fact that he never talked about himself, or anybody else, as for his trans-oceanic and continental flights, dined with Slate at the Vortex. Slate and Painbred were both rover-adventurers. They understood each other.

The fliers' plane was chartered by Slate on liberal terms. It was not an autogyro, but the last word in amphibians.

Before he went to bed that night, Slate scrutinized, beneath a powerful lens, a certain set of twelve Hawaiian stamps.

"You understand," said the dealer who had sold them, "that I consider these stamps masterpieces of forgery. I let you have them only under your personal guarantee that you will not attempt to pass them on as genuine. I would not let anybody, less well vouched-for than yourself, Mr. Slate, obtain them. Only a microphotographic examination could determine their fraud, and that only to an expert."

"You have my word," Slate told him. "They will only be employed in a most legitimate manner. I shall use them to confound a cheat, not to be one myself. Here is your check."

The amount was large enough to allay any remotest spasm of conscience the dealer might have felt. And, to him, as it had been with Brightly, the address of the Vortex Club on Slate's card was a sufficient guarantee.

He imagined that Brightly would discover the minute flaws in the reproductions. That did not matter. He was not going to sell them to Brightly. They were serving as letters of introduction.

On Saturday morning all his arrangements were complete. He ordered Abu to pack his bag.

"This is a week-end visit," he told the Sudanese. "You may bring Fatima."

Abu's eyes glowed.

"Bismillah, tuan," he replied. And he carried with him, in his capacity as Slate's henchman, not only Fatima, but a smaller, slightly curved dagger, called in Malayan, "the pepper-crusher."

SLATE saw nothing of armed guards, or savage dogs, as the car that met him at the train passed the lodge at Brightly Manor and rolled through the magnificent gardens to the great house, built in the Italian style. But the dogs would not be likely to be released until after dark, he considered; many of the outdoor servants looking like gardeners might be armed. There was a high wall, hard to climb, the lodge gates might have belonged to a penitentiary, and he caught a glimpse of a stout and lofty steel fence that suggested it could be charged upon occasion with electricity.

There were a good many guests. Slate met them later. They gave him the impression that the tales of Brightly indulging in some sort of a harem might be well founded.

Brightly was a stout, florid, effusive but somewhat nervous man. Slate did not think he possessed the slightest rudiment of a conscience, but he believed the man was afraid. His manner was most cordial.

Slate had been given an elaborately furnished guest-suite on the second floor, next to the rooms occupied by his host. There was a dressing room with a couch for Abu, arrangements which could not have been bettered if Slate had chosen them himself.

"I usually have some friends staying at the Manor," Brightly told him. "I like gaiety and company," he added, looking jerkily about him. Slate guessed he did not like to be alone, for then his cowardice crawled out of his ego. Slate noticed also certain signs that more than hinted that Brightly, upon occasion, braced his soul with drugs.

"None of them are especial friends," he went on. "They are amusing. If you find one of them you think you might consider *especially* amusing, Slate, I do not think you will find any difficulty in being entertained. Only, before you go to bed, you must show me the stamps. I can hardly wait, but dinner will soon be served. After, I must play the host.

"You have them with you? Good. I shall not sleep before I see them. Business before pleasure, Slate. Don't forget. Let your fancy rove. There is quite an assortment, you see. You will find them fascinating, and generous. This is Liberty Hall, Slate. Only, don't trespass on *my* preserves. I haven't made my own mind up yet," he ended with a high-pitched laugh, like the whinny of a horse.

Slate had a sudden and almost irresistible impulse to bash in the other's soft-looking face, hued like fresh pork. The man was unclean, loathsome as a fat slug, or some swollen, sapless fungus grown in a cellar. He seemed like a reincarnation of some bestial intimate of Nero's court, satyric and sadistic.

The women present had their charms, which were not hidden, but their purpose in life was obvious. Slate felt a trifle nauseated. He was far from a prude, he had lived in rajah's palaces and seen the nautch girls paraded for the delectation of a sultan's guests. There had never been any special woman in his life, and could be none now; with the roving bubble of death within him; and this exhibition of a white man playing the rôle of

Pandarus removed from him any lingering scruples he might have had towards him.

THE dinner was lavish, perfectly served, though the menu was ostentatious rather than epicurean. The guests proved to be professional entertainers, others listened to their efforts with more or less favor. Some gambled, others danced, and constantly there was a slipping away of various couples, who did not reappear.

More than one woman gave Slade up as an enigma, after efforts to interest him. Brightly, he noticed, seemed to have quarreled with the titian-haired voluptuous charmer who appeared to have been his choice. She sulked and Brightly glowered. Refreshments were being constantly served, with hot dishes at midnight. Soon after that hour most of the party had, more or less mysteriously, broken up. The servants discreetly disappeared.

Brightly came out on the terrace where Slate was smoking a cheroot. There were hidden lights that mocked the true glow of the rising moon. He had not been disturbed, and he had watched the grounds that sloped down towards the Sound, tying them up with the mental image of the sky-map printed in his brain. Now and then he saw the figures of men, plainly not guests, who seemed on patrol. Now and then he saw the swift, furtive passage of beasts like wolves, running free.

They made no outcry. Once in a while, when they neared a man, the latter stood stock still, and let the beast approach him, sniff at him, pass on its way.

The scene was beautiful, should have been serene, but it was somehow sinister. All these preparations were for the defense of a supreme crook, living in luxury on his ill-gotten gains, but miserably afraid, no matter how he sought to deny fear with companions and drugs.

There was menace here, for those who tried to interfere. These hybrid wolves, the hireling guards, were of a mind when it came to savagery. They were paid for it, their natures itched to serve, not from fealty but from the sheer love of killing. It was a tough problem for any one to tackle, but Slate, smoking the aromatic cheroot, felt a pleasant tingling in his veins. Before morning he might be dead—equally he might die with the next pulsebeat, if that errant globule found its way through his tissues. Life, while it lasted, was a constant challenge.

Brightly spoke to him, a trifle thickly.

"That red-headed siren thinks I'm Midas," he said. "You're wise, Slate. I see you looked 'em over, and not like 'em. They're all alike. A bunch of harpies. She only wanted a ten-thousand-dollar bracelet. Bah! Let's go into my library and look at those stamps. I warn you, Slate, I don't expect they're genuine. No offense to you. But they're just too good to be true. I've got five of that 'Missionary' set. I'll pay well for the rest. They'll come close to perfecting my collection, Slate—*perfecting* it. And, by God, a man who has a hundred per cent collection—that is authentic—is a man who deserves recognition, and is going to get it!"

Slate nodded. Brightly's secret was out. He wanted a place in the sun. He was an egomaniac, devoid of natural genius, save for the ability to inspire confidence and to rob thousands, to

drive them to death and desperation. He was a balloon, a skinful of hot, foul air. Now he had turned to collecting stamps as his shortcut to fame.

"I've got the stamps on me," Slate told him. "Let's look at them."

The library was Gothic, with vaulted beams and groined arches, with paneled walls and stained-glass windows. There were elaborate bindings, shelves upon shelves of books gathered by Brightly, bought for show. It was doubtful, Slate thought, if he had even looked into one per cent of the volumes.

BRIGHTLY turned to a carved buffet. There was the tinkle of glass as he brought out decanters and goblets. Slate caught, in the glass of some shelves that acted as a mirror, the swift gesture with which Brightly swallowed one or more pellets he shook from a phial into his palm, slipping the phial into his pocket.

Dope!

The man was only a shell, filled with slime. But there was stolen treasure in the slime, and Slate was set to redeem it.

"Tomorrow," said Brightly, "I will show you my stamps. Now let me look at yours."

He took the set, examined them through a strong magnifying glass, held them to a light, soaked them in water and repeated the process. Then he shook his head.

"I am not sure," he said, "but I fear they are counterfeit. I should like to submit them to an expert in New York before deciding. I want them if they are genuine, but..." He puckered his sensuous lips and shook his head doubtfully.

"Keep them, and submit them," said Slate.

"You trust me with them?" asked Brightly, a sly gleam in his eyes.

"By all means. Why not?"

"Collectors have been known to kill people for less valuable specimens than these," Brightly came back. "A man forgets to be scrupulous when he has a hobby like this. He will ride it to death."

Slate believed the other absolutely unscrupulous. He became more disgusted as Brightly flattered him, almost fawned on him, offering more liquor, clearly hinting for his desire for a closer acquaintance, a bid to the famous Vortex as guest of Slate, in return for his own hospitality.

The drug he had taken showed in his eyes, in little twitchings of his body. Slate feigned sleepiness.

"I'll go to bed, too," said Brightly. "See you to your room. Next to mine, you know. Sorry you're going to be lonely," he leered. "Don't lock yourself in. Who knows what might happen? As for myself, I shall be well protected. I do not intend to buy any diamond bracelets."

He invited Slate in and Slate followed willingly, to see the wrought-iron balcony, the view of the moonlit Sound from the windows of Brightly's ornate chamber. It might have been used by a high grandee of the Old World. Its magnificence made Brightly seem more mean than ever, as he pointed out its beauties, boasting of their value and identity.

Slate was interested in what the other had said about his being well protected. He had thought there might have been a dog, or elaborate bolts and bars. But the heavy door had only a handle, beautifully wrought in bronze. There was no keyhole, no chain, no bolts. In its simplicity Slate thought he read the secret of that pro-

tection that would keep Brightly, and whatever inamorata of the moment might share his chamber, undisturbed. It was vital that he was not making a mistake, and he almost risked a direct question, but decided against it. Tonight Brightly was alone. That was favor enough to ask from the red gods. Slate had made various plans. It looked as if the easiest would prove the best. Though none was easy.

THE great house was very quiet. Slate barely caught faint, and far-off, laughter. They were not especially discreet at Brightly Manor, but they were apt to be well covered.

In the grounds, steeped with silver radiance, he had glimpsed again the wolfish hounds padding along a hedge-rowed path, crossing a lawn, trained, silent, savage sentinels. He said nothing of them to Brightly, who might not have noticed them. But Slate had not seen guards—human guards—again. He did not doubt that they were there, but they might be less eternally vigilant than the dogs, more apt to lie in ambush at strategic points.

He had also seen the intricate key-pattern grouping of the maze, copied from one in England, walled with high ranks of close-grown imported yew, tough, thick, impassable.

His face was a trifle grim as he entered his own quarters, where Abu instantly appeared, cat-footed, alert and eager, his eyes shining. He wore his turban, the trousers and sarong of a Malayan chieftain. The sarong was used as a sash, and its folds, formally, concealed the handle of his kris. They did not cover it now, though the falling ends hid the scabbard. His smaller knife was tucked in handily. A knee-length tunic of black silk, unfastened, aided the masking of Fatima.

"It is for tonight, tuan?" he asked in a voice that was just audible.

Slate nodded. He was making sure of the two guns he carried, both automatics of Belgian manufacture, flatter than other makes, snug in holsters that had been slicked inside with black-lead. One was at his left shoulder, the other slanted in front of his left hip.

From the latter Slade could make a lightning draw, unsuspected, swift as the strike of an adder, firing the weapon upside down. He could hold a can with his right hand, drop it, draw, and puncture the tin twice before it touched the ground.

He did not want to shoot tonight, save in extremity. A shot would bring guards rushing from every direction. He had still a third weapon in the side-pocket of his dinner-coat, and he inspected it. It was an ammonia gun that shot a vaporizing jet from a strong impulse of compressed air. The jet sprayed as it left the muzzle and, if not as deadly as a bullet, was efficient.

At last he nodded to Abu, drawing on a pair of rubber gloves. He had changed his shoes for others with sponge-rubber soles. He left his bag behind, with its contents. His accomplices in adventure might be masked, but Slate did not choose to screen himself. He might, with Abu, assume disguise upon occasion, but this was not an affair that called for it.

CHAPTER III.

SLATE STRIKES.

IT was, perhaps, an hour after he had left Brightly, when he and Abu stood outside Brightly's door. Now the great house was very still indeed, all lights that showed were subdued. Abu slipped down the stairs and

came back again, shaking his head. There were no guards inside the Manor. Slate had not expected any, noting the customs of the place, but he was making sure.

Slate took a loop of wire, the sort used by florists. He dropped it cleverly over the handle to Brightly's chamber and watched it spring and sizzle in blue flame. As he had thought, Brightly's protection had been set with an electric switch, probably from his bed. There would be voltage enough there to hold an intruder powerless.

Insulated by gloves and soles, Slate turned the handle and opened the door. No doubt the windows, the balcony, were equally defended. But they were in. The door closed behind them.

Brightly lay sprawled upon his wide bed, four-posted, canopied and carved. He was clad in silk pajamas that looked purple in the splotch of moonlight that spotted him, as if to expose his ugliness, his unworthiness to lie on such a sumptuous couch. Arms and legs and chest were hairy, with pinkish hairs, where unbuttoned top and rucked up sleeves exposed his pulpy flesh. He was snoring spasmodically, his coarse mouth open, in the reaction of his drug.

Slate carefully opened a casement. There was no ventilation in the room, other than a fireplace, and the air smelled of some musky perfume. Slate did not risk the balcony but he brought a powerful flash from a hip pocket and began to send brief, broken rays, stabbing the night, spelling in Morse.

The answer came, from the sky, swift winkings that told him Painbred was on hand. He did not wait to see the amphibian come swooping down, drifting, like a cloud, settling on the water outside Brightly's waterfront in perfect handling.

The waterfront was the main hazard, in Slate's opinion.

BRIGHTLY awoke, sluggishly, his shoulder shaken, a bright light dazzling him, then shifting to show a bright, serpentine blade set at his throat, the point just not touching the jugular vein.

"A flick, and you're a dead man," Slate told him. "You'll be emptied of blood like a smashed bottle. But I don't want to kill you—this way, or now. Get up and dress, you swine!"

Brightly gobbled with fright, and at the absolute contempt in Slate's voice. Then he recognized him, as Slate bent over him.

"You've come to rob me," Brightly gasped. "It's my stamps. Who are you? Aren't you Slate, of the Vortex Club?"

"Never mind who I am," Slate told him curtly. "I don't want your stamps. We came for you. Get up. Tickle him, Abu."

Abu's pliant, sure wrist turned and immediately a trickle of hot blood ran down Brightly's fat neck. He yelped in terror.

"I'll do it," he said. "I'll dress. I'll give you what you want..."

"Shut up. Let him up, Abu. Help him get some clothes on. The ones he just took off. It doesn't matter what he wears," he added, while Brightly shuddered at the deadly thought the last words suggested to him. Slate took the kris while Abu acted, deftly and imperturbable, as valet to the frightened, quivering Brightly, fastening studs and buttons, adjusting garters and lacing shoes. He was about to apply a tie when Slate told him not to bother with it.

"You and I are going for a sky-ride, in a plane, Brightly," Slate told

him. "It is on a matter of business, pure and simple. If you don't manage to get into the plane with me it will be because you will be in hell. If you understand that very thoroughly, now, we shall get along nicely."

Brightly was goosefleshed with fright, but anger was with it. The hate in his eyes was that of a wild boar that finds itself trapped, tuskless. The hate for the moment almost took the place of the valor he lacked. It was the malignance of a rat in a corner that tries to summon courage enough to spring. Then Slate saw a flicker of cunning. He marked it, had been prepared for it. He did not know the extent of Brightly's resources. Brightly did. He might be counting on aid that would come swiftly and unseen.

Those chances Slate had reckoned with. This was a daring raid, one after his own heart, and Abu's.

Brightly's rooms were at the rear of the house. They marched him out of the building without disturbance, making for the water. There was no direct path at hand, but Slate knew his route, conning the sky-map in his brain. He had his arm linked in that of Brightly, and Abu walked on the other side, slightly behind. His kris was sheathed but the curved "pepper-crusher" was so close to Brightly's ribs that that smug faced robber fancied he felt the point.

No guards appeared, or challenged. Slate told Brightly that he must handle them for his own safety, assure them that the stroll, strange as it might seem at that hour, was of his own desire.

THEY made towards the maze. Its hedges loomed before them when two shapes came streaking, one on either side. White fangs showed in the moon, slavering jaws, lambent eyes; as the great brutes came on in great leaps.

Brightly showed no fear of them. He tensed. Slate remembered how the wolf-dogs nosed at the guards. No doubt they had been taught friend from foe. The musky perfume in Brightly's bedroom might have something to do with that.

"Don't run," Slate said to him. "If you try, I'll stop you."

He turned to meet the dog nearer to him. He had no fear for Abu. Abu had met the devil himself in full charge, the black leopard of Java, and stopped the jungle-satan. Brightly stood still, taut with hope, rigid with hatred and desire to see these two captors of his torn apart.

Wish, hope, and hate died out.

Slate took the brute as it sprang for his throat. He set his knee and it caught the hound on its chest, sending it rolling. As it scrambled to its feet he pressed the trigger of his ammonia pistol. The vapor spread in fine spray, blinding it, choking, strangling the beast. It could neither snarl nor whine. It smote at its streaming eyes and tortured muzzle with its forelegs, increasing its agony, then crawled away, breaking into a mad gallop from the strange power that had overcome it.

As for Abu—Fatima slithered from its scabbard, played in an arc of light reflected from moon to steel. The wolf-dog rolled one way, its head another, severed in one precise slicing, blood spouting from both ends of the divided neck. He thrust the reddened blade deep into the soft lawn, resheathed, and took place again, with the short dagger threatening the bewildered Brightly.

They plunged into the maze. There had been no noise. The plan of the labyrinth was clear in Slate's mind, as

it had shown on the sky-graph. Brightly might know the key, but Slate doubted if any of the guards would. He banked on that, and the fact that there was a true exit at the far end, that would bring them out close to the final terrace that led to the pier and the water-dock.

They went swiftly through the baffling paths, Brightly sandwiched like so much pork, Abu's pepper-crusher rowelling the small of his back. They emerged in shadow.

Painbred's amphibian was on the water. It had taxied shorewards and now lay on the quiet Sound like some mighty bird, with wings outspread, ready for flight. Its lights were twinned on the quiet tide, ruby and emerald.

SLATE switched his signal from the shade of the hedge, got the winking answer. A small boat came out. It had been carried slung between the huge pontoons. The *putt-putt* of its overboard motor sounded smartly, urging it fast towards the water-stairs, used for bathing.

This was the crucial moment. An amphibian might alight without exciting too much alarm, but Brightly had surely not neglected his shore defense. A small boat coming in was suspicious.

They hurried Brightly on. His face was bright with sweat. Now the cornered rat in him was growing desperate. Two men were coming from the structure of the water-dock. Their guns glittered.

"Tell them to stay back, or you die," said Slate. He set one arm about Brightly's trembling bulk, Abu on the other side, with ready dagger. "We'll shoot it out if we have to, but we'll attend to you first. If they fire at me, the odds are they'll hit you."

The boat was close in, and they were close to the stairs. They reached the head of them with the two guards thirty yards away, slowing down, recognizing Brightly, uncertain.

"Tell them," urged Slate. Abu's dagger pressed in. A warm stream flowed down Brightly's spine.

"It's all right, men," he faltered. "I'm going off to the plane."

There was panic in his voice. It was betrayal. But they rushed him down the stairs as the boat, with two men in it, glided alongside. The guards came to the head of the cement stairway, hesitant, suspicious.

Slate hustled Brightly into the boat, followed with Abu leaping lightly in. The guards had only pistols. They would soon be out of range. But it was touch-and-go.

The rat squeaked. Brightly gave a choking cry of "Help!" before Slate rabbit-chopped the back of his neck, and he slumped, as the motor churned and the boat swung off.

The guards raced down the stairs, opening uncertain fire. Slate did not reply. The boat swerved to the swing of its screw-rudder. A blinding spotlight came from the amphibian, holding the guards in its glare.

There followed the *rat-tat-tat* of a quick-firer, and they ducked, sprawling on the steps, clambering, then crouching.

Other men were racing from the house, where lights sprang up. Some made for the water-dock where the fast launch and faster cruiser lay. The boat, deep-laden, just equal to its load, gunwales close to the water, made the amphibian. Brightly had to be hauled to a float, into the hull.

The droning propeller revved up, drumming the air. They were all aboard, the empty boat turned adrift.

Painbred turned her, headed her east, swathing a wide ripple.

The gates of the water-dock were open. A launch shot out like a rocket. One had evidently been kept primed for action. It came on, racing. From its bows a gun sputtered. The amphibian returned the fire, the range closing.

Then the plane's powerful motors roared into full life. The speed tore the suction from the pontoons and she lifted, rising fast, speeding up into the blue, racing towards the broad Atlantic, as the baffled launch seemed like a crawling water insect, farther and farther below, futile.

Brightly had been well served, but not well enough. He slumped, collapsing, in the cabin.

Painbred had two mechanics with him. All three were masked.

BRIGHTLY groped in the pocket of his coat, feebly brought out the phial he had taken from the buffet. Slate let him take two of the pellets, noting that the phial was half empty.

Now the amphibian was logging a mile for every twenty seconds, at a five-thousand-foot ceiling.

The stimulating drug took effect.

"The law is hard on kidnapers," said Brightly. His voice was hard, but brittle, like his will. "It's life in some States, death in others. A Federal offense, Slate, if you *are* Slate."

"You are not being held for ransom," Slate answered. "At least, not in the usual sense of the word. You don't know it, Brightly, but you are doing a noble thing. People might forget you for what you have done for them. You might even live up to your name, a shining light."

"I don't know what you mean," he answered, his bluff faltering under the mockery of Slate's tone. "Where are you taking me?"

"That," said Slate, "is something you are not supposed to know. When that drug wears off a bit we'll give you an injection that will allay your curiosity, even if it does not satisfy it. Brightly, you are bound for No Man's Land."

Brightly glowered, as the great plane snored on through the night. He could not tell its direction. He was still convinced that he had been kidnaped for ransom, though the idea of his stamp collection was mixed up with this, and Slate—if this man who had snatched him out of his carefully planned security—*was* Slate.

Brightly's conscience was immune to any moral reactions, but it still functioned, as a receiver of memories concerning the tricks he had put across, had considered masterly, but knew were crooked deals. He wondered whether some of those he had defrauded had hired this bold adventurer, who had laughed at all his precautions.

Slate knew men; so did Brightly. He had to be a judge of them to swindle them. But he had never gone up against one of this type before. His kidnaper was humorous and ruthless, he had the devil-may-care air of a pirate whose neck is already dedicated to the noose. At times there were tones in his voice, a look in his eyes, that made Brightly shudder.

The masked fliers, Abu, with his turban and kris, the swift events of the night, this sense of floating in space, made Brightly feel as if he might have been in a fourth dimension. One thing he sensed thoroughly, that he was helpless as a goldfish in a bowl.

Presently Slate wiped his bared forearm with alcohol, Abu assisting.

There was the sting of a needle, then oblivion.

CHAPTER IV.

STERN MEDICINE.

THE island was a small one, remote and solitary. The wide horizon ran about it like a purple brush-stroke, unmarked by any hint of other land. There was no sign of sail or steam, no flash of planes in the sky. It was No Man's Land, in what might well seem No Man's Water.

It was set down on no chart, included in no national division. At some remote period a submarine convulsion had thrust the top of a smoking peak above tidemark. Coral insects had builded, birds had dropped seeds, and currents had aided them with drifting growths.

Now there was a masterless islet, unclaimed, because it held no attractions. The birds that lived there had not deposited enough guano for commercial enterprise. It held no strategic position. It was far from sailing lanes or air lanes. An ignored, forgotten place.

Indians had lived there once, as midden heaps attested. There was a reef about the place, unbroken. A boat might not pass through, but Painbred brought his amphibian down precisely in the lagoon. He knew its position, once had hailed it as a refuge when a broken gas-line had forced him down.

There were walls, of coral slabs, from the ancient occupation. They needed only thatching with palmetto fronds. There was a small spring of fresh water, coconuts to eke out the supply of liquid. For the rest, cactus, machineel, agaves, and the usual semi-tropic vegetation found in the latitude of the Tropic of Cancer.

Fish, and turtles. Among the first, fierce flocks of barracuda, more deadly than the occasional sharks. It was a perfect prison.

Brightly considered it so, gloomily. He did not even know in which hemisphere he was located. He was still drowsy from injected drugs when he awakened in the reconstructed house. He found himself lying on a cot, mattressed and comfortable, tented with mosquito netting.

His clothes had been taken off. He was clad only in bathing trunks. He was used to his flaccid body, and did not fairly measure his own grossness as he lay there, like a prize hog at a fair.

Abu was serving him pungent, potent coffee that flogged his dullness. He had been offered food, but he had no appetite. He felt numb, defenseless, outraged. Memory revived when Slate stepped inside, immaculate in white linen. Brightly achieved a snarl.

"To use a slang expression, Brightly," said Slate, "I have you where I want you. The plane is still here, and, if you care to comply with my suggestions, the whole affair will be expedited. You will have to remain here for a short time, in any case, but you can always shorten your stay."

"Where are my clothes?"

"I will see that you have whatever you need for your return. For the present, the climate is mild. You will not suffer, unless you unduly expose yourself to the sun, a bad risk, in a man of your complexion. You must also be careful about bathing. There are jellyfish that sting, and cause you to swell unmercifully, barracuda, octopus, sharks. I mention them as a warning, rather than threat. Do not expose

yourself too much. There is no chance of rescue. You are very far from the beaten trails. How far, it is not necessary for you to know. You will be fairly well fed, my own servant will attend you. You may miss some luxuries—"

"Where is my phial of pellets? Damn you, you know I need them! I go to pieces without them. Give them to me—"

"You exaggerate, like all addicts, Brightly," replied Slate. "I may even cure you, if you stay here long enough. I will let you have one now. Abu is a fine judge of such matters. He will administer the rest, as he sees fit. Unless, of course, you prove amenable in short order."

Brightly gulped down the lone pellet. It barely dammed the resistance that had oozed out of him.

"What do you want?" he demanded. Slate sat down beside the cot.

"I WANT you to make restitution to the people you have robbed," he said. "I have already advertised for those who have bought worthless shares from you to send in their claims, with proof of justification. I imagine you will still have enough left, aside from your valuable stamp collection, to be tolerably well off. You may return to America in a blaze of glory, as a true philanthropist. Or, you may be exploited in your true colors, depending entirely upon your attitude to me. Regard me as your good angel, Brightly, guiding you rightly."

The pellet was working. Brightly snarled.

"The Champion of the People?" he sneered. "What do *you* make out of it?"

"Less than nothing. I shall deduct certain expenses, but not all. There will be an auditing. I am not trying to rook you, Brightly, as you have rooked others. I leave you your profits, less a fair charge for interest, and dividends to the people who will recoup. We will write off the shares. And you can either be a hero, or a laughing stock, as you choose. Provided, that you cease promoting, and devote yourself to stamps, and your own peculiar ideas of private living. Of course you will appear to do this freely. You will have been stricken by your conscience. I am your duly appointed agent, by power of attorney, which I trust you will sign. It can be witnessed, duly sealed, here and now."

"No," cried Brightly. "No! I will sign nothing. Give nothing. I am not powerless, even here."

"As you like," replied Slate. "I shall go back in the plane. I shall return in two or three weeks. Doubtless with interesting data from your rightful creditors. I leave you here with Abu, and his kris and dagger. He will not harm you, unless it is necessary. And he will take care you suffer no permanent injury. Your life is quite precious, to a great many defrauded people. Think it over, Brightly," he added coldly. "You may get up. You are granted the liberty of the island, such as it is."

Brightly got to his feet, with somewhat wabbly knees, when Slate left. The drug still stimulated him. Nobody stopped him as he went down to the beach, estimating his surroundings.

There were some supplies piled up, two men busy with the plane, in shallow water. Painbred stood apart, directing. Slate and Abu were not visible. Brightly, limping barefooted over the sharp, hot shingle, approached the aviator, who was still masked. After a few crisp sentences, Painbred moved

away as Slate came out of the palmetto scrub.

"This louse," said Painbred distinctly, "offered me a hundred thousand dollars to rescue him. He called it 'rescue.' I told him I wouldn't touch him with a pair of hot tongs. I know plenty he's swindled, the measly skunk."

"He has not yet awakened to a full sense of his responsibilities," answered Slate. "Are we ready to take off?"

Brightly sullenly saw the amphibian lift, bank, and swing north. He knew enough to judge that by the sun. The drug was dying out. Abu spoke to him, appearing from nowhere. He had changed his clothes. Now he wore the short drawers and vest of a Malayan fighting man. His brown skin was immune to the sun. Brightly was already conscious of scorching flesh, of a beating headache.

"You must be careful," said Abu. "You may get white man's leprosy, with your thin skin."

His tone was contemptuous. Brightly felt impotent and inferior.

"You had better rest, in the shade," suggested Abu. "The sting of the mosquitos is dangerous to those not used to it. After dark you may take a bath, if the tide is right. At high tide the barracuda and the sharks come in. Presently I will bring you food."

FOR the second time the amphibian lit in the lagoon, and Slate came ashore. The crew of the plane were masked. Abu met him.

"He is sick, tuan," said Abu in Malayan. "He craves the drug."

"I have a fresh supply," said Slate. "What ails him?"

"Devils," answered Abu. "Many devils. They torture him. He cries out in the night. I think they are the devils of those he has injured, tuan, but he has a special devil of his own. A cunning one that you must watch. This man is not a fool."

"I never rated him one," replied Slate. "Where is he?"

"In the hut, swollen by the sun, and sick to his stomach with fish he has caught in the lagoon, though I warned him they were out of season. He did not think I gave him enough to eat. I watched him, but I did not forbid him."

Brightly tossed on his couch, swollen and wretched. He sat up with an effort when he saw Slate.

"Give me my drug," he gasped. "You know what I must have. Damn you, Slate, or whatever your name is, you've got me where you want me. I'll make a deal with you. But, *give it to me . . .*"

Slate looked at the man who had once controlled the market. He was bloated and blotched, blistered with sun and poisonous medusæ. Almost a madman. Slate gave him a dose of the drug he craved, and waited for the reaction.

"You win," said Brightly. "I can't stand this any more. I can't stand it. I'll give you your power-of-attorney, or whatever you want. It will have to be notaried to be legal—and the whole damn outrage is illegal. But I'm not going to sign away my life. I won't be bled white."

"I am representing justice, rather than the law," said Slate. "I will attest your signature myself. I have secured a notary's seal. And there will be witnesses enough. I have a list of the shareholders of Brightly enterprises that seems fairly complete. I am allowing a margin. The totals, including the margin, amount to something like five million dollars."

"It is an outrage," yelped Brightly. "They would ruin me."

"You ruined *them*," answered Slate. "You are worth much more than that amount. Personally I should prefer to leave you penniless, but I shall be strictly just."

"Give me the pills," Brightly gasped.

Slate gave him three of the pellets. Brightly was in a bad way, but the pellets acted on him like magic. Light came to his dull eyes, his dry skin grew moist, and Slate, holding his pulse, felt it beat more strongly.

"You've got me licked," said Brightly. "I quit."

Slate wondered if he did. He wondered how long he had been using the drug. It made a new man of him, almost as if it had started up again some almost rundown clockwork in Brightly's brain. Cunning reigned there, as he read over the papers Slate had prepared.

"I WILL sign these," he said, "but they will not be sufficient. I do not trust banks these days. I never have trusted them. Most bankers are pawnbrokers at heart, and often in practice. I have cash and negotiable securities in a strong room at the Manor. There is a safe within a vault, fireproof and burglar-proof, if any such construction can be. There is a timelock on the vault, and of course a combination on the safe. That combination is changed, automatically, whenever I am absent for more than two days. I don't know now what it is myself."

"You must have some one you trust implicitly," said Slate, not believing that Brightly would trust any one entirely.

"I have. You didn't meet him. It is a man named Garvin. There are good reasons why he would never betray me. I doubt very much, despite your power-of-attorney, that you would persuade Garvin to open the vault or safe for you, without a special message from me. You see, I am playing fair with you. I want to get this matter over. You have me in a cleft stick."

Slate, watching him, wondered what scheme was clicking in Brightly's mind, beneath his show of frankness. It was true enough that, even with power-of-attorney, he might have considerable trouble in getting at the hoarded wealth. He had expected to deal with banks.

A private vault was different. He did not want publicity, and even if he took the matter to the courts, it was quite likely they might put a restraining order on his wish to enter a man's house and take away money, if some one in charge objected.

However, the fact of the money being available, practically cash, helped a lot.

Slate imagined that Brightly must have some hold on this Garvin, to insure fidelity; perhaps knowledge of crime committed or covered up.

There was one difficulty Brightly might be counting on. Although Slate had not met Garvin, Garvin might have seen him.

Others of the Manor household would recognize Slate as the man who had left with Brightly under circumstances that looked as if the latter might have been spirited away.

There had been nothing in the papers suggesting such an abduction, but it was as well to approach Garvin, and the treasure vault, cautiously.

This simply meant disguise. Slate felt confident of achieving that.

He read over the message to Garvin. It was brief.

MY DEAR GARVIN:

The bearer, who holds my power-of-attorney and other notes of credit, is to be given access to the vault and safe, and permitted to remove therefrom an amount in cash and selected securities, not exceeding five million dollars. (Not to include gold.) He will be identified by his fingerprints, herewith attached in my presence and to be reproduced before you, signing in the same fashion the receipt he will give you. This is a confidential matter. I shall return before long. Within the text of this memorandum do anything named, grant any request.

HAROLD BRIGHTLY.

Slate scrutinized the signature while it was being written, and afterwards. It seemed precisely the same as that on the other papers he got Brightly to sign. Brightly watched him quizzically, alert and revived by the drug.

"I thought the fingerprints would be the best," he said. "Otherwise Garvin might remember your name, and the mode of my leaving, which was not entirely peaceful."

SLATE nodded. He would also leave his fingerprints behind with Garvin, on the receipt. Brightly was clever, but Slate accepted that risk. Garvin was not going to be able to identify Samuel Slate with the man who would present the order. And he did not think that Brightly would dare to bring proceedings, criminal or civil, against him, when all was over. He held a paper Brightly had signed, that would not look well in rebuttal.

Having come to the resolve to reimburse all those who have lost money through purchase of shares in various and sundry Brightly enterprises, I herewith appoint Samuel Slate, of the City of New York, to whom I have given power-of-attorney to act in my absence, as my administrator in this matter; to list and attest all claimants and to pay them in full the amounts spent by said claimants, representing the actual price paid by them for the said shares, together with six-per-cent interest on their investment to date.

Signed, HAROLD BRIGHTLY,
Witnessed, SAMUEL SLATE.

Slate's personal reputation should stand up against any declaration of Brightly that he had been forced to this measure of restitution. Brightly would hesitate to step down from the highly favorable light in which the restoration would place him. He would, if Slate knew humanity, bask in the spotlight as a benefactor of most unusual order. He would get his place in the sun. He would have plenty left.

That fact was the fly in the honey. Slate felt the man was to be insufficiently punished, but the opportunity of restoring hope to thousands was not to be denied.

He attached his fingerprints, gathered the papers. Within him a hunch whispered that Brightly had somehow set a trap for him. He saw that Abu shared the suspicion. Abu walked over to Brightly, and showed his naked kris.

"Do not forget," he said, "that I remain with you. If anything goes wrong with my tuan, if he does not return promptly, I, Abu, will wed you to Fatima. You shall die, slowly, of her kisses. That I swear, by the beard of the Prophet."

Brightly shifted uneasily. The look of cunning was still in his eyes. It remained there long after the amphibian had gone, had vanished from sight, and he and Abu were alone on the island.

He took two more of his precious pellets, and chuckled.

Abu watched him, preparing his own separate meal, as his religion demanded; and his heart was troubled.

This was a man who was wholly evil, Abu said to his soul. He did not know all that his own tuan was about, but he knew that the cause was righteous, also that a villain cannot be made to disgorge without venom.

He was afraid for Slate. They had traveled many danger trails, where pits were digged, and rigged with sharp, poisoned stakes, where the touch of a vine would bring darts triggered in ambush. But this time he was not with his tuan, to share the perils, perhaps to avert them, to thrust himself as a sacrifice to the man who had saved him, Abu, from death.

And Abu's soul, whispering back to him, told him that the trail's end, now sought by Slate, was fraught with treachery. This Brightly was like a spider, squatting there, chuckling.

Abu breathed upon the kris, wiped the blade clear, and swore again his oath—upon the beard of the Prophet. Brightly would not die easily if aught happened to Slate. But that would not bring Slate back. It might leave Abu on a lonely isle with nothing left to live for.

In which case he would *not* live, even though it meant self-destruction, the certainty of loss of Paradise, the futility of his voyage to Mecca, his green turban.

His tuan was everything.

CHAPTER V.

FIVE MINUTES TO LIVE.

"THE name?" asked Garvin.

"There is no name," Slate answered. "This is a matter of fingerprints, that I am prepared to establish. You will see that in this note."

Garvin studied the visitor. A swarthy man, whose dress and accent subtly suggested a transplanted foreigner. A Greek, perhaps. Garvin was not well educated in such matters. But he noted that the man had a deformed little finger on the left hand, that he limped very slightly, and that there was a scar on the helix of his right ear.

For his part, Slate set down Garvin as a man who, if he had not done time, deserved it. He was lank and cadaverous, with deep-set, lackluster eyes, and deep lines in his gaunt face, high veins on his temples. His pallor suggested either prison, or drugs, or both.

If Brightly trusted this man, it was because he knew something about him, had that something stowed securely, where it would see the instant light of day if Garvin ever betrayed him.

For Slate, who knew beasts, also knew human killers when he saw one. A low, bestial, but cunning type, with an intelligence that was perverted, dressed as an office-manager might be clad, suave enough, but not polished. A dangerous customer.

Garvin read the message twice, without a faintest quiver that he thought it extraordinary to be asked to permit a stranger to take away five million dollars.

"It is a large amount," he said. "I trust you are prepared to protect it. If not—"

"I can handle it," Slate answered. "I have taken some precautions."

He saw a curious light in Garvin's eyes, as if a candle, whose wick was drooping, ever threatening extinction, suddenly found new fuel and flame. He did not trust Garvin.

"The timelock is set for ten o'clock this morning," said Garvin. "An hour

and a half from now. Will you have breakfast? I trust you left Mr. Brightly well?"

"I've eaten, thanks," said Slate. "How about my fingerprints?" He ignored any talk of Brightly. He watched Garvin as he would have watched a snake. The man covered it well, but he was slinky, with the slyness of those who have walked beneath the eyes of wardens. He might have been an auditor or a cashier at some time. He had been a potential crook from birth. Brightly trusted him, as crook trusts crook.

The vault was nobly built, to protect ignoble gains. It was in the basement of the Manor, a room perhaps twenty by twenty feet, of steel and cement. The outer door was worthy of a trust company. Inside there were steel curtains defending files, another door that was the safe. Inside it, Brightly's ill-gotten millions.

The ceremony of the fingerprints had been gone through, with Slate wondering where Garvin's own digital record was held. The man was a proper villain, not so sleek as dry.

There was a flat-topped desk in the chamber, with several chairs. Garvin invited Slate to take one of them. A man had come with them, introduced as a secretary. He looked more like a trusty, to Slate.

"WILKES," said Garvin, "bring the P.5 file. It is a list of securities," he explained to Slate. "Largely bonds. It will help you select what you want. I suppose you want the deal closed as promptly as possible."

"Exactly," agreed Slate. "I should like as much currency as possible. Mr. Brightly specified there should be no gold coin. That suits me. It is hardly negotiable under the present national embargo."

Brightly had been hoarding gold. Slate was not surprised. His mention of it provided another handle against him, if any were needed. There might be. In that basement vault, with its thick doors, Slate knew he had come to trail's end, that danger lurked somewhere, imminent and deadly.

He read it in the furtive eyes of Garvin, in the message to Wilkes, behind whom the heavy door had closed.

"So I understood, from reading the message," said Garvin. "I do not know how carefully you read it yourself. Something might have escaped you. Perhaps you would care to go over it again."

He set the note, fingerprinted by Slate, upon the desk, beneath a shaded light.

"You might have overlooked this," said Garvin. "The last few words. It is arranged between Mr. Brightly and myself, whenever he has cause to send me an order, that the last six words tell me if he fully trusts the bearer. The first letter of each word, for instance, after the comma—Do anything named, grant every request. *Danger.*"

As he spoke, a section of the curtained files slid aside and three men stepped into the vault. One of them held a sub-machine gun, the others automatics, covering Slate.

"You are *not* to be trusted," said Garvin. "You will take no millions out of this place, you will not leave yourself, until you tell me where Mr. Brightly is to be found, until he is located, and arrives here in person, to decide what is to be done with you."

"There are people, close at hand, who will inquire for me, within the hour," said Slate. But he knew the trap was sprung, that he had to free

himself. The sneer of Garvin's face was confident.

"Let them ask," said Garvin. "They will not find you. Unless you tell me where to find Brightly, you'll never talk again."

"And then you'll never find him," countered Slate.

"That," said Garvin slowly, "might be endured."

His slow smile showed him in his true light. Brightly might have a hold upon him, but he resented it. If Brightly was hidden, could not readily return, if ever, why, here was a safe holding a great treasure. Garvin had the cards. He would play them to win —for himself.

"You have exactly five minutes to live," he said. Then he stared at Slate in amazement.

Slate was laughing at him and the three gunmen, laughing with sincerity.

"I might not live that long," said Slate. "My doctors tell me excitement may take me off at any moment. I have a blood clot in me that can kill in any instant of excitement. You have not unduly excited me as yet, but I have no fear of death. Death lives with me, sleeping or waking. No one may cheat me of much life. And before I died, at your hands, I might take some one with me, perhaps two, or even three. You might be the first, Garvin."

"Frisk him!" cried Garvin. "Stick up your hands!"

IN the moment that they moved towards him, without any prearrangement, their guns wavered, and Slate snatched his lone, desperate chance.

His hand flashed beneath his coat, at the belt, and his gun came streaking out from the slanting holster. Trigger-guard up, he fired at the man with the Tommy gun and saw him sinking to the floor.

His second shot sounded simultaneously with another from one of the gunmen. They had jumped apart, and one had to step over the still falling body of the machine-gunner. He stumbled over the weapon.

Slate had dropped purposely to the floor. His bullet was the fraction of a pulsebeat the faster. It smashed through a shoulder blade and sent a thug staggering back.

He fired from the floor, and the third gunman crashed, his knee shattered. His lead raked Slate's cheek but he squirmed in agony.

Slate kicked his dropped gun aside, rose from his haunches, facing Garvin, who had dragged an automatic from a shoulder holster.

"Too slow, Garvin," said Slate. "You're out of practice." Blood dripped from his cheek, made a red mask of the lower part of his face, above which his eyes blazed. "Drop it, stand against the wall. You three rats crawl there, stay there, if you know what's good for you. I'd just as soon finish you as not."

They obeyed him, the machine-gunner leaving a trail of blood from a wound above his hip, the others snarling, weak from the shock of splintered bones, creeping like crippled jackals, while Slate swept their weapons into a heap, took possession of Garvin's.

"Now, Garvin," he said, "you gave me five minutes to live. I give you two, to open up that safe and bring out what I want. Don't think I'm bluffing. Too many men, and women too, have died from Brightly's manipulations, to bother about a snake like you. I've still his power-of-attorney. With you out of the way..."

Garvin walked to the safe, under the urge of those blazing eyes, the threatening gun.

"You're cleaning the can?" he asked.

"I'm taking five millions. You can loot the rest, after I'm gone, for all I care. But don't waste time."

While Garvin twirled the dial, Slate picked up the message that had so nearly tricked him, which bore his fingerprints.

Ten minutes later, Garvin escorted him to the front door of Brightly Manor, with every aspect of respect, born of the knowledge of the gun carried in a side pocket.

"You'll ride with me, a mile or so, Garvin," said Slate, at his car. "You can walk back, and be damned to you!"

Blood had soaked his shirt, his coat collar and lapel; but that did not bother him.

He had the money collected for the poor devils Brightly had rooked.

FOR the third, and for the last time, the amphibian swooped, to alight in the lagoon. Abu was on the shore. With him was a man, whose muscles and fat tissues sagged in some places, were swollen in others.

Brightly, his mind, surcharged with hatred, in the balance. He was naked, save for bathing trunks, his body blistered with the sun.

He advanced towards Slate, swaying, stuttering.

His supply of pellets had given out. He had suffered the agony of the damned; but he had banked everything, preserved his sanity, upon the certainty that Garvin would have interpreted his warning.

And, here was Slate—damn him—alive, and smiling!

Fibers that must have always been weak, rotted by dope, pricked by what was left of conscience, in its turn inspired by fear. His helplessness before Abu, his unrelenting jailer—all these things combined to snap the sanity of Brightly.

He came to Slate, stammering:

"You—you . . ." The bloodshot whites of his eyes became suddenly scarlet, foam showed at his lips.

He snatched something from his only garment, leaped at Slate like a leopard, screaming hoarsely.

Slate reached for his gun, not to kill, but to cripple. And Abu dived along the sand, and tripped the madman. Slate sat across him, gripped his wrists. It took Painbred to help subdue him.

Brightly had made a weapon, fashioned with infinite pains from a conch shell, grinding it down; when Abu had not watched; to a sharp spike and curving handle.

"I think he meant it for me, tuan," said Abu. "I watched him but he was cunning."

"It won't work for him any more," said Slate. Brightly had collapsed. They watched him sit up, picking up shells, tossing them into the air, laughing at their bright colors.

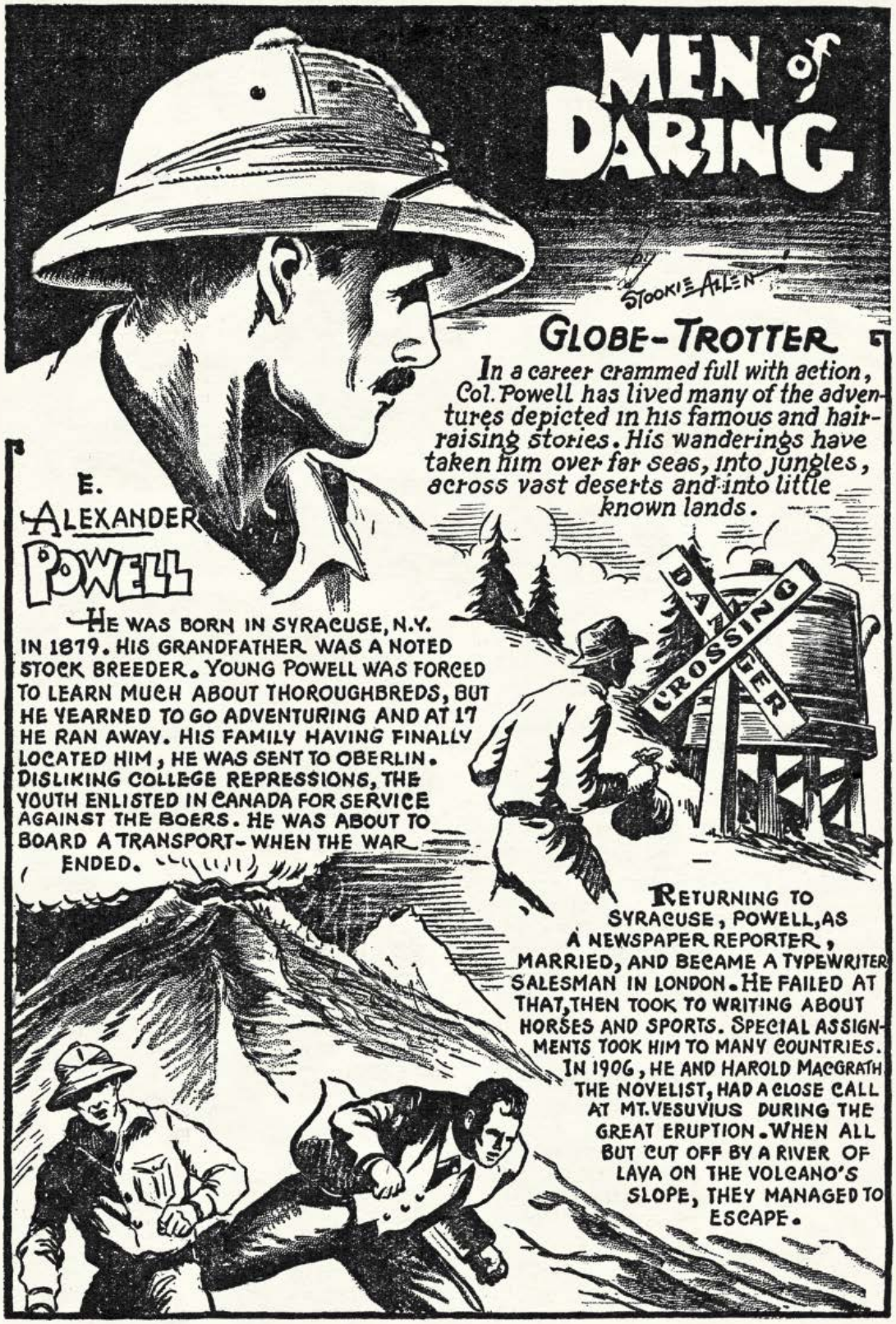
Never again would he conjure the savings out of credulous citizens, to indulge his own lusts. He did not even seem dangerous.

"Taking him back?" asked Painbred.

"Yes," said Slate, "we'll see the proper authorities take care of him. He'll be missed. It's better he's accounted for."

"Cutting out paper dolls," said the aviator, and did not know he was a prophet.

THE END


MEN of DARING
BY STOOKIE ALLEN
GLOBE-TROTTER
In a career crammed full with action, Col. Powell has lived many of the adventures depicted in his famous and hair-raising stories. His wanderings have taken him over far seas, into jungles, across vast deserts and into little known lands.
E. ALEXANDER POWELL
HE WAS BORN IN SYRACUSE, N.Y. IN 1879. HIS GRANDFATHER WAS A NOTED STOCK BREEDER. YOUNG POWELL WAS FORCED TO LEARN MUCH ABOUT THOROUGHBREDS, BUT HE YEARNED TO GO ADVENTURING AND AT 17 HE RAN AWAY. HIS FAMILY HAVING FINALLY LOCATED HIM, HE WAS SENT TO OBERLIN. DISLIKING COLLEGE REPRESSIONS, THE YOUTH ENLISTED IN CANADA FOR SERVICE AGAINST THE BOERS. HE WAS ABOUT TO BOARD A TRANSPORT - WHEN THE WAR ENDED.
DANGER
CROSSING
RETURNING TO SYRACUSE, POWELL, AS A NEWSPAPER REPORTER, MARRIED, AND BECAME A TYPEWRITER SALESMAN IN LONDON. HE FAILED AT THAT, THEN TOOK TO WRITING ABOUT HORSES AND SPORTS. SPECIAL ASSIGNMENTS TOOK HIM TO MANY COUNTRIES. IN 1906, HE AND HAROLD MACGRATH THE NOVELIST, HAD A CLOSE CALL AT MT. VESUVIUS DURING THE GREAT ERUPTION. WHEN ALL BUT CUT OFF BY A RIVER OF LAVA ON THE VOLCANO'S SLOPE, THEY MANAGED TO ESCAPE.

Next Week: Frank Crilley, Master Deep Sea Diver

An arm passed across his throat, throttling him

The Immortals

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

What was the brilliant ruse by which John Maitland, Wall Street banker, tricked two distinguished chemists into becoming his tools?

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

WHEN Charles Deane, brilliant and youthful chemist, spoke before a meeting of a learned society of chemists on the new element, "Stratium," which he had discovered, his severest critic was Professor Oscar Cairns. The old professor regarded Deane as a young upstart in the world of chemistry—while his daughter, Donna Cairns, was more favorably disposed toward him for personal reasons. At the meeting Deane showed samples of "Stratium," an element lighter than air, and designated it according to Moseley's periodic table as "Minus four." After the meeting it was discovered that one of the samples was missing! Someone had wanted it for private purposes; but it was not discovered who the culprit was.

Upon returning to his laboratory, Deane found it in much disorder. And the dead body of Professor Cairns pierced with a laboratory knife! Deane's assistant, Angus Frazer, was at home with the remaining Stratium samples—so that they were at least in safe hands. While Deane stood near the body looking it over, the phone rang and a mysterious voice spoke.

CHAPTER III—(*Continued*)

STRANGE BURIAL.

"BUT I tell you—" Deane indignantly began.

"Tell it to the Judge!" sternly snapped the voice.

This story began in the Argosy for November 17

"My God! Do you think—?"

"I *know!* Now listen to me, Deane. The case against you is perfect. You'll burn for the murder of Oscar Cairns. You need two things, and you need them in a hurry. First, some friend with influence and money, to hire one of the best detective firms in the country, to go after evidence, to prove that you are innocent. Secondly, some place to hide, while this evidence is being gathered."

"But I tell you I'm innocent!" Deane exclaimed. "The father of Donna Cairns is the last person in the world whom I would want to kill!"

"Oh, so that's how the land lies," said the voice; and there was a new note in it, which Deane couldn't quite make out. "Um! Well, do you wish me to help you? As I've already stated, the case against you is perfect."

"But why not surrender myself to the authorities, and let the District Attorney dig up the facts?" asked Deane, beginning to weaken.

"The most asinine thing you could possibly do!" the voice scornfully replied. "Did you ever hear of a prosecuting officer helping to prove anyone *innocent*. Come on! My time is valuable!"

Footsteps sounded in the corridor outside. Deane held his breath, but the footsteps continued on, past his door. He glanced at the dead body.

"All right! All right!" he yielded. "What do you wish me to do?"

"That's better," asserted the voice in a self-satisfied tone. "There's a taxi waiting for you at the front entrance to this building. Get into it and say nothing. The driver knows where to take you. Believe me, it's the only safe move for you. And you'd better hurry, for Angus Frazer will be here soon now, and then it'll be too late."

"All right. I'm coming," said Deane.

Returning the phone to its cradle, he gave one more look at the body of Cairns, more walrus-like in death even than in life; and then hurried out of the laboratory, and locked the door. He still had on his hat and topcoat.

He rang for the elevator. It came. He got in.

At the floor below, it stopped again. And there entered "the face," the man with the beady eyes, hooked nose, swarthy skin, and black beard. So this man had an office in the building? Or at least was addicted to snooping around other floors than Deane's.

"Nice day, sir, isn't it?" said the young chemist.

But the other, without moving his head, merely shifted his eyes to Deane's face and then looked away again, without reply.

At the street level, as soon as the elevator doors were opened, the man scuttled out and away; but Deane remained behind for an instant.

"Who's that?" he asked of the operator.

"A Mr. Smith. Office on the sixth floor. Moved in a little over a month ago."

"Hmp!" said Deane to himself. "So 'the face' isn't a snooper, after all. Well, I've got something real to worry about now, for a change."

So, with leaden steps, he made for the street.

There, sure enough, was a taxi. As Deane approached, the driver got out and opened the door.

THIS was unusual, for a taxi-driver usually merely reaches back from his seat to open the door for a patron. And the unusualness of the action registered itself even on Deane's perplexed and sorely tried

brain. He even noticed that the driver's face was hollow-cheeked and pale.

How totally absurd it was for him to be getting into a cab with destination unknown, a cab obviously planted here by the real perpetrators of the murder of Professor Cairns! So Deane stopped abruptly, and did *not* get into the cab.

A slight noise to the left attracted his attention. He turned and saw the black-bearded, hunched-up "Mr. Smith," who had ridden down the elevator with him, now standing on the curb about twenty feet away, grinning at him with an uninterpretable expression.

Deane raised his hand to his head in perplexity, and the next instant he was seized by the scruff of the neck and the seat of the pants by the chauffeur, and was hurled through the open cab door into the dark interior of the cab.

His football training enabled him to land catlike, and to wheel almost as he landed. Then he gave a crouching spring at the closing door of the cab.

But the spring was never completed, for from behind him an arm passed across the front of his throat, throttling him and pulling him over backwards back into the cab.

Resourceful, his mind perfectly clear by now, he swung his right fist over his shoulder, and felt it strike a face. The grip upon his throat loosened, and he twisted around to confront his antagonist. The cab door clanged shut, and the cab started.

As the cab drove off, he heard a voice from the curb saying, "Good luck, Dr. Deane." And it was the same voice which he had heard over the phone.

Deane and the man with whom he was struggling, fell back against the seat, and instantly another arm was flung around Deane's neck. There were *two* men in the cab with him!

Shoving back his right elbow at the man who held him, Deane at the same time threw his left fist into a burly mustached face in front of him. The man in front of him collapsed, and Deane wheeled to confront the man behind. But this man, leaning back in the corner of the seat, caught Deane in the chest with his foot, and shoved the young chemist into the opposite front corner of the cab.

THEN the two of them went at each other, with all four fists, as the cab bounded and jounced along.

Deane was just getting decidedly the better of the encounter, when the unconscious man on the floor came to, grabbed Deane's legs, and pulled him down. Then joined the mêlée.

The two thugs were more than a match for even an ex-football star. Gradually he began to weaken under their blows. Then a muffled shot rang out in the dark interior of the cab, and Deane's nostrils sensed the acrid stench of powder.

"You fool!" panted one of the men. "Lay off the gat! You know what Al—"

"Fool, yourself, for mentioning names," panted the other. "I'll shoot if I—"

The fist of the first speaker sent the gun flying, and Deane, taking advantage of this momentary diversion, pulled himself together for one last frantic effort, and knocked both of his captors cold. Deane took a good look at his two ex-captors. One had a swarthy Sicilian face with large mus-

tache. The other, a bullet head with scarred jaw.

The cab had come to a stop beside the curb. Deane flung open the door and lurched out onto the sidewalk.

"Here you are, sir," said the taxi-driver genially, as though nothing had happened. "Right at the top of those steps. They'll be expecting you."

Deane gave his head a shake, to clear the cobwebs from his brain, and passed one hand through his hatless hair. Then stepped toward the cab to retrieve his hat; thought better of it, and stepped away again.

He looked past the cab, and across the street to the broad expanse of the Hudson.

"Riverside Drive," he said to himself.

He looked up at the house, at which the cab had deposited him. An impressive brownstone front. He glanced along the sidewalk in one direction, and there stood a policeman.

Deane took one step toward the cop, and opened his mouth to speak. Then suddenly realized that *he* had more to fear from the authorities than did his abductors.

The policeman by this time had evidently made up his mind to investigate, for he started to walk toward Deane. The taxi drove off. This left but one course open. Deane staggered up the steps of the brownstone house, and pushed the bell.

The policeman came to the foot of the steps, and stood there expectantly. The door opened, and a pompous butler stared in amazement at the bloody, disheveled figure which confronted him.

With every show of assurance, and in a tone loud enough to carry to the waiting policeman, Deane said, "Oh, it's all right, Higgins. Just a little tussle at the Club, that's all."

Then he forced his way past the butler, and closed the door behind him. The butler nearly exploded with outraged dignity and suppressed protest.

"But! But!" he spluttered.

"Higgins," said Deane levelly, "will you please tell your master that I've come. I understand that he is expecting me."

"Me nyme is *not* 'Iggins," pompously retorted the butler, "and your barging in 'ere in this wye is most irregular. 'Oo shall I sye, sir?"

"Dr. Charles Deane," the young scientist replied. "And I have already told you that your master is expecting me."

"Werry well, sir. Won't you set down, sir?"

And the butler moved off aggrievedly through a pair of high carved wooden doors, which he closed behind him.

THE hallway was tall and somber. Deane stepped to a combined mirror, hatrack and umbrella stand, which stood along one wall; smoothed his hair and clothes, and cleaned the blood off his face with a wet corner of his handkerchief.

A sudden urge to flee swept through him. He seized the handle of the door. Then thought of the policeman outside, and stepped back again.

To himself he said, "I might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb."

But somehow the word "hung" didn't sit so well, after what he had found under the bench in his laboratory.

Grimly he revised his quotation to, "I might as well be *electrocuted* for a sheep as a lamb."

Laughing harshly, he turned, just as the carved oak doors swung open again.

A man of uncertain age stepped out, erect and tailor-clad.

"Well, well," said he, extending his hand in friendly greeting. "This is indeed an honor, Dr. Deane. What brings you here? Busby told me that you seemed to be a bit battered up."

"Two thugs in a taxi-cab brought me here. They said that you would be expecting me."

Deane had uttered the first thoughts that came into his head, for his attention was riveted upon studying the face of his host. Where had he seen those suave clear-cut bronzed features before?

Suddenly it dawned upon him. He had seen that face in the newspapers and magazines. This was John Cortlandt Maitland, financial rival of Deane's late patron, Wolf Diggs.

Meanwhile Maitlandt was saying, "I don't know what you are talking about, Dr. Deane, for your visit here is a total surprise to me."

CHAPTER IV.

A GUEST OF THE MIGHTY.

CHARLES DEANE was completely taken aback by Maitland's expressed ignorance of the object of his visit. Had the voice over the phone merely been playing a practical joke on him? But it must have been more than a mere joke, for the taxi-driver had brought him to a definite address, and the two thugs in the cab had certainly been in deadly earnest.

Deane stared into Maitland's face, and saw there merely an intensely friendly interest, slightly amused. But Deane's scientific training led him to register a resolve to keep his eyes open.

"Well," Maitland was saying, smiling, "regardless who sent you here, and regardless why he did it, it was certainly a favor to me, and I hope that it will turn out to have been a favor to you. Step into my library, and I'll ring for a drink. You look a bit shaken up. Which do you prefer, scotch or rye?"

"Neither," said Deane.

"Bourbon?"

"I don't drink, sir."

"Um," approvingly. "Neither do I. But I keep it on hand for guests."

Meanwhile Maitland was leading the way through the high carved oak doors into a room with book-lined walls, a massive table, and several red leather easy chairs and a couch. He sat down, and motioned to Deane to be seated.

Then, placing the tips of his slender fingers together, and staring quizzically at his guest through narrowed lids, he continued, "I'm glad you've come. Your visit here is a most fortunate coincidence, for I have admired your work in chemistry, and have regretted that you were not *my* protégé instead of being under the wing of my friend Diggs. So, when I learned of his sad death a month ago, I very nearly sent for you. But I kept putting it off, for fear that some mistaken sense of loyalty to your old employer might lead you to reject an offer of financial assistance from me. And here you are, of your own free will and accord. What a coincidence!"

"I'm hardly here of my own accord," laughed Deane. "And yet I'm certainly glad to have met you, if you can forgive the unconventional way in which it has happened."

"Yes, it certainly was unconventional," Maitland admitted, pursing up his lips and nodding his head several times. Then, "Have you any idea who the thugs were, and why they brought you to my house?"

"Well—yes," Deane reluctantly admitted.

Maitland watched him narrowly, with just the trace of an amused smile. Then said, "I want to be your friend, Deane. You are in trouble—serious trouble. I can tell it from your face. Perhaps you are even a fugitive from justice."

Deane's body jerked erect. So Maitland did know!

"Ah," continued Maitland, "I must have hit closer than I guessed. Well, you are safe from pursuit, so long as you remain in this house. I need your services in some chemical experimentation which I am about to undertake. Suppose we strike a bargain. Stay here as my guest and protégé."

"The fact that I have no other choice," said Deane levelly, "doesn't alter the fact that it will be a pleasure."

"Well spoken!" his host exclaimed. "You know, young man, I've taken an instinctive liking to you. And now suppose you unburden all your troubles. I am sure that I can help you. I've turned my hand to almost everything except detection of crime, and nearly always with success. Yes, I'm reasonably sure that I can help you."

So, almost before he knew it, Deane had plunged into an account of the happenings of the evening before. Why not? It would all be in the papers within a few hours. If Maitland were on the level, Deane ought to tell him everything; and, if Maitland were *not* on the level, he probably knew everything already. So Deane even mentioned the mysterious hunched figure with the black beard. He told of his run-in with Professor Cairns, the loss of one of the samples of stratium, his walk past Cairns's house, his sensation of being followed, his grisly find in the laboratory this morning, the mysterious telephone call, the reappearance of the man with the beard, and the forced ride in the taxi.

But somehow he omitted to say anything about the bloody handkerchief which he had attempted to analyze. Probably it was his professional pride which kept him quiet; he did not like

CHARLES DEANE

to admit that any chemical experiment had completely stumped him.

THROUGHOUT the narrative, Maitland was suavity personified; but, though his mouth was smiling, his brown eyes were narrow slits, as he stared intently into the face of his guest.

Deane finished the account, and added, "What do you think of it, Mr. Maitland?"

"I think that you are in a tough spot," was the answer. "The first thing that you need is a good lawyer."

He pushed a desk-button, and as the butler entered, said, "Busby, get me Peter Markham at once."

Then, as the butler withdrew, Maitland continued. "The next thing that you need is the service of a detective agency, to dig up all the possible clues

in your favor, before the District Attorney finds and suppresses them. Markham can arrange that detail for us. Then you need a new name, while you stay in my house. Servants might talk, you know. Except Busby; he's a regular clam. So, for the present, you'll be Mr. Horace Jones. You'll live in this house, and work in my basement laboratory."

Again he pushed the button, and this time told the butler, "Busby, show Mr. Jones to the second guest suite." Then to Deane, "Lunch is at one o'clock, Jones. Better rest in your room until then."

In the guest suite to which the butler showed him, Deane sat heavily down upon the bed, and with elbows on knees, ran both hands through his tousled hair. What was it all about?

But gradually the calm, the orderliness, the seclusion of this household reassured him; so much so, that when Busby returned with morning papers and the morning editions of the evening papers, Deane was able to read, with aloof abstraction, the accounts of last evening's meeting and of the finding of Cairns's body. He was even able to smile a bit grimly at the realization that, if it had not been for the murder of Professor Cairns, the discovery of the new element stratium would not have been given one tenth of the space now accorded to it.

The newspaper accounts consisted largely of what Deane already knew; but, surprisingly, there was no mention of Angus Frazer. Also there were two additional items of importance. First, the night janitor had carried up in the freight elevator around midnight a large pasteboard carton marked "CHEMICALS. HANDLE WITH CARE," accompanied by Dr. Charles Deane, whom he well knew, and a short stocky gentleman who answered the description of the now deceased Professor Cairns. Neither had been seen to leave. Secondly, none of the day elevator-men could say for sure whether he had carried Dr. Deane up, but one of them distinctly remembered bringing him down, shortly after nine, this being impressed upon his mind by the fact that Dr. Deane had stopped and asked him the name of one of the other tenants of the building. Dr. Deane, so this elevator man said, had appeared excited and a bit bewildered, as though he had been drinking.

"Of all the rot!" exploded Deane, referring not to the part about his having been excited and bewildered, which was undeniable, but rather to the part about his having gone up in the freight elevator with the deceased.

Just then the butler knocked again, this time with a suit, shirt, etc.

"Shall I draw your bawth, Mr. Jones?" he inquired solicitously.

"Thank you, yes, Busby," Deane replied, and began to undress.

The cuffs of his shirt were bloody and still damp, and as he stripped it off he noticed a peculiar and reminiscent smell. Hydrogen peroxide! The blood spots were drying, and some of them had begun to turn quite brown. Yet others were still a bright crimson. He sniffed of *them*. Yes, they were the source of the peculiar odor.

Some of the blood was not his own. Some of it was that peculiar substance which he had found on the handkerchief dropped by the bearded face, and which even his chemical skill had been unable to analyze!

ALTHOUGH the bath made him feel a lot better, it did not solve any of his perplexities. After dressing in the new clothes, which

fitted him surprisingly well, Deane sat by the window, staring off across the Hudson, and trying to piece together the kaleidoscopic events of the last two days. But it was no use; the events refused to piece. He was sure that Maitland fitted somewhere into the picture; but just where?

He was still gloomily cogitating, when Busby knocked to announce luncheon. When descending to the main floor hall, Deane found all doors closed; and so, after a moment's hesitation, he opened the door which led into the study or library of his host. This would be a good place to wait for further instructions.

The room seemed to be empty, so Deane entered and closed the door. Then looked around. But the room was not empty. For on a red leather davenport in one corner behind the desk, lay Maitland on his back, with mouth open, apparently asleep.

Deane was about to withdraw, when something about Maitland's appearance stayed him. The body seemed to be unnaturally motionless, the bronzed features seemed to be a shade paler than before, one hand and arm hung down limp over the edge of the couch, and there was no rhythmic rise and fall of the chest.

Tiptoeing, he knew not why, across the room, Deane leaned over the prostrate form, and listened. There could be no doubt now. There was no breath. Maitland was not breathing.

In one stride Deane reached the desk and pushed the button for the butler; then rushed back to the motionless body, snatched up the pendent hand, and searched for the pulse with trembling fingers.

He found the pulse; the heart was still beating, faintly. More than faintly; for as he shifted his fingers and slightly relaxed their frantic grip, he felt the pulse beat strong and full. Then the wrist was snatched from his grasp, and Maitland sat suddenly erect, brushing Deane aside and nearly upsetting him.

AS Deane staggered back, both from the impact and from surprise, Maitland shook his head, blinked, and then stared fixedly at Deane.

" Young man," said he sternly, " you gave me quite a scare. Just what was the idea of disturbing me when I was asleep?"

Deane laughed embarrassedly.

" I'm sorry, sir," he apologetically replied, "but *you* gave *me* a scare, too. I thought you were dead. You didn't seem to be breathing."

At these words, Maitland's head jerked around, and his eyes narrowed to slits.

" Young man," said he, and there was menace in his tone. " Don't you ever again, while you are my guest, meddle in anything which does not concern you."

Deane was about to stammer some apology, when the door opened, and the butler entered, saying, " You rang, sir?"

" It was an accident, Busby," Maitland replied.

" Werry well, sir. But I was about to announce luncheon, anyway, sir."

Maitland smiled up at Deane, all trace of his recent tense resentment gone. Then rising, he said jovially, " Well, let's eat." And led the way across the room, down to the hall, and through another door, into a dining room. Deane too by this time had recovered his outward calm, but inwardly his scientifically trained mind was searching for a solution of his host's strange behavior.

Two other persons were already at table: a beautiful, statuesque blonde of about twenty, with black eyebrows; and a small fat pudgy man of middle age, with white grub-like fingers and very dirty nails.

As they entered, the man arose.

"Mavis, dear," announced Maitland, indicating Deane with a gracious wave of his hand, "this is Mr. Horace Jones, who will stay with us for a while as a member of the family, and assist me with some chemical experimentation. Mr. Jones, my daughter Mavis. And this is my good friend and legal counselor, Peter Markham."

Miss Maitland raised her black eyebrows, incredulously, as she said, "So you're to help father with his chemistry? Welcome to our midst."

"I've heard about your scientific work, Mr.—Jones," added the lawyer.

Maitland's brows contracted slightly, as his dark eyes flashed a quick signal of disapprobation to each of the two speakers.

Then with his old suavity he indicated a chair to his guest, and took his own place at the head of the carved oak table.

Her yellow green eyes half closed, and her face expressionless, Mavis Maitland leaned toward Deane and purred, "And now tell me all about yourself, Mr. Jones. You say you come from Boston?"

"I didn't say," laughed Deane a bit uneasily. "But, as a matter of fact, I was born and brought up right here in your old New York."

Maitland jerked his head around toward his guest, without change of expression, and then turned toward the pudgy little lawyer again. The warning was clearly and unmistakably understood by Deane.

Meanwhile Maitland's daughter was saying abstractedly, "Really? How very interesting."

THROUGHOUT the meal which followed, Maitland and Markham discoursed together, in an undertone, of cases and deals. Once Deane pricked up his ears as he thought he heard the words "heavy water," but the conversation did not seem to refer to chemistry. From time to time, Maitland's daughter would ask Deane some question about himself, and then appear to doze off while watching him through half-closed sleepy cat-like eyes as he answered.

After the dessert, Mavis excused herself; and, over the coffee and cigarettes, the conversation turned to Deane's predicament.

"Mr. Jones," said lawyer Markham, with a briskness which his pudginess belied, "I shall continue to address you as 'Mr. Jones' just for practice, although of course I know your true identity. In the few hours since Mr. Maitland put me in charge of your case, I have been able to learn much through undercover methods. And there is one item which is rather disquieting."

"By the way," Deane interrupted, "have you learned anything of my old assistant, Angus Frazer? The newspapers don't mention him; and I haven't heard from him or about him since we left the lecture together last night."

How long ago that seemed!

"You have heard nothing since then?" asked Maitland pointedly.

Deane shifted uneasily.

"Well," he admitted, "the voice which talked over the phone to me in the laboratory early this morning told me that Angus had gotten home safely with the samples of stratium."

"Do *you* know anything of this Frazer?" Maitland asked of Markham.

The little lawyer shrugged his shoulders and spread out his dirty-tipped fingers.

"Such a business!" he complained. "Well, my real information can wait, I suppose. Yes, I *do* know about Frazer."

"Yes?" asked Deane, leaning forward eagerly.

The little lawyer sniffed.

"He's locked up in the Tombs," he announced laconically.

"What on earth for?" exclaimed Deane indignantly.

"For supposed complicity in two murders!"

"Two?"

"Yes, two. And you're wanted for both, Charles Deane. Your finger prints were found on the gun which shot the Wolf of Wall Street, as well as on the knife which stabbed Professor Cairns."

Maitland was watching his protégé intently through narrowed lids, as the fat little lawyer made this announcement.

"Why, I never touched the thing!" Deane indignantly exclaimed. "And I took pains that no one else should touch it, either."

"How very unfortunate," said Markham, wagging his head. "For, if someone else had touched it, they might have smeared your finger prints. As it is—"

"But how could anyone know my prints? I've never been fingerprinted."

"Oh, they found plenty of those all over everything in your laboratory."

"It looked to me, Mr. Deane—" Maitland levelly began.

"Jones, sir," Markham reminded him.

"Don't interrupt," Maitland snapped. "It looks to me, Mr. Deane, as though you were unquestionably guilty of both murders."

"But, Mr. Maitland," Deane objected, turning a hurt and surprised face toward his employer, "I tell you that—"

Maitland held up his hand with a suave smile.

"Oh," said he, "I don't say that you had anything to do with either killing, but yet I do say that you are guilty of both. Being guilty does not depend on facts; it depends on the evidence. And the evidence is overwhelmingly against you. I am afraid that I can't keep you here any longer."

CHAPTER V.

FLIGHT.

"VERY well," said Deane, getting up from the table a bit unsteadily. "Somehow this haven seemed too good to be true. But why did you play with me, Mr. Maitland? Why did you tell me that you would protect me, and then leave me in the lurch? Why not turn me over to the police, and be done with it?"

"My dear young man," Maitland exclaimed, jumping up and placing one hand on Deane's shoulder. "You have sadly misunderstood me. When I said that I could no longer keep you here, I meant that I must take you to some safer place. I have a hunting lodge in the Black Hills, where no one would ever think of looking for you. We shall start for there tonight. What do you think, Peter?"

"I think it would be a most excellent idea," said Markham obsequiously.

"Forgive me for having doubted you," said Deane gratefully, and yet

not altogether convinced, as he sat down again.

"It's all decided then," said Maitland briskly. "We start tonight in my plane."

"But what about good old Angus?" Deane objected. "I hate to leave him behind. Can't you do something for him, too?"

Maitland smiled coldly. "That's a big order," he said casually, "but I'll see what can be done about it. And now, will you please step into my library, and amuse yourself with whatever books and magazines you can find, while I arrange the trip."

It was a dull afternoon for the young scientist. In spite of the excellent chemical library of his host, his mind kept dwelling on his predicament.

He could not fathom the mystery of how his fingerprints came to be on the gun which he had taken such pains not to touch. Doubtless they had been planted there by the same persons who had planted Professor Cairns's body in Deane's laboratory. But who could these persons be, and what was their object in attempting to pin these two crimes onto him?

And this man Maitland! Deane did not know quite what to make of him. He was an affable, genial, considerate host; and certainly was protecting Deane from the police. And yet he had a coldly calculating inscrutability, which baffled his young protégé. What was his motive anyway? For obviously a man of his Wall Street reputation wasn't out of mere kindness protecting a total stranger wanted for two murders.

And Maitland's daughter Mavis! Resembling her father in many respects; and, like him, inscrutable. But her inscrutability had a feline touch which was most intriguing.

Many times in that long afternoon, Deane characteristically ran his fingers through his sandy hair, and shook his head in bewilderment. His scientifically trained mind told him that something was wrong. But what? He could only watch and wait.

Finally he became interested in a collection of pamphlets and magazine articles on heavy water, articles by Rutherford and Oliphant and Harteck, articles on how these three scientists had discovered deuterium and triplogen, articles speculating on the place which heavy water might play in the drama of life and death.

Deane read all this material with a purpose, for anything in which Maitland was sufficiently interested to invest thousands of dollars, might throw some light on the mystery of his character. But, as he read on, Deane soon forgot all about his host, and became absorbed in pure scientific interest.

Dinner was served to him alone in the library, and quite early. Then Busby brought him a hat and overcoat and gloves, and apologetically announced, "The master says as 'ow you 'ad better put on this false mustache. In case anyone might recognize you, sir."

So saying, Busby handed over a dark mustache, a small mirror, and a bottle of collodion. And, feeling very foolish and melodramatic, Deane put it on.

It completely changed his appearance, especially when his cap and overcoat-collar covered his blond hair.

Then Maitland and his daughter joined him. There was a twinkle in the banker's eye as he inspected the mustache, and Mavis gaily laughed aloud. But they hurried out to the car, before Deane had time to become embarrassed.

Mavis sat between the two men in

the rear seat of the car. Leaning a little toward Deane, she smiled up at him and said, " Have you flown much, Mr. Jones? I just adore it. I am a licensed pilot and drive my own plane."

No longer sleepily feline, she seemed tense and vibrant. Deane marveled at the change in her, as she chattered on, all the way to the flying field.

Maitland sat stiffly erect, staring straight ahead with half-closed eyes, immersed in thought.

AT the Newark airport, their car was driven up to the side of a large trimotored plane. As they alighted, another car drove up, and Peter Markham got out with a tall and rather bewildered looking gentleman with reddish sideburns, whom the pudgy little lawyer introduced as " Mr. Campbell."

" Vurra pleased to make your-r acquaintance," said Campbell.

A pang shot through Charles Deane. The voice, the manner, of this newcomer reminded him so poignantly of his old Scotch assistant, whom he was leaving behind in jail. But he was bustled aboard the plane, with but little chance for thought. He and Campbell sat together.

As the plane took off toward the West in the starlit night, Deane remarked, " You know, you remind me of a friend of mine."

Then bit his lip, as he realized that no hints at all as to his identity should be given out. Yet, unthinking, he removed his hat, thus uncovering his unruly sandy hair, in incongruous contrast to his black mustache.

" And you, too, sir-r," began the Scot; and then he too bit his tongue.

" Oh, by the way," remarked Maitland, ambling back to them, and leaning against the seat ahead. " You two ought to get really acquainted. Dr. Deane, meet Mr. Frazer."

" What!" exclaimed the two seatmates, staring at each other.

" You can take off your disguises now," said Maitland, with a twinkle in his eye. " We know you."

" But how did Angus—" Deane began."

" Easy enough," Maitland explained. " Markham got a professional bondsman to put up bail for him, and here he is, skipping bail. That's all. And now I've got *two* chemists to work for me, instead of merely one."

He turned and went forward to the pilot's compartment, while Charles Deane and old Angus compared notes, and tried to piece together the events which had enmeshed them.

During most of the trip, Maitland stayed with the pilot. In fact, he drove the machine himself part of the way. Mavis kept to herself, reading or staring out of the window into the black night, until Deane tired of the company of his middle-aged laboratory assistant, and wished that she wouldn't. But she left him no opening for an approach. Natural diffidence kept him from making up to the elusive daughter of his employer.

After a while, the lights were turned off, and he curled up in his seat and slept.

AROUND noon the next day, the plane came down on a small landing-field surrounded by high mountains. Deane judged they must be somewhere in North Dakota. On the side of one foothill there stood a pretentious log-cabin overlooking the field. Thither Maitland led his guests.

" Welcome to Sioux Lodge," said he.

The main room of the lodge was

lined with mounted heads and with stuffed fishes on plaques. Fur rugs were on the floor. At one end was a fireplace and a chimney of rough field stones, on which hung a framed motto, the one incongruous note amid all these surroundings.

The motto *had* read: "We can afford to wait." But all the words, except the last, had been crossed out by two brush strokes; above them was now scrawled the single word "Why"; and the period had been roughly changed to a question-mark, so that the motto now proclaimed: "Why wait?"

Maitland had gone to give directions to the servants. Angus Frazer was examining some of the specimens at the other end of the room. Deane stared at the motto with considerable puzzlement, and ran his fingers thoughtfully through his hair. Somehow he instinctively felt that this altered sentiment held the clue to many things. Somehow his mind flashed back to the time he had found Maitland lying unbreathing, apparently dead, in the latter's study in New York.

As he stared at the motto, and sought to fathom its mystery, a soft hand was laid on his arm, and the voice of Mavis Maitland spoke in his ear, "My friend, ask no questions about that sign."

Then wheeling him around to face her, she smiled up at him, and continued, "I know that you don't like me, Mr. Deane—or rather, Mr. Jones, as you must be known for some time—But you might as well make up your mind to stand for me, for you are going to see quite a lot of me from now on."

Deane smiled back at her; but his thoughts were on the similarity between her warning, just given, and her father's warning at the time that Deane had awakened him from his unbreathing sleep.

Two months later. They had been busy months for Charles Deane and Angus, and the several hundred workmen whom Maitland had imported. In fact, Deane's work had been so preoccupying that he had practically given up speculating upon the peculiar circumstances attendant on his being here.

Several laboratories had been built on the mountainside. Into one of these Deane was never permitted to enter. Here Maitland spent a great deal of his time, assisted by two very taciturn individuals, one of whom Deane learned was a doctor, and the other one a chemist. This laboratory intrigued Deane greatly, especially when he happened to spot, on the label of a highly insured container bound for that building, the word "denterium" for somehow he had developed an intense interest in the subject of heavy water.

He asked Maitland to be allowed to help him, but was rebuffed in such a manner that he did not care to raise the question again.

In addition to the laboratories, there was a storehouse and a smelter. A huge balloon had carried one end of a small pipe up into the stratosphere, and through this pipe the peculiar gases of that far height had been pumped down, and separated into their constituents. From the stratium-hydride gas, the rare element, stratium, was electrolytically extracted, and then sent to the smelters to be melted into bars.

Everything was paradoxical, contrary to nature!

Sinking a shaft into a blue sky, instead of into the ground, to mine for metallic ore! Extracting that ore from the mine in gaseous, rather than solid, form! Bringing the ore down, instead of up, to the surface of the earth!

But the smelter was even more absurd! Crucibles hanging upside down, with their open ends facing downward. Fires applied above them. Pieces of metal dropped up into them. Liquid metal boiling merrily at the bottom—or top, if you prefer to call it so—of inverted bowls; and finally being poured upward over the lip into moulds hanging above the crucibles.

And the storehouse was the most absurd of all! Gantry cranes running on rails low to the floor, with their traction-wheels bearing up against the bottom side of the rails. Chains hanging straight up into the air from the winches on the cranes, and holding down at their upper ends, huge bars of silver-yellow metal heavily striving to fall upward to the ceiling, where hundreds of similar bars lay piled, row on row. And, when the winch was slacked off, and the chains paid out, the bar would gradually rise, until the chain was finally cast off, and the bar clinked up, to rest on the bottom of one of the ceiling piles. Shipments of stratium from this storehouse were frequently sent out by trucks, destination unknown to him.

Charles Deane often shook his head over it all, and ran his fingers through his sandy hair.

THIS huge establishment for stratosphere mining was far beyond anything of which he had dreamed when working in the little laboratory financed by Wolf Diggs. It was large-scale, stupendous, magnificent, characteristic of the personality of Deane's new patron, John Cortlandt Maitland.

And, like the establishment, Maitland was a paradox. Just as Deane was never quite able to understand, to realize, this stratosphere mining venture, so also Maitland himself never appeared quite real, quite understandable. No further clues had turned up as to his motives.

And his daughter Mavis was no less inscrutable. Catlike and sleepy in the daytime, at night she emerged into something elfin and eerie. Often she and Deane walked together in the evening; and yet he felt that he did not know her at all, until one night—

Maitland's conversation at supper had taken one of its cryptic philosophical turns. "I shall never marry again," he had said, placing the tips of his slender fingers together, and surveying his auditors through narrowed lids. "Do you know why people marry? It is because of the craving for immortality. *Racial* immortality, since personal immortality is not available to most of us. In the words of the Persian poet Jami:

> *"'O, thou whose wisdom is the rule of kings—glory to God who gave it—answer me: is any blessing better than a son? Man's prime desire, by which his name and he shall live beyond himself. A foot for thee to stand on he shall be, a hand to stop thy falling. In his youth thou shalt be young, and in his strength be strong.'*
>
> *"And yet for some of us—"*

He had paused abruptly, had looked up at the altered motto hanging above the fireplace, and had smiled a smile so peculiar that no one had cared to ask him to explain the riddle of his words.

And now, as Deane walked beside Mavis along a moonlit mountain trail, his thoughts flashed back to the strange words of her father; and he wondered.

But one could not walk with Mavis Maitland and keep his thoughts for long on anything other than Mavis. In white dress, with a pale green scarf

thrown lightly about her shoulders, she looked like a slim white birch tree, slender and graceful and weird, yet with a cold strength within.

In a little clearing they paused, hand in hand, and stared out across the moonlit mists of the valleys. And then she turned and pressed softly against him, looking up at him with expressionless face, her yellow-green eyes veiled by long lashes beneath pencilled lines of black.

"Mavis," he breathed, and swept her into his arms.

For some minutes they stood thus. Then gently she disengaged herself. Her lips were tight, her pointed jaw firm, her eyes narrow slits. Slowly she shook her head.

"No," said she. "It cannot be. This is the penalty that I must pay. Of course, father could make you one of us. But if you were one of us, you would no longer be able to love. Father has said so. And if you were *not* one of us, our love would be too fleeting. And—"

"What on earth are you talking about?" Deane exclaimed, horrified.

"Nothing you would understand."

"But, Mavis—"

"No! No! And now will you please do me a favor?"

"Why, certainly—"

"I knew you would. And it is something very simple. Let me go home alone."

"But, Mavis—"

"You promised. And now kiss me again."

Once more he held her close. Then suddenly with a little cry of pain she disengaged herself.

"Your ring has cut my hand. See!" And she held it up for his inspection in the moonlight.

With a stammered apology, he mopped a tiny red scratch with his handkerchief. Then kissed her gently on the forehead, craving forgiveness.

HER expression was now once more the sleepy cat of daytimes. But her rigid body and clenched hands belied the expression.

Then she fled from him down the moonlit mountainside path. And, true to his promise, Deane did not follow her. Instead, he stared longingly after the fleeing green-white figure, and reverently raised to his lips the handkerchief which had staunched her tiny wound.

Then dropped it with surprise.

For the familiar odor of hydrogen peroxide assailed his nostrils!

Sliding pebbles on the path behind him suddenly caused him to wheel about. Down the trail lurched a heavy squat figure, with round head and scraggy beard. Its arms flopped flipper-like as it walked.

As Deane turned to confront it, it paused irresolute as though to flee. Then, with a hopeless gesture, it fell forward. Deane jumped and caught it as it fell. Then eased the body gently to the ground.

A mountain stream flowed beside the path. Deane wet his handkerchief and bathed the face of the gnomelike man. Its eyes opened, small piglike eyes, and stared unseeingly up at him. Then focused, and studied him incredulously, —and fearfully.

"Dr. Deane, eh?" asked a husky voice. "Then it really was you who kidnapped me."

"Yes, I'm Deane all right," he replied, forgetting for the moment the part which he had been playing. "But I didn't kidnap you, or anyone. Never saw you before in all my life. Who are you?"

The gnome smiled gruesomely through its unkempt beard.

"*You* ought to know, for you brought me here. But I suppose I *have* changed since then. Don't you recognize your old enemy Cairns? Professor Oscar Cairns? And now take me back to my jailers."

CHAPTER VI.

A PRISONER!

"BUT you're dead!" Deane exclaimed, looking down with horror at the unkempt bearded face which was staring up at him in the white moonlight. "I saw you lying dead on the floor of my own laboratory, back in New York. I'm wanted by the police, for murdering you. Though I didn't do it, I swear I didn't," he hastened to add.

"Naturally not!" snapped Professor Cairns, sitting suddenly erect, and frowning at the younger man.

Both men continued to stare at each other for several minutes in the moonlight, first incredulously, then reflectively, then quizzically, and finally with a broad grin, which broke into a laugh.

"Put it there, young fellow," bellowed Cairns, holding out one flipper. "Let's bury the hatchet. We're both in some sort of a fix; the same fix, if you'd ask me. Let's be scientific about this. Let's compare notes before my jailers catch up with me."

"Your jailers?" asked Deane, still incredulous. "What do you mean jailers?"

"I must be brief," declared the Professor, casting his little pig-eyes apprehensively first up and then down the moonlit mountain trail. "The night of your lecture on 'Stratium'—and, by the way, I did *not* steal that sample stick—when I got home from the lecture, I decided to stay up for a while, and read some articles by Moseley and Curry, to see if they might not throw some light on your alleged discovery."

Deane grimaced at the word "alleged."

Professor Cairns noticed the grimace—the moon was bright enough for that—and apologetically murmured, "My error. As the modern generation say, 'Skip it.' But, to get on. Quite awhile later, my butler announced that some gentlemen wanted to see me at the front door. I suppose that the strangeness of a call at that late hour ought to have impressed itself on me. But I was so engrossed with my reading that I didn't notice what time it was. I went to the door. And there you stood, between two rather rough-looking characters."

"I did not!" Deane hotly retorted.

The Professor held up one flipper. His little pig-eyes twinkled.

"No, no, of course not," he deprecated. "I'm merely reporting what happened, as it appeared to me at the time."

"Just a minute," Deane interrupted, with the sudden flash of an idea in his eyes. "Was one of them a swarthy Sicilian with long bushy mustaches? And did the other have a round bullet-like head like a pugilist, with a scarred chin?"

"Why—yes."

"Go on."

"But why?"

"Go on!"

"Very well. You seemed agitated and urged me to get into a taxi which was standing at the curb. You said that you wanted me to go at once to your laboratory to witness a startling new development."

"Did you notice—"

"The driver? Yes. A face very sallow, and skull-like."

"Ah! Go on."

"That's about all. I don't even remember getting into the taxi. The next thing that I knew, I was in a plane, speeding through the night—"

"Just a minute," Deane interrupted. "Listen!"

Far up the moonlit trail could be heard the sound of voices. "It's they!" exclaimed the Professor in a hushed altered voice.

Deane needed no explanation of those words.

"Come on!" he whispered, pulling the older man to his feet. With sure steps, he led the way at right angles off the trail up the mountainside to the purple shadow of a clump of bushes, where the two men squatted down silently to wait.

THEY did not have long to wait. To the accompaniment of sliding pebbles, the voices drew nearer. Grumbling voices. From behind the bush, the two fugitives could make out the black forms of three burly brutes, slipping and sliding down the trail.

Said one of the three jailers, "What do you suppose became of the old walrus? He was too weak from starving himself to get very far."

"I 'ope 'e fell orff a precipice, that I do," fervently grumbled one of the others.

"Here's his handkerchief," said the third, picking up the one which Deane had used to staunch Mavis's wound and to bathe the Professor's forehead. "Come on!"

Then they passed on, down the trail.

Professor Cairns snorted softly.

"You were saying—" Deane suggested.

"Oh, yes. Where was I? Oh, yes. The airplane, in which I was a prisoner, flew all day, and well into the next night. We passed above small cities, and crossed rivers, but I was unable to recognize any of them. We seemed to be avoiding landmarks and large metropolises. Finally, late at night, we landed in these mountains. I was pushed and shoved up a trail—this trail, I think—and was locked up in a sort of cabin prison, which seems to be in charge of a handsome dark young fellow named Alpheus. He is in command of quite a number of low-brow thugs—you've just seen three samples of them—but Alpheus himself seems to be quite intelligent—educated even."

"But what was the great idea?" Deane exploded. "What did they want of you?"

"They desired my assistance in some chemical experiments, I believe," the old Professor dryly replied, "but I have consistently refused to work for them. No one can drive *me*."

DEANE smiled to himself at the thought of anyone trying to drive the pugnacious old man. Then sobered at the realization of how he himself had been duped. True, he had been suspicious of Maitland's motives right along; but it had never occurred to him to doubt that at least he was being afforded a hide-out from the police who wanted him for the murder of Oscar Cairns. And now to think that all this while Cairns himself had been living safe and sound within a couple of miles of him!

"Cairns," said he, with sudden realization, "this thing is bigger than we think. Maitland has never been known to do anything for any one other than Maitland, and never anything that wasn't on a grand, stupen-

dous scale. His kidnapping of you, and his tricking Angus and me into coming here voluntarily, means something. Something not so good. Let's find out what it is, and stop it."

"Just a minute, young man," Cairns objected. "You forget that you haven't yet told me what *you* are doing here. You seem to be allied with my captors—and yet you just now helped me to escape from them. A few minutes ago you said something about being wanted for having murdered *me!* And just now you mentioned Maitland. Do you mean Maitland, the New York banker? What can *he* have to do with all this thuggery?"

"A plenty!" Deane exclaimed. "I'll tell you."

Then briefly, in that incongruous setting—the shadow of a bush on a moonlit North Dakota mountainside—the younger of the two scientists briefly sketched to the other the scrambled events that had occurred since the two of them had parted in anger at the meeting of the Chemical Society—long, long ago, it seemed—in old New York. As he recounted those events, they took on new meaning, by virtue of the disclosures of the present evening.

The death of Wolf Diggs in his Wall Street office, a death of which Deane had been accused because of finger-prints on a gun handle. But, now that Professor Cairns had been found alive, was it not possible that Diggs too was still among the living? Or, at least, that Deane was not wanted for this murder at all, and that the story of the finger-prints had been a mere invention of Maitland's greasy little lawyer, Markham?

The successful kidnapping of Cairns, and the unsuccessful attempt at kidnapping Deane—by the same taxi-driver and two thugs. Unsuccessful? How absurd! For both kidnappings had had the same result, namely, to deliver the victim into the hands of Maitland.

Although the technique had been different in each instance—and, too, in the capturing of Angus Frazer by the simple expedient of putting up his bail-money—nevertheless Maitland had in each instance "got his man."

Cairns naming his head jailer as Alpheus, and the thoughtless mention of "Al—" by one of the thugs in the taxi. Could these be the same?

Of course, Deane could not figure out any of the details. For example, who had impersonated him to Cairns, and whose body was it that he had found in his laboratory, etc., etc.? And then, too, there were certain other items, apparently unimportant in themselves, which intrigued him. Such, for example, as: who had stolen the little sample of stratium at the lecture, and why; why had Maitland apparently not been breathing that time asleep in his study; and what was the meaning of the alteration of that motto, hanging in Maitland's hunting lodge, from "We can afford to wait" to "Why wait?"

But, of course, the major question was: What was this all about, anyway? What was Maitland's racket? For Deane was by now absolutely convinced—what he had suspected ever since he himself had sought haven in Maitland's brownstone front on Riverside Drive—that Maitland was systematically working toward some gigantic and sinister scheme.

Thus Deane's thoughts wandered, as he sat on the moonlit mountainside, in the shadow of a bush with the old professor, and recounted the story of how he had become enmeshed in Maitland's web.

But there was one part of the story which he changed. He did not tell the professor the true reason why he happened to be on this trail at this time of night, for he felt that Cairns might mistrust him if the old man knew the extent of his intimacy with Maitland's daughter Mavis. So, instead, he merely stated that he had felt restless that evening, and had gone out for a walk.

Old Cairns thrust out his chin belligerently, and blew a blast of breath through one side of his unkempt mustaches. His little black eyes twinkled appreciatively. Weak and disheveled though he was, he was once more his old self again.

"So that's the situation, is it, eh?" he snorted, lumbering to his feet. "Come on! I'm going back."

"What on earth for?" exclaimed Deane, springing up too, and staring with puzzlement at the old professor in the moonlight.

"I'm going back," asserted Cairns resolutely, "for the purpose of seeming to give in to my captors. To the chemical work which they captured me for. To keep my eyes and ears open, and find out what it's all about. Come on!"

"Me?" Deane asked, bewildered.

"Certainly," the old professor asserted.

"But what will your captors—? Oh, I see," appreciatively. "I'll walk back with you, so as to make certain that you get there all right, and so as to learn the exact location of your cabin. My staying out an hour extra won't make any difference. I'm with you!"

So the two of them set out up the trail together. And it was just as well that Deane came along, for the old professor—once his flare-up of energy and resolution was over—could never have made it alone.

Together they made it. Then, while Cairns sat and puffed in a chair in the prison cabin, Deane bustled around, brewed the old man some tea, and then put him to bed.

SOMEWHAT revived, Cairns said, "And now, *auf wiedersehen.* I'll be all right by morning. And won't those thugs be surprised! And won't Alpheus accuse them of pipe-dreaming my escape. But as to *your* plans—what do you suggest?"

"Well—" Deane replied ruminatively, "now that I'm no longer chargeable with having killed you, and as that charge is all that Maitland is using to hold me here, why not have me escape from here, give myself up, and then tip off the authorities to watch and investigate Maitland, meanwhile keeping me locked up on the murder charge, so that Maitland won't suspect."

But Cairns shook his head. "No good!" he snorted contemptuously. "The authorities would never believe that I am alive. They might even blunder out here and show their hand, which would be worse.—I have it! I'll write a note to my daughter Donna. She knows young McGrady, the District Attorney! With her convinced and on your side,. and you keeping under cover in my house, she ought to be able to line things up satisfactorily with the authorities. Have you a pencil and paper?"

Abstractedly, Deane reached in his pocket for an Eversharp and a little leather-clad notebook which he always carried. But his thoughts were far away in both time and space: back in old New York at the meeting of the Chemical Society, at which he had delivered his fateful paper on the new negative metal stratium. Oscar Cairns had been there, belligerently opposing

him, doubting his epoch-making discovery of a metal hard as steel and lighter than air. And, sitting beside Cairns, had been a slim dark girl, with wavy brown hair and a wistful mouth, elfishly uptilted at the corners. Donna Cairns!

And then his thoughts abruptly shifted to the very different girl whom he had passionately held in his arms an hour ago. Mavis Maitland! Steel cold and mysterious.

Deane felt embarrassed and disloyal. Disloyal to the memory of Donna for having held Mavis in his arms. Disloyal to Mavis for now thinking so poignantly of Donna.

"Wake up, and snap out of it, young fellow," bellowed Cairns. "Here's the note to Donna, and you'd better be on your way before Alpheus and his thugs return. You and I are going to work this thing out. Goodby and good luck."

"Goodby, sir," said Deane, gripping the older man's hand. But his eyes were not on Cairns; instead he was looking beside the old professor, where in his imagination he saw the wistful face of Donna Cairns.

Then he blew out the light, stepped from the darkened cabin into the moonlit night, and strode resolutely down the trail toward the hunting-lodge and attendant buildings of the encampment of John Cortlandt Maitland.

As he strode along, with narrowed eyes and set jaw, he tried to focus his thoughts on the problem which he was about to tackle, but instead his mind kept wandering to the vision of two beautiful faces, one crowned with brown hair and the other crowned with an aureole of gold, one impishly wistful and the other coldly glamorous.

The comparison was so intriguingly engrossing that Deane soon lost all realization of where he was. His feet automatically picked their way down the moonlit trail; but, apart from that, he was oblivious to his surroundings.

A CLOUD passed across the face of the moon, just as Deane rounded a turn in the path. The contrast of sudden darkness was sufficient to jar him out of his reverie. He halted abruptly, and glanced around to get his bearings.

And at the same instant, he heard sliding pebbles ahead, and a voice exclaiming, "Hi sye! Did you see wot Hi saw? The owld codger hisself."

"I saw it too," came the reply in a gruff voice slightly subdued and awed, "but it wasn't old Cairns. Too tall and slim."

Instantly alert, Charles Deane stepped quickly off the trail to one side, groping carefully with his feet so as to avoid setting in motion any telltale pebbles, and holding his arms crisscrossed in front of his face. Four full strides, and his outstretched hands encountered a bush, and instantly he slid around and crouched behind it.

At just that moment the moon came out from behind its cloud, and once more flooded the mountainside with chalk-like light.

Meanwhile a third voice was saying, "You two goofs give me a pain in the neck, with your imaginings. I wouldn't be at all surprised, when we get back to the cabin, to find that you merely *imagined* Cairns's escape.—There! The moon's out again, and where's your spook?"

"Well, maybe there wasn't anyone there. But I'll bet you a quart, Cairns is gone. You seen him gone, didn't you, Herbert?"

"'Ow c'd Hi 'ave seen 'im if 'e was gone? Hi seen that 'e wasn't there, that's wot you mean."

The voices trailed off, around the corner. Deane came out of his hiding place, and strode on in the opposite direction, chuckling softly.

Said he to himself, "When they get back to their cabin, and find Oscar Cairns sleeping peacefully in his bed, they'll be quite certain that they didn't see me either. So that's okeh."

He reached the spot where he had held the slim tense figure of Mavis Maitland so tenderly in his arms, and he paused there to live that moment over again in memory.

Thus he came down the mountain side into the clearing, on the slopes of which stood the hunting-lodge and its attendant cabins, and the newly built laboratory and storehouse for stratium, and the barracks for the workingmen.

The lodge and cabins were in shadow, with the moon hanging above and beyond the hill on which they stood; but the other buildings were clearly limned in the chalklike light. And down at one end of the flying-field in the valley, the hangar which housed Maitland's planes stood like a black and white toy building-block, flanked by purple shadow.

Deane sighed. He had loved his work here. Thanks to Maitland's millions, he had here done chemical experimentation on a scale never dreamed of by him before! Not only had he loved the work, but also he had loved the clear crisp air of the North Dakota mountains, and—he smiled wryly to himself at the thought—John Maitland's daughter.

AND now he was about to leave it all. For why? Merely because he had been tricked into coming here. What of it? Tricked into safety. Tricked into work which he enjoyed. Tricked into the intimate companionship of a most exquisite bit of femininity. If this be treason, make the most of it.

Then he thought of Donna Cairns. Poor little Donna. Deprived of her father. Perhaps on the verge of destitution. Believing her beloved father murdered by him, Charles Deane. No! She could not believe it!

And the certainty that Maitland was up to something diabolical. For if not, why the kidnapping of Cairns, and the tricking of himself and Angus Frazer? And anything diabolical that Maitland might be engaged in would be certain to be diablerie on a gigantic scale, for John Cortlandt Maitland never did anything not grandiose.

Yet why leave these pleasant surroundings, to go into danger on what might be a mere wild-goose chase?

At the thought of the danger, Deane smiled and drew in a deep breath. His mind cleared. His thoughts flashed back to the night before the game in the Rose Bowl. Danger? An uphill fight? That was his meat.

With no more regrets, he crossed the clearing and made his way to the cabin occupied by himself and Angus.

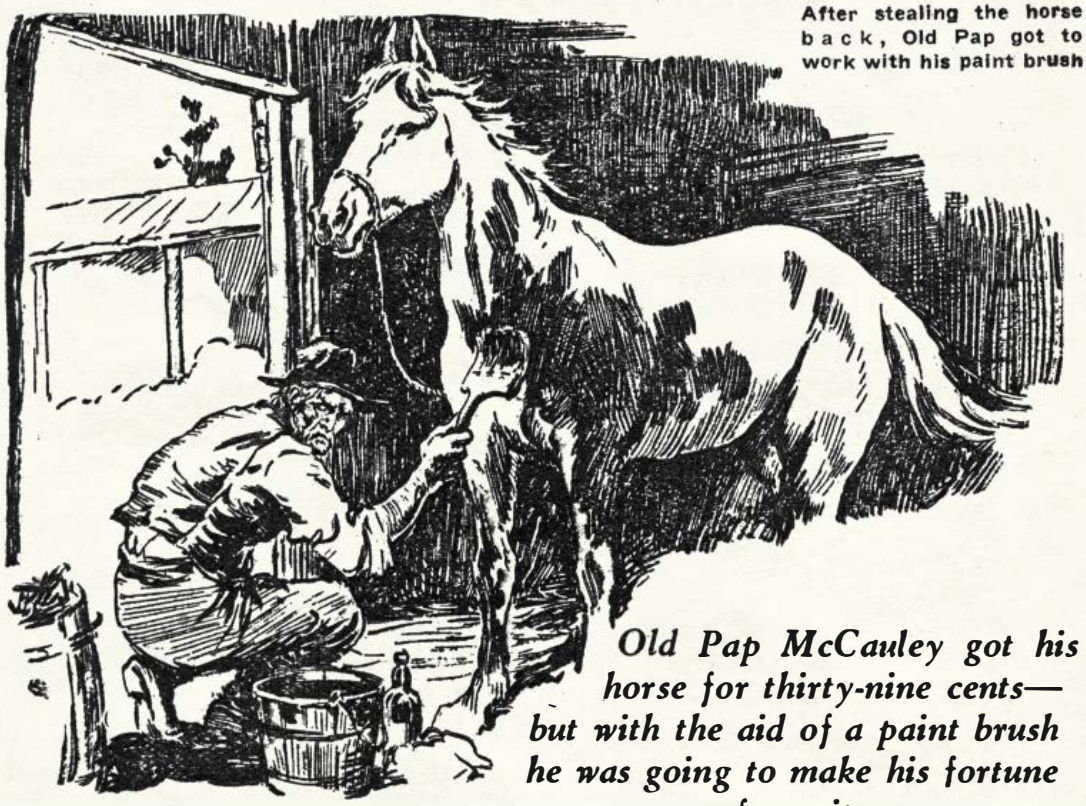
His path led past the main lodge, and as he approached it he heard voices. Ordinarily Charles Deane was no eavesdropper. But having set himself to the task of fathoming Maitland's game, all was grist to his mill.

And furthermore, one of the voices was Maitland's; and the other was—the voice that had talked to him over the telephone the morning he had found Cairn's dead body in his laboratory, the voice that had told him to take the taxicab which had brought him to the brownstone front on Riverside Drive, the house of Maitland.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Hoss-Trade

By HAPSBURG LIEBE



After stealing the horse back, Old Pap got to work with his paint brush

Old Pap McCauley got his horse for thirty-nine cents—but with the aid of a paint brush he was going to make his fortune from it

LITTLE and wizened, scraggly-bearded Old Pap McAuley ambled into the Bad Axe Creek lumber-camp store, bought a nickel's worth of plug tobacco for his pipe, and a box of matches, then said to the lowlander clerk:

"What's this about the super'ntendent a-rafflin' off a hoss?"

"Here's the way it is, Pap." The clerk pointed to a tray of small, sealed envelopes on a near-by shelf. "In each o' them envelopes they's a slip o' paper with a number on it. The numbers runs from one on up to a hundred and thirty. If you draws number one, you pays one cent for your chance. If you draws number seventy, you pays seventy cents. Number a hundred and thirty, o' course, would cost you a dollar and thirty cents. See?"

"Yeuh." McAuley nodded. "Then what?"

"Well," the clerk pursued, "when the chances is sold, we makes a big pasteboard wheel with a hundred and thirty numbered spaces on the rim, spins it on a nail in the center, and shoots through the rim. The number space that the bullet happens to hit, it gets the hoss. Fine animal, too. Gentle as a dog. The super bought him from a stranger, and thought the best way to sell him was to raffle him off."

Old Pap's eyes were crafty now. He bent across the rough counter and whispered: "You see cain't you hold them envelopes up to the light and pick

out the numbers a-runnin' from one up to ten fo' me, and if I gits the hoss I'll gi' you a pocketful o' money. Huh?"

Parsimonious, cantankerous, genuinely mean, old McAuley was, and had been for some years. But he had a daughter that was just about the prettiest thing in the Smoky Thunder Mountain section. So the lowlander clerk smiled as he shook his head.

"Sorry, but I cain't do that, Pap." Quickly he went on: "Today's payday, and these chances will go like hot cakes with butter on both sides as soon as the boys gets in from the woods. Buck Ashford sent me word to hold fifteen chances for him. If you want some, you better grab 'em."

"Buck Ashford, hey?" angrily bit out McAuley. "I'll take one chanst anyhow. Lemme have 'er."

He had exactly fifty cents. If the chance cost more than that, he told himself, he'd refuse it.

HIS number was thirty-nine—and it won the horse! Many an envious woodsman's eye followed him as he rode the animal saddleless out of the camp clearing and into a laurel-lined trail that led down the creek and homeward. His lone daughter came on bare feet to the front doorway of their ramshackle old log cabin in response to his call.

"Looky, Jane Mary," said he, proudly, "at my fine white hoss. Not a black hair on him. Got him in a raffle fo' thutty-nine cents!"

The girl eyed the animal for a few seconds, then she slumped downward an inch.

"Well, now that you got him, pappy, what air you a-goin' to do with him? We'uns cain't feed no hoss, and you ort to know that. We'uns ain't got no more use fo' a hoss 'an a grasshopper has fo' a hip-pocket. Better ride him off and sell him, pappy."

"But I air allus wanted to own a hoss, and I never did have none afore!" cried McAuley.

"Ride him off and sell him," ordered Jane Mary.

She was well within her rights, at that. There were but the two of them, and they lived almost wholly on the little money she'd been able to earn by mending lumberjack clothing. The wizened old mountaineer flared up:

"Ef hit'd 'a' been Buck Ashford which won this yar hoss, hit'd 'a' been all right. But no, hit warn't Buck. Hit war only yore pore pappy!"

The girl shrugged and turned back to her work. She was dyeing her one unpatched dress. Every week or so she did this—using a cheap coldwater dye that washed out easily—and had, in effect, a new dress every week or so. Old Pap thought of that as he sat the white horse at the sagging gate and stared off at nothing. It was sort of pitiful, even to him.

Then Buck Ashford, lean and stalwart and forever grinning, came riding up on a logging-mule.

"Hi, Pap. I couldn't git to the camp in time fo' the raffle. Heared you won the hoss. Want to sell him fo' a good price?"

"Yeuh, but not to you!" McAuley barked so vehemently that Ashford turned his mule and rode away without another word.

Buck lived in a big, hewn-log house all by himself, worked on sublet logging contracts and made considerable money at it. He would have married Jane Mary, would have taken good care of her and her father also, had it not been for—the cussedness, he called it, and he wasn't far wrong—of Old Pap in flatly refusing his permission.

McAuley had no foundation whatever for his dislike of Ashford. The thought of leaving her sire behind, so little and so lone and bitter, had kept the girl from a runaway marriage with Buck.

"He wanted to buy this yar hoss jist because he knowed Jane Mary'd benefit by the money," muttered Old Pap, when Ashford had gone. "He thinks I cain't make a livin' fo' her. I'll jist be derned ef I don't show him, i-god!"

His daughter's dyeing her one whole dress over and over—it was this that gave him his unique plan.

EARLY the next morning he rode toward the foothills farming sections. There he sold the horse for sixty dollars cash. He walked on to the nearest lowland town, and bought a great deal of cheap coldwater dye and a wide paint brush. That night he stole the horse back, rode it into the mountains and concealed it in the tumble-down old blacksmith shop of a deserted logging-camp not very far from his cabin home.

Old Pap was clever, in his way. At noon of the day following, the hidden horse was no longer white. It was a shining and beautiful sorrel!

Before sundown, another foothills farmer had paid him sixty dollars for the animal. McAuley waited until barely dusk for stealing the horse back this time, but at that it was late when he reached home. Jane Mary, of course, was sitting up for him.

"Whar on earth you been, pappy?" she wailed. Her face was wan in the yellow light of the little oil lamp. "Out 'way late last night, and out 'way late to-night. What does hit mean?"

He didn't like to lie outright to her. After all, he *was* fond of her. He said importantly: "Hoss-traders is like doctors. They has to go sometimes when they'uns don't want to. You can stop a-mendin' clothes fo' other people now, Jane Mary, fo' because I air a-makin' a livin' fo' you now. What do you think o' this yar, huh?"

He flashed a thick roll of banknotes, more money than she had ever seen at any one time in her life before.

"Pappy!" she gasped.

McAuley peeled off a few tens and gave them to his daughter. "When you needs more, honey, jist lemme know."

"Did—did you git hit honest?"

There was no evading the question. Old Pap had to lie to her outright then. "Why, shorely," he said. "Tradin' hosses and gittin' paid boot each time air honest, ain't hit?"

She admitted that, and smiled.

In turn the horse became a bay, a claybank, a chestnut, and a roan. McAuley had some difficulty in mixing a blend of colors to make the white horse over into a roan—his eyes were not so good any more, for one thing—but at last he did a good job of it. He and his daughter now had new clothing, and they had new things in the cabin.

"I cain't make a livin' fo' Jane Mary, hey?" he would say to himself frequently. "Wunner what Buck Ashford thinks o' me now?"

But the scraggy-bearded little old mountaineer's mind was not at rest. He'd been a good man during most of his life, and the conscience he had permitted his senile irascibility to throttle was not yet dead.

He stole off down to the deserted logging-camp, very late in the day, to dye the horse black. Since darkness was almost upon him when the job was finished, he led the animal from the tumble-down shop to the clearing and staked it to grass. Just then laurels

that grew along the edge of the near-by woods parted, and the dim form of a tall, bronzed young man stepped into the range of McAuley's vision.

"Howdy," he drawled. He was a stranger. "I air from Nawth Ca'liner, acrost the State line. Looks like a good nag you got thar. Like to buy him, ef you don't ast too much fo' him."

Old Pap blinked. "And ride him back to Nawth Ca'liner, huh?"

That meant going a long way for the purpose of stealing the horse again. On the other hand, it would be a first-class method of getting rid of the animal safely and for keeps. He had used all the horse colors he knew, and repeating would be hazardous.

"I'll gi' you fawty dollars fo' him," said the stranger.

"You air boughten yoreself a hoss, i-god," McAuley said.

Horse and money changed hands. The unknown led the animal away. Old Pap added the banknotes to the roll he carried wedged into a rear trousers pocket, threw his paint brush and pail and the rest of the dyes into the creek, and turned homeward in the gathering darkness.

THE next day was Sunday, when loggers did not work. At four o'clock in the afternoon, Buck Ashford rode a dog-weary mule up to the sagging McAuley gate and hallooed. Old Pap got out of a new rocker and went to the door. Buck wanted to laugh at McAuley's screaming red tie and stiff boiled shirt, but he didn't.

"I unnerstand you air got to be a hoss-trader," soberly began Ashford. "Well, I got a hoss I want you to see."

Jane Mary was visiting her nearest neighbor, the young Widow Ensley, so her father talked to Ashford as he pleased. He heaped abuse and more abuse on Buck's head. By this the caller knew that the daughter of the house was not at home; therefore, he, also, talked as pleased him.

"Pap," said he, "I air about decided Janie would be better off with you in jail, and I shore can put you thar. You want to come along and look at that hoss, or do you want to go to jail?"

His voice had a businesslike ring. McAuley went ashen under his thin, unkempt beard. "Jail—" he muttered. "Jail—"

"Yeuh, jail!" exclaimed Buck, quickly.

"But you—you ain't got no proof!" blurted Old Pap.

"I ain't? You come along, and I'll show you!"

McAuley tried to speak again. The words stuck. He walked unsteadily down to the gate. Ashford dismounted, opened the gate, legged the old hillman to the mule's back and walked off leading the mule.

Twenty minutes, and they were entering the Ashford barnyard. Buck pointed to a rarely beautiful horse that stood beside the watering trough. Old Pap gasped and slid to the ground feet first. Buck said:

"I figgered things out correct, and got a cousin o' mine from Nawth Ca'liner to watch you and not let you know, and then buy the hoss fo' me. You must 'a' done this one pa'ticklar job atter dark, or else yore eyes has gone sorter bad. Hit's proof, ain't hit?"

The horse was not black. It was an impossible color—*a fine, rich navy blue!*

McAuley was speechless. This certainly was proof of his guilt. Ashford smiled as he went on:

"I wouldn't see you put in jail, Pap. Had to skeer you thataway to git you

over yar. Fact is, I've kep' you out o' jail. Them farmers you skint had got together with their bristles up. They'd figgered things out right, too, and with them hit didn't matter that yore makin' yoreself a hoss-thief war fo' the sake o' yore dotter! I paid 'em their money back, and they promised to not even talk. I'll leave hit to you—don't you think I desarve Janie now?"

Old Pap McAuley blinked a sudden mist from his eyes. Bullets never could have broken his cantankerous shell. But this sacrifice and this kindliness had done it.

He thrust a big roll of money into Ashford's hands.

"I air a pow'ful, sinnin' fool, but I knows when I'm licked, i-god," he said jerkily. "You can have Jane Mary. Go over to the Widder Ensley's and tell her. And whilst you air gone, I'll be a-washin' that thar hoss back to white fo' you."

THE END

Peculiar Animals

IF you were to penetrate the thick forests of Madagascar you might stumble over a little furry aye-aye with a face and ears like a cat's, a squirrel's bushy tail and foreclaws like big spiders. The aye-aye has big black eyes for nightly prowls, when it tops off a meal of small birds with a drink of sugar-cane juice—and yowls.

A small hairy animal with a very different disposition is the Tasmanian devil, which looks like a wolf's head mounted on a pincushion with four feet. The young devils climb trees, but soon learn to fight and then don't have to. Tasmanian devils are supposed to be willing to attack anything. A thick mat of fur covers the honey badger, giving the appearance of a hard-boiled pup wearing a fur rug, as the fur is gray on top, black below. Projecting teeth and eyebrows carry out the hard-boiled idea, though they probably don't impress the bees whose hives they rob.

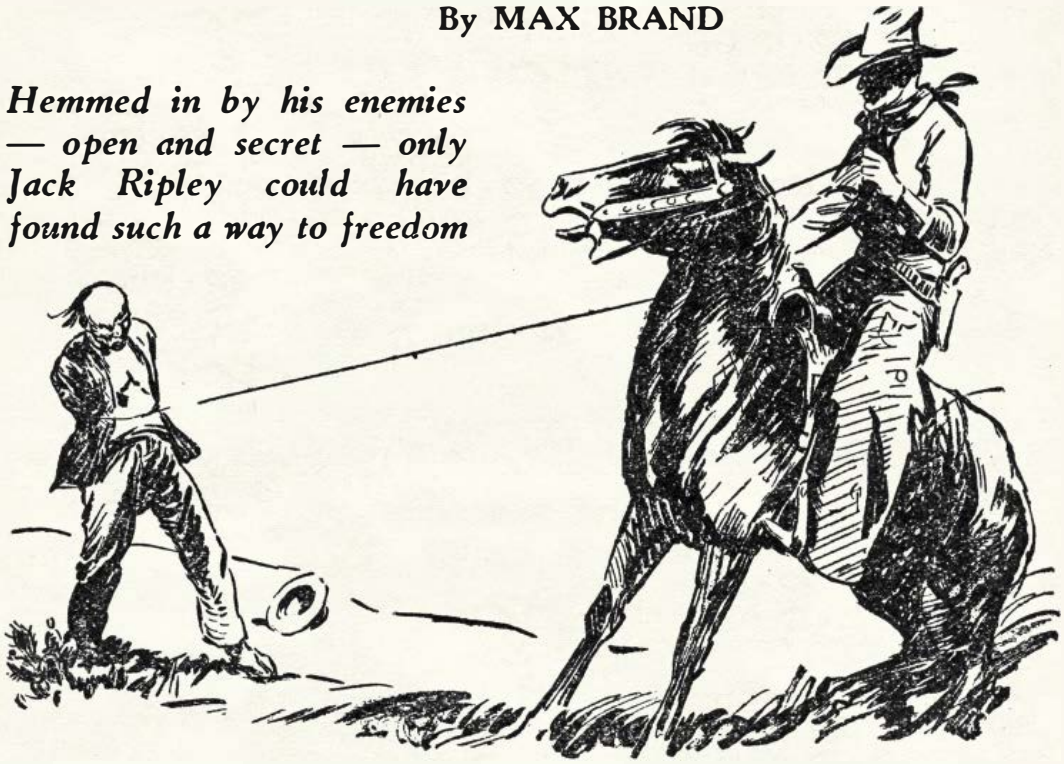
The aard-vark or earth pig is remarkable because of the sudden way he can disappear right into the earth, a feat which we humans might envy. His foreclaws work like boring machines. A long snoot helps him collect ants. Deserted burrows of aard-varks are sometimes occupied by wart-hogs in distress, an animal which seems to unite the pig and the rhinoceros. To a non-student of animals the takin of Asia looks like a dejected buffalo on a small scale, except that it has better balance. However, it is a mere goat. The takin never appears below snow line except to bear young takins, and is extremely hard to photograph. Even scarcer is the pygmy buffalo of the Celebes, about three feet high; so scarce that native Celebesians sometimes deny that there is such a creature. We know better, though.

South America offers something entirely different in the pichi or small pink hairy armadillo. Only five inches long, it wears a jointed rose shell as well as bristles and appears by moonlight on the dunes of Argentina. Timid, the frightened pichi forms a tripod of forefeet and tail, digging into the sand with swift hind feet. A very distant relative, the Chinese pangolin, looks like a fourfooted pine cone with a pink snout. *J. W. Holden.*

Scourge of the Rio Grande

By MAX BRAND

Hemmed in by his enemies — open and secret — only Jack Ripley could have found such a way to freedom



The noose dropped over the shoulders of the howling Chinaman

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

WHEN Marshal Tom Dallas captured young Jack Ripley, handsome bad-man of the Southwest, he made Jack the proposition that in lieu of serving a prison term he go out to "get" Jim Lancaster, leader of a band of smugglers, about whom very little is known. Ripley accepts, "escapes" from the jail, and sets out to locate Lancaster.

Jack meets by chance an old side-kick, Chuck Warren, who takes him to the establishment of Sam Li, a silk and tea merchant. He meets there a shy, beautiful, little girl, named Ching. Jack learns that Sam Li's place is the base of smuggling operations and Jack is introduced to Lancaster. The chief of the smugglers, impressed with Jack's manner and record as a square-shooter, wants to hire him as a guide to bring safely across the line (with a shipment of Chinese boys) a scar-faced Chink named Dong, who is held in great regard by Ching. Jack accepts Lancaster's proposal so that he can get an intimate view of the smugglers' operation methods.

Ripley meets the packet of Chinamen, piloted by Dan Tolliver, Lancaster's lieutenant, and camps with them over the night. He discovers that Dong is being led away from the camp to be shot on "orders from some one higher than Lancaster. Jack rescues Dong from Tolliver, and riding away, they manage to get through safely to Sam Li's place. But after arriving there, Dong mysteriously disappears.

Some time later, while riding, Ripley manages to be alone with Lancaster when Lancaster's bodyguard, Missouri Slim, is left behind because of an accident to his horse. Jack conducts Lancaster to the jail at Dalton and notifies Marshal Dallas. At first, Lancaster's gang try to bribe Jack with $10,000—later they raise the ante to $50,000—and then try to storm the jail, but to no avail. Jack receives word from

This story began in the Argosy for October 20

Ching that she is near by, and while he goes to her, Lancaster escapes. Jack feels that he has been tricked.

Aided by an old friend, Jose Oñate, Jack locates Dong again in a desert shack, tortured and nearly dead. While Jack goes to get a doctor to attend his wounds, Dong once more disappears, evidently dragged away by some one. However, the canny Oñate picks up the trail and Ching and Sam Li are found with Dong in an obscure hide-away in the hills. While Sam Li is apparently busy elsewhere, Dong relates to Ching and Jack of his days in China with Ching's father; how they had gone on a prospecting trip which yielded, after many hardships, a specimen of ore, giving evidence of a fortune to be mined. On their return to the city, they found a revolution in progress, and Ching's father was murdered. Dong also tells of Sam Li's tortures which he had inflicted on Dong in order to find out the location of this gold in China. He discloses that Sam Li is the real leader of the smuggling ring. Shortly after Jack discovers that Sam Li has gone away. Ripley follows; but Jack and Sam Li fall into the hands of Lancaster and his men. Lancaster is planning their death when horses' hoofs are heard not far away.

CHAPTER XXXI *(Continued).*

A DOUBLE HAUL.

MORE hoofbeats came towards them now through the trees and three riders appeared, with the huge form of Sam Li overflowing the saddle on the central horse, his silken robe lifting and fluttering in the wind.

Jim Lancaster threw up both hands and then shouted with amazement and joy.

"Hai, boys!" he yelled. "Is *this* what you got off the top of the hill? Is *this* what was sending the signal to fetch us to the house, here? Was Sam Li up there?"

One of the pair answered: "We got around behind the hill. When he saw us coming, he didn't try to run, even. He simply kept on working his blanket up and down before the fire, spelling out his words faster than ever."

"Did he? Bring him here!"

Sam Li dismounted—stepped down, to be more accurate—and stood vast and calm before Lancaster.

"Now, you double-crossing, yellow-faced baboon, you," cried Lancaster. "Have I got you, or ain't I?"

"Of course you have me!" said Sam Li.

"Are you a double-crossing rat, or ain't you?"

"You know, Jim," said Sam Li, "that I've always been cursed with a brain that's too restless. It is hard for an ample mind to follow a straight, narrow line."

"It ain't hard for a narrow knife to cut a fat throat, though," said Lancaster. "Hey, Barry—jump-up—a couple of you get into the old house, back there, and bring out whatever you find there. You'll find Ching and the scar-face, according to the message off the top of the hill. Treat Ching dead easy, will you, boys?"

The messengers hurried away out of sight around the corner of the barn, and Lancaster turned back to Sam Li.

"My God, Sam," said Lancaster, "I was never happier to see anybody than I am to see you. Only one other—and that's Ripley, here. Think of it—the two of you in one haul! Oh, wasn't I the bright gent to send a pair of the boys up there to the top of the hill!"

"The strong spirits must love you, Jim," said Sam Li. "For see how kind they are to you! They fill your hand. You can close your fingers and destroy the two men you hate the most."

"You wanted to throw Ripley to the dogs—to me, eh? And you got caught in the trap that should of nipped him, only!"

Sam Li's hands were tied behind his back, so that he could not indulge in those big, flowing gestures of which he was so fond, but nevertheless he had a way of nodding his head and moving his shoulders that fairly took the place of the missing freedom.

HIS booming voice rolled through the night. "Have you come to blame the old sinner, Jim? But see how easily I have been caught! A little evil

will cover a long road; a great evil is the bog that catches us. So I have been caught, my friends."

Missouri said: "Lemme slam him in the mug with the heel of my Colt, will you, chief? Just lemme slam him once. I won't hurt him much. I won't spoil him very bad. I just wanta slam him once in the middle of his fat mug."

Jim Lancaster laughed. "Leave him alone," he said. "Let him be, Missouri. When I wind up with him, it'll be something worth watching."

"No, Jim," said Sam Li. "Your anger will begin to soften in you before long."

"Soften?" said Lancaster. "Say that again for me, will you? Do you hear him, boys? Of all the damned crooks and sneaks and traitors and hypocrites in the world, this here Sam Li is the worst, I'll tell a man. And now he says that I'm gunna soften my anger for him?"

"Because you are right, Jim," said Sam Li. "There are a great many evil people in the world, but I suppose that there is none as great a wrong-doer as I am. And for that very reason you'll see that I cannot help being as I am."

"Listen to him," said Lancaster. "Damn my heart, but it's sort of good to hear him oiling up and turning out the talk, ain't it, Missouri?"

"Just lemme slam him once, will you, chief?" begged Missouri.

"I want to hear him. I like to hear him," answered Lancaster, as they voyaged on together. "I want to hear him tell me why and how I'm gunna let him off."

"No, Jim, not let me off," said Sam Li. "But see what a perfect harvest of revenge you have! You are rich with it. And the man who has killed a whole flock of ducks gives one away to the needy."

"By my way of thinking," said Lancaster, "if you were tied to a pole and the sun let to fry you out, and the lard on you rendered till you were down to normal size—if you were kept starving on bread and water till your ribs showed through the four fingers of your fat, that might be a starting point."

"Do that, Jim," said the Chinaman, in his melodious voice. "Yes, do that. It will be a bitter thing. For think how much pains I've been at to build up this gross body of mine! How many flocks of young lambs have passed into me, and the droves of fat, grunting swine, and the soft-eyed beeves, with shambling feet; how many fish have turned brown in the pan for me; how many golden acres of wheat have turned into soft bread for Sam Li; how many groves of bright oranges have been stripped for me; how orchards of apples have shaken their fruit down my throat; what a river of liquor has flowed through me. And to tie poor old Sam Li to a pole, like a bear, and watch him dwindle day by day, while all those droves and groves and rivers oozed out of him—that would be punishment enough, I should say."

Lancaster began to laugh.

"He does me good, damn him," said he. "I like to hear his lingo. I always liked to hear it. Listen to me, you fat pig!"

"Yes, Jim—I listen," said the cheerful Sam Li.

"Do you know that I did for Tolliver?"

"You did for him?" echoed Sam Li. "I want to tell you about him, Jim. There was the vainest man in the world. And he was my slave for life because I gave him enough money to let him put golden teeth in place of the bad ones in the front of his mouth. After that day, he practiced smiling!"

They laughed together, at this, and Sam Li looked at Ripley as though inviting him to join in the mirth.

LANCASTER cut the laughter short, snarling: "Before I did him in, I got the truth out of him. He told me everything. He told me how you'd directed him to kill the scar-face, here, rather than let him come north and see the girl. Now, you fat devil, tell me any reason you could have for that—except *pure* devilishness."

"Not devilishness," said Sam Li. "No, no! Not devilishness, Jim. Only a stroke of practical business, you see."

"Business?" said Lancaster. "I'm listening. You explain, if you can, how that murder could have been good business for you."

"Ah, but that's simple. For several months, Jim, you had been growing restless. It was I who invited you into the smuggling game. It was poor Sam Li who showed you the way to become rich. It was Sam Li who put all the cards in your hand, and made you the Number One boy. But then you grew restless. You seemed to everyone the head of affairs, and you didn't see why you shouldn't be the head, in fact—and throw me out."

"Well, what of it? I'm the head now, Sam Li. And be damned to you."

"Yes, yes. But for a time I held you. Only with a silken string, but I held you. That dear girl, the lovely Ching, when she came down from San Francisco with her story—in her I saw my chance. When she brought me the letter from her friend, the San Francisco merchant, and told me that she had traced an old, scar-faced family servant as far as the boat on which he had left China for Mexico—when she told me that, of course I promised to help her. I promised to have every drove of the coolies searched before they came over the Border, so that her man would be found for her. In the meantime, since she would have to be close to us, day and night, it was better for her to live the part of a Chinese girl in my house. Then, at any moment, we might have the good news for her. And then, also, I could show her to you as a daughter to a friend, so to speak. Do you see, Jim?"

"You pouch-faced old rat!" said Lancaster. "Was Ching the rope that held me? Aye, and she was."

"LET me go on, Jim. We hear at last that the scar-face has appeared. What am I to do? When he reaches Ching and tells her what she wants to know about her father, that is the end. Then she leaves me, and when she is gone, what hold have I over you to keep you from throwing me over and becoming the sole head of the business I had started? No, but with the scar-face gone, I keep Ching waiting, hoping—perhaps for months—and every day or so, Jim Lancaster comes to see her and is grateful to me for keeping her on the Border. An endless chain of services rendered and gratitude given—a chain that would be broken by the arrival of Dong. You see?"

"When you listen to him," said Lancaster, his mouth snarling, "it sounds almost like a good man talking, doesn't it? But after you got hold of Dong for yourself, why didn't you cut his throat and throw him into the river, if you wanted Ching still to stay for a while? Why did you have to beat hell out of him, that way, and torture the poor feller?"

"Because of this, Jim," said Sam Li, and he nodded. "Open the saddle-bag on the left, here."

It was done, and Lancaster drew out a carved, ivory box.

"What the devil!" said Lancaster. "This is where you keep the sacred relic, eh? What had that to do with Dong?"

"Look inside, Jim, and see what it holds now."

Lancaster opened the ivory box and took from it a long, narrow shard of dark stone.

"Light a match and try to look through the stone at the flame," said Sam Li.

The match was struck.

"Do you see the little gold fish?" asked Sam Li.

"It's ore!" cried Lancaster. "It's the richest piece of stuff that I ever looked at in my life! It's *loaded!* What has this to do with Dong?"

"Why, this is the ore sample that Ching's father brought down from the mountains of Tibet. And then the mob of revolutionaries rubbed him out, as you say. And it was I who found this little treasure in the knot of Dong's belt. He brings to Ching the unhappy word of her father's death; he also brings to her the fortune that her father had found. A pretty story of faith and truth, Jim. I knew that you would like it a great deal. You see how my position was changed at once? The mo-

ment I saw that piece of stone with the pretty little golden fish in it, I could forget all about smuggling on the Border. There were swift wings that carried me to a far land. But just where was I to go? That I must learn from Dong."

He sighed, and the sigh was almost a groan. "I did what I could. Perhaps I would have won in a little while. But then came our stupid friend who never steps where he is wanted. Then came this Ripley, and snatched Dong away. Ah hai! It was a rapid moment, yesterday, when the poor, silly man came to tell Ching that Dong had been found! I almost shook myself free from Ripley—but his Mexican held him on the trail—and so you see that from the first, Jim, I've only been working as a good business man should do."

"Aye, listen to him!" murmured Lancaster. Then a new thought struck a chime of anger into his voice. "And when I was still in the game with you, you wanted to put Ripley into my job. Tolliver told me that!"

"With a stupid, good man like Ripley, I could have gone on for a long time," said Sam Li, "and when he hanged, he would have hanged alone. I love company, Jim, but not hanging on the end of a rope."

And again Lancaster laughed, his mirth bursting out heartily and ringing freely through the night.

CHAPTER XXXII.

HOOFBEATS IN THE NIGHT.

RIPLEY had been amazed by the perfect frankness with which Sam Li exposed his hand to Lancaster; yet he could see a reason. Sam Li was playing for his life, and against that stake even the possession of the most fabulous mines of gold could not be counted important.

"What were you doing with your fire-signals, Sam?" asked Lancaster. "Why did you keep on flashing something after my boys were ready to grab you?"

"I was calling for you, Jim," said Sam Li. "I thought that some of your men might be pretty rough with me. But the master is always kinder than the servant. I knew I could appeal to your reason. A man who thinks twice forgets hatred."

"I tell you how well I forget it," said Lancaster. "You see Ripley, here? You know what I'll do to him?"

"I know that he seems to be living, but he is really dead," answered Sam Li.

"And so are you!" exclaimed Lancaster. "Damn you and the mines you talk about in China! Ripley fought me fair; you played friend and double-crossed me. Why, you fat-faced hunk of blubber, you think you've been oiling me down with your talk, do you?"

"Ah, have I, Jim?" asked Sam Li, in the gentlest of his booming voices.

"If there's a hell I can send Ripley to," declared Lancaster, "I'll find two hells for you!"

"Will you, Jim?" said Sam Li. "No, I think I can trust the happy old days more than that!"

"Happy old days?" shouted Lancaster. "Damn you, do you dare to talk to me to my face about 'em? Happy old days? And all the time you were ready to cut my heart out! Ready to double-cross!"

"No, Jim, no!" said Sam Li, and Ripley looked with singular admiration on the vast, fat, beneficent face of the Chinaman; he listened to the rich unction of that voice as to a blessing. And the Chinese liar and philosopher said: "In all those days I looked on you as a brother, Jim. A younger brother. But finally a great temptation came. Virtue is ice, but there is always a sun which can melt it. It took a great, shining sun to make me bad to you, but even when I was evil I thought kindly of you, Jim, and—"

The bony fist of Lancaster cracked suddenly home against the face of Sam Li.

"That ought to shut your mouth for you," said Lancaster.

Sam Li was still. A dark dribbling ran down from his mouth. He had not flinched from the brutal blow.

"Well," said Lancaster, "wipe his mouth for him, Slim."

There was a slight trace of compunction in his voice.

A moment later the voice of Ching was crying out, merrily: " Jim! Oh, Jim!" and there she came around the corner of the barn, with old Dong carried behind her by Lancaster's men.

She ran forward, with her hands outstretched; Lancaster went striding to meet her. " Now—at last you've come!" cried the girl. And she fairly threw herself into the arms of Lancaster to kiss him.

Ripley, sickened, stared at the ground. But their voices still came to him.

" They dragged you a long way from me, Ching," Lancaster was saying. " I've been telling myself that I'd lost the most important trick in the game. But the fellow that stays to the finish sometimes changes his luck. Lord God, how glad I am to see you! You look all made new in the moonlight, Ching. But tell me what I'll do with this hound of a Ripley?"

" Why should I care?" she asked.

" You don't care a bit?"

" Well, he's so stupid that I'm a little sorry for him," she said.

VAGUELY, Ripley tried to fit the parts of the picture together. Had she not been fleeing willingly—trying to leave Lancaster behind her? Had it been sheer compulsion on the part of Sam Li? He was staggered. And more than he was staggered, he was sickened.

" Yeah? Stupid, is he?" remarked Lancaster. " You must be a lightning calculator, honey, because one more of his stupid days and I'd of had my neck stretched by a rope, by my way of figuring. Slim, what'll we do with him?"

Missouri Slim took in a relishing breath before he said: " Go right ahead back to the valley, all of you. The Chinks are ready to raise hell, there, and you need to be on deck. Just leave Ripley behind with me."

" How does that sound to you?" snapped Lancaster, beside the girl.

" Why, Missouri seems to want him—and why not?" asked the girl.

" You don't care?" asked Lancaster.

" Care?" she demanded. " Why should I care?"

" It does me good to hear you," said Lancaster. " There was a while when I thought his handsome mug might of made a difference with you. Missouri, I'd sure like to let you have your hand with him, but he knows some things that I could use—about Dallas. We'll take him back to the valley with us. Hurry it up, some of you. Chuck Warren, where are you?"

" Here!" called Chuck.

His twisted face came looming through the dust and the moonshine.

" Take the lead and pelt back there to the valley as fast as you can hop. There's only two men back yonder, and there's doggone near two hundred mad Chinks boiling up. Make it fast!"

" It ain't luck," Missouri was assuring Ripley. " It ain't even a chance for luck. It only means that me and Jim are gunna have more time to think things out. It's better this way, for us. I wouldn't wanta get rid of you too soon. I wouldn't wanta have it all over with!"

" Wait till I look at the Chink," Lancaster was saying. " This is him, is it? This is the scar-face? Doggone me, he ain't a pretty sight, Ching. Is he dead or alive?"

Lancaster turned suddenly, and lifted a hand.

" Wait a minute!" he exclaimed. " Hold on, Chuck. Steady, boys. Don't you hear hoofbeats? Who could be riding this way, this time of the night?"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

" WHO IS BOSS HERE?"

RIPLEY and all the rest could hear, now. For a number of riders suddenly crashed through the underbrush of the woods.

" What in hell-fire is this?" demanded Lancaster. " Sam Li, you fat-faced snake, do you know what this means?"

" How can I tell who will be riding to

enjoy the moonlight, Jim?" asked the always gentle voice of Sam Li.

Six riders burst out from the shadows of the trees.

"It's Klein—and Rudy Wallace—and Skinny—all our boys," said Chuck Warren, lowering the muzzle of the rifle which he had raised.

"But what the devil are they doing up here?" asked Lancaster, putting down his own gun.

The six newcomers drew up close, dismounting.

Lancaster bawled out: "Who gave you orders to come up here?"

"Chuck—Rudy—my boys—cover the rest of 'em!" cried Sam Li. And his voice, now, rang out like a mighty gong that sent metallic vibrations through the body and the very soul of Ripley.

He saw the flash of many guns.

"Lancaster! Cover Lancaster!" roared Sam Li. "Steady, my lads, and no shooting."

They stood in agonized suspense. Every face that the moonlight showed to Ripley was contorted with an agony. Lancaster and his men, more scattered and some of them surprised before they had a chance to draw, would nevertheless be a bitter morsel for the others to swallow. Lancaster himself had a gun in either hand, ready to begin.

But the deep, rich voice of Sam Li continued, again: "You see, Jim, there are two sides to the game!"

Lancaster shouted: "Klein—Rudy—all of you—what in hell do you mean? Who's been paying you hard cash? Who's your boss, here?"

The tallest and the thinnest of the six answered: "Hello, Jim. We been getting plenty of dough from you, but we been getting a lot more from the Chink, yonder. He's the one we call boss in this outfit."

He side-stepped to Sam Li, and cut the cords that tied his hands.

"Let us be peaceful, Jim," said Sam Li, pouring oil on those troubled waters. "If we examine everything, we see that we are about equal. When you were planning to throw me out of my position—when you were going to take over all the work for yourself, and open a new mouth in Sam Li's throat so that he could drink plenty of dirty Rio Grande water, was it strange that Sam Li should make a few friends among the boys—like poor Tolliver—and these?"

"All the Chinks in the world—I wish they were in hell!" said Lancaster.

"That is angry talk, Jim," said Sam Li. "The truth is probably shining behind clouds. Let us brush the clouds away. Then what do you see, Jim? You see that while you and I were working together, everything went very smoothly. But when we tried to separate, when each of us tried to swallow all the profits, then we came to grief. Isn't it a lesson that we should go back to the old ways, my friend?"

"I dunno," groaned Lancaster. "I had the whole damn world in my hand—and now it's no better than an even break! I'm kind of sick! Sam Li, those last words that you spelled out on the hill—after you saw my two men—that was a message to your own men, to come fast!"

"Yes, yes. Of course," said the Chinaman. "And like good fellows they rode hard and fast."

"And you might of had him dead an hour ago," commented Missouri Slim.

"Damn you and what might have been!" snapped Lancaster.

He took a great, audible breath and then exclaimed: "Well, Sam Li—maybe you're right. Each of us tried to crook the other fellow. Each of us was wrong!"

"My right hand waits for you, to forgive everything and to welcome a new day," said Sam Li.

Several of the men spoke at once, urging the reconciliation.

The thin fellow who had been spokesman before now, added: "You two gents got plenty of brains, plenty of cash, but you need one another. Shake hands with him, Jim."

"I kind of hate to do it," said Jim Lancaster. "But it's the best way. Ching, give me a woman's hunch. Is this the right thing for me to do?"

"You know, Jim," said the girl, "that living is better than dying, for everyone."

At this he laughed. "We got an even chance each way," he said. "But before the shooting was over, one thing is sure. You and *me* would be dead, Sam, no matter what happened to the other. Give me your fat paw. Now, you damned old liar, we're shaking; we're quits; and we start on the old basis, level. Is that right?"

A good, hearty shout from the men who had been teetering on the verge of battle as on the edge of a cliff gave the answer in the place of Sam Li's voice. The handshake completed the bargain. And at last, final hope dwindled and disappeared from the mind of Ripley. Out of the fight there might have come a dim chance of liberty to him.

But that did not matter so much. Whatever happened, the girl was a traitor a thousand times over. And that knowledge struck him like a bullet through the brain.

HE had a dreamlike knowledge, also, that there was a bustle of people about him, and that he was being put on the back of Hickery Dickery again. He saw the horselitter rigged and Dong laid in it. He knew they were heading back for a valley where, Lancaster had said, there were two hundred Chinese on the verge of revolt. But all of this was like happenings in sleep. Only one thing was clear—the picture of the girl, riding beside Lancaster, laughing and chattering with him.

Chuck Warren's twisted face appeared beside Ripley.

"And here you are, Jack, eh?" he said. "Well, none of us thought that we'd ever have you except dead! Of all the tough hombres that we've ever ridden after, you were the hardest!"

Ripley looked blankly at him.

He was thinking of that bargain which he had made with Lancaster—that bargain that the girl could go free—she who had run with extended arms to meet the gunman and kiss him—she who now rode at Lancaster's side—she who did not care what became of Ripley—because he was so stupid.

Chuck Warren went on: "We get a good split out of the chief because you're cornered and caught. But tell me something, Jack. Why did you want to give yourself up just for the sake of the girl? Did you figger that she gave a damn about you? Was that what you were thinking about?"

"I wasn't thinking," declared Ripley. "I was only being a damn fool."

"Yeah?" said Chuck Warren. He sighed and shook his head.

"The same way with me," he said. "The females can sure stop the clock for me—yeah, and turn the hands back, too! But what's gunna happen to you now, Ripley?"

Ripley made no answer. He could see an answer to that question far better than he could speak it in words.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

UNRULY CHINKS.

THEY came to hills which lifted rocky knees and great, gleaming heads and shoulders out of the sands. A narrow pass opened through the cordon and they were still in the middle of this way when Ripley began to hear a rapid, excited babbling of distant voices.

"The Chinks are warmin' themselves up," said Missouri Slim. "They was warmin' themselves up for a coupla days. I dunno why for except that yaller rat that tried to get away, and I shot him on the wing. It seemed to bother 'em, some. Like they was regular people, the same as you and me, chief!"

"You never should of plugged that Chink," said Lancaster. "On this side of the river, it's murder, is what it is."

"Just for shootin' a Chink? You gunna call that murder?" asked Missouri, with a good deal of indignant passion. "I give him a fair run for his money, too. I wouldn't make it easy. I took him left-handed and only got him the second shot.

If that ain't sporting, I wanta know what is!"

"Leave it be," soothed Lancaster. "Only, there's a lot of gents that wouldn't understand your idea of good sport. The next time, let the Chink run, and catch him up with a rope. Hear me?"

"Yeah. But it's hell," said Missouri. "Treating them like they was humans, pretty near. It's hell. There ain't any more education in those Chinks than there is in a pack of cards. It kind of boils me up, is what it does, when I see them treated so fancy."

Racing hoofbeats ran at them; a horseman shot out into view and waved his hand at them. He began shouting before he reined in his horse.

"Hurry it up, Lancaster, will you? The Chinks are gettin' pretty high. Move it along, will you?"

"What's the matter with you dummies?" demanded Lancaster. "I told you boys to hold that job down. I didn't tell you to come hollerin' for help to papa! Get back there on the job, will you? And get fast! What's the matter with you?"

The messenger jerked his mustang around. A whirl of dust fanned up from around him.

"Knives! That's what's the matter. The damn Chinks have got knives—and if they try to jump us—we're gunna sow a lot of yaller meat in the ground. That's what!"

He was off again, his mustang grunting as the spur went into its flanks like a knife.

"Take it easy, boys!" said Lancaster. "We'll be there in a minute, anyway, and if we start racing, the first thing you know, Mr. Jack Ripley is gunna be slidin' away from us on his gray mare. And maybe Sam Li is too fat to catch up. What's the matter with you Chinamen, anyway?" he demanded of Sam Li. "I give that gang of Chinks rice every day, three times, and a whole flock of rabbit meat, a couple of days back, too. And just because them rabbits was a little high, the whole doggone lot get sick on me and say they're poisoned, or something. I never handled such a doggone, unreasonable bunch of Chinks in all my life!"

Instead of waiting for an answer, he swung his horse over beside Ripley, and muttered: "I could pass you out cold, now, instead of bothering about you, Jack. But this leaves us at evens, now. Even-up for the night—that night back there in Dalton. That sock in the face you gave me, it done me a lot of good. But we're even-up for everything, and from now on you catch hell as fast as I can figger it out."

He pulled back from Ripley. "It's all right, Ching," went on Lancaster. "I been held up on transportation. Sam Li used to work that all out for us, and now there's a little tie-up, that is why the Chinamen are bunched in the ravine. I'll have 'em all cleared out in the morning. There's plenty of transportation showing up then! Hey, Jerry!"

"Aye?" said Jerry.

"Where would the Chinks be picking up knives, anyway?"

"I dunno," said Jerry. "That fool of a cook, he *would* always carry an extra case of knives. I told him many's the time, but he would have to have 'em along. He thinks that he's still a trader in the South Seas. He's got a can of beads along, too. Where does he think we travel? Through a lot of native nigger countries, or something like that?"

They turned the corner of the rocks and dipped sheer down a narrow trail towards the mouth of a box cañon. Across the entrance, a number of riders moved back and forth; and half in shadow, half in moonlight, the Chinese contraband were held in the throat of the cañon by the usual rope corral. They were not in their usual places for sleep, however, but moving here and there, and as they chattered, something brighter than the gesture of empty hands flashed now and then.

"Yeah, they're all heated up," agreed Jim Lancaster, "but we'll cool 'em down again!"

A ripple of voices and then a yell went

up from the Chinese as they saw the new riders approaching.

That long and undulating cry was a song of despair. Ripley listened to it with a deep recognition. The whole scene was to him like something remembered, as if he had entered the place long ago, and in another age had lost his life here as he would lose it now. For one thing was certain—that Lancaster would not let him escape. He had learned too much; but beyond that, he had made a shameful stain on the record of Lancaster.

He pulled back his horse beside Dong, and as the litter swayed painfully from side to side, as the horses shortened their steps down the grade, the coolie called softly up to him: "Ching? Ching?"

"Dong's calling for you," he said to Ching.

She turned her horse back from Lancaster, at once; as Ripley drifted the gray mare rapidly ahead, he heard her voice making a gentle music over the coolie. Dong, at least, would never be able to see through her. Love would blind him, and that was as well. It seemed to Ripley that clear-seeing is no blessing, in this world of ours. Was it not far better to be equipped with a blind faith that refuses to question all that lies around us? If he could live, in that manner he would face the rest of life.

HE had been a fool. He had galloped merrily through the world, as though happiness were composed of the miles that a man covers! Now, if he had another chance, he would understand that the majority are right, those who bow their necks to a yoke and pull heavily to move a burden; for the burden is only the weight of true happiness. He had gone with empty hands. Like a wind he would disappear and be forgotten.

They were down on the level, now, and drawing into the mouth of the valley, as Sam Li said: "Let me offer you advice, Jim. You know that truth may be spoken even by fools and fat men."

"Fire away, brother," said Lancaster.

"Nobody ever called you a fool. Not while I was listening. What can you offer to put that gang of Chinks to sleep?"

"Well, you have Dong," said Sam Li.

"Him? The poor dummy that you beat up so bad? What can he do except waste Ching's time?"

"He can sing to them, and make them answer," said Sam Li. "Put him where they can hear him well. And then I'll tell him to sing to them. You'll see what happens, Jim."

"Why, it's such a damn funny idea," said Lancaster, "that there may be something in it." Then he added: "But why shouldn't you talk to them, Sam? You do that. We'll ride right down close to the corral and you make 'em a speech, will you?"

"Yes. Gladly," said Sam Li. "But China is such a great country, brother, that we cannot understand what every man from China says. A great many of those men speak Cantonese, and that is a language of which I know only a few words. However, I'll talk to them and try to find out why they are unhappy."

"It's the spoiled rabbit meat," said Lancaster.

"No. Not the food. It must be something else. I shall try to draw it from them," said Sam Li.

They took a course, therefore, that led down from the slope and straight past the face of the corral. A portion of it lay under the steep shadow cast by the moon from the nearest cliff. The rest of the crowd was almost as well illumined as though sunshine were falling.

Ripley, looking down into the faces of those people, thought that he had never seen so much brutal and ugly distortion of human features. As they saw the riders coming towards them, they pressed in so close that the ropes of the corral bulged.

"Beat 'em back!" commanded Lancaster.

A pair of his men rode close to the rope fence, using their quirts right across the bare faces of the Chinamen. And to the bewilderment of Ripley, the yellow men

hardly flinched from the blows. He literally saw the streaks and the welts left by the lashes, and still the men of the Orient remained steadfast, as though they were frozen in place.

A singular terror ran through the body of Ripley. He had felt it once before when he watched a grown man hypnotized. So these Chinamen seemed to be held fast by an uncanny power.

Dong, raising his voice to a plaintive waver, called out a few short phrases in a monotone. A groaning ripple of sound instantly passed through the mass of the prisoners.

And then a man stirred among the thick-packed throng. He followed the litter of Dong right down the side of the fence. Now and then he beat at the people around him, and they instantly pressed to the side and gave him way through the jam. He seemed a privileged character.

He was not very big, but his face could be selected at a glance from those around him. It was very large across the skull and very narrow below—starved beneath the great cheekbones until he seemed like a famished man about to die.

Now and then he called out something in a howling voice. Now and then Dong seemed to make an answer, until Sam Li reined his horse back and stretched out a huge, threatening hand towards the helpless man in the litter.

He barked out a few rough words, and Dong was still.

"What's the matter?" asked Lancaster.

"There are things that this coolie can tell to the others—and I was afraid that he might be telling them in his Cantonese. I could not be sure."

"How about here?" asked Lancaster. "How about talking to them now?"

"This is a good place," agreed Sam Li.

He halted his horse and held up both arms, the loose silken sleeves flowing down like water about the great arms.

"Make it slow, will you, Sam?" asked Lancaster. "So's Ching can repeat it for me. Ching, d'you know Cantonese as well as Sam Li's dialect?"

"I know them both," she nodded.

"Tell me what Sam says," directed Lancaster. "It'll be something worth hearing, the damned old oily artist!"

The great voice of Sam Li made music, pouring through the moonlight over that mob of wild Chinamen. In his impressive pauses, the quick voice of Ching interpreted:

"All my fortunate brothers—now that you are entering into a free land—now that you have left slavery behind you—now that you are beginning to be your own masters—why are you impatient?"

Ripley saw and heard the breathing of the many Chinese inside the ropes. They seemed to be breathing together; there seemed to be one heart in them. Their faces were upraised a little. Sweat polished the bronze skin, sweat and the moonlight that flowed over them. He saw above all the little man with the great skull and the starved face. His body was swaying from side to side, so that his head seemed to be making a sign of negation.

"A long road is not covered in one step," Sam Li was saying. "The boy is not a man in one day—one mouthful does not fill the belly—and you must endure and be patient for a little time. All of these people on horseback want to be your friends. They cannot speak your tongue. Their ways are new to you. But you are also new to them—"

Here the man with the face of a skull cried out in a swift jabbering and the whole mob of those Chinese put back their heads and howled. The shrill, wailing sound stopped the heart of Ripley. It stopped the speech of Sam Li, also.

"This is no damn good," said Lancaster. "What's the matter with you, Sam?"

"Well," said Sam Li, as the howl of his countrymen died down, "even if you put green spectacles on a donkey, it cannot get fat on wooden chips."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Lancaster.

"All of these," said Sam Li, with a sweeping gesture, "have been told about a green land of plenty. And they have

sand in their throats and sand in their eyes."

Lancaster called: "Chuck, fetch me out that little Chink with the bald skull and the skinny face, will you?"

The rope instantly fled from the sure hand of Chuck Warren. The noose dropped over the shoulders of the Chinaman who had started the howling. Two pairs of hands dragged him out of the corral like a fish out of water.

CHAPTER XXXV.

CHING'S AVOWAL.

WHEN the man from the corral was put upright before him, Lancaster said: "Bring the other one down—bring the scar-face. What he yipped in the first place was what boiled up this other Chink. And what Starvation Willie yelled was what started the whole gang hollering. Sam, ask Dong what he said, will you?"

Sam Li rattled words at Dong, and received a brief answer.

"He says," replied the giant Chinaman, "that when he came near the crowd he simply called out to them that he was their singer and that his heart was happy when he saw them again, because they were as brothers to him."

"D'you believe that that's the truth?" asked Lancaster.

"It may be the truth," said Sam Li. "Dong is a simple man. You and I, Jim, think too quickly for our tongues to keep always on the one straight road."

"Speak for yourself, John Chinaman," answered Lancaster. "Go on, Sam. Talk to Starvation Willie and ask what's eating him."

Sam Li spoke. And as the little Chinaman answered it was the girl who made the translation.

"Oh my father, it is hard for a fat man to listen to one who has a thin belly. We are hungry. Rice is not enough to feed us. Our minds are hungry. We are going into a strange country. There is no green grass. The trees are dying. The mountains have strange faces. Kind ghosts cannot follow a man such a great distance. We shall never see happiness again! In the day, the ground burns under our feet; our masters beat us with whips; we are not happy; we are—"

The voice of the little Chinaman rose to a steady wailing; and a sort of vocal shudder ran groaning through the crowd as it took up his yell.

"Throw the fool back into the corral!" commanded Lancaster.

He added: "Hurry! This looks damned bad. I can see a lot of bare knives in that crowd!"

Ripley had seen them, also—quick, obscure flashings like the gleaming of bright eyes.

The little Chinaman was picked up by Warren and another and literally thrown back among his fellows, landing over the ropes sprawling on the heads and shoulders of his companions.

"Now, Sam Li, these are your people. Tell us how to ride herd on 'em? They're getting tough," said Lancaster. "They'll be making a break, before long."

"There is Dong, who used to sing to them," said Sam Li.

"Can you trust him?" asked Lancaster. "Won't he tell them what's been happening to him?"

"I'll listen. Unless he sings the strangest Cantonese, I shall be able to understand. And here is Ching. She can make out every word that he says."

"Good," said Lancaster. "Let's get back from the corral and then give Dong a chance to tune up."

They retreated a little distance to a white, smoothly rounded hummock of sand half way between the corral and the mouth of the cañon. There they halted; Missouri Slim was constantly at the side of Ripley, watching him as though he were sighting down a gun.

Lancaster commanded: "Tell the damn dummy, there, to open up and sing to those dogies, will you?"

They had taken Dong from the litter

and made for him a sort of reclining chair in the sand. There he lay with his head back, and as Sam Li spoke sharply to him, he uttered a long, wavering note. His head began to sway a little from side to side as he continued the phrases of his song.

He paused. The Chinamen in the corral milled around as before, and the same broken chattering rattled through the moonlight and the blackness of the shadow from the west.

"It's no good," said Lancaster. "You can see that. No damn good at all. Ching, I'm going to get you out of here. Missouri, you can take care of these two—"

"I want to stay," said the girl.

She said something in Chinese to Dong. The coolie nodded and began another chant, on a higher, thinner note. This time, as he paused, a scattering of strange song came back to him from the corral.

"You hear?" said Sam Li. "Now they'll all be singing, soon. Men that sing cannot use knives for fighting, Jim."

"I always said you had a head on your shoulders," said Lancaster. "I always said it, and it's true. Listen to 'em, now!"

The milling in the corral had stopped utterly. And from the contraband Chinese wailing answers were going up at the intervals of Dong's singing.

Finally he reached the end. Ripley could hear him panting.

"That'll hold 'em for a little while," said Lancaster. "Tell Dong to keep it up. I'm glad we brought him along. It'll be morning before long, and then if the Chinks start anything, the light'll be better for the guns."

He added: "Come here, Ching. Come here and sit with me. I gotta lot to tell you. You see that mob of Chinks? I'm gonna make so much dough just out of that one gang that you and me could take a trip around the world on it, and hit the high spots all the way. But we've got to settle about Ripley, first."

"Yes," said the girl, coming close to Lancaster, and smiling up at him. "What shall we do with him?"

"As long as he's alive for the boys to see him or even to think about him," said Lancaster, "they'll be remembering the one man that came the nearest to putting me down. We've got to polish him off, Ching. You might as well know that!"

"I suppose so," said the girl, and the calmness of her voice was a cruel torture to Ripley. "But I know the best way."

"What's the best way, Ching? You tell me!"

"Put him on his horse and send him scooting up the valley. Put the whip on *his* back, and hear him yell as he runs his mare!" said the girl.

Lancaster laughed.

"You can be a mean little devil, Ching," he said. "That's from living with Sam Li, I guess. What do you think about this Ripley, though, if you wanta have me turn him loose?"

"He is very stupid, Jim. He is the most stupid man in the world."

"Yeah, and how stupid do you make him out?" asked Lancaster.

"Come!" said the girl.

She led Lancaster straight to Ripley, where he sat in the sand, tied hand and foot, close to Dong. She snapped her fingers above the head of Ripley.

"Look up and tell the truth!" she commanded. "At the very time when I was making a fool of you, did you not tell me that you loved me, Jack?"

Ripley rolled his head back on his shoulders and stared at her. The moonlight fell like a silver magic over her. And her smile and her eyes gleamed through the shadow.

"Aye," said Ripley, "I said it then. I say it now. Even if you had your teeth in my throat—I'd still say it!"

His own words surprised him. They had come suddenly out of his heart.

Lancaster made a great, bawling laughter.

"Doggone me if he ain't moonstruck by you, Ching," he said. "But you're wrong. He's a fool about you, but he ain't a fool about other things. He's made me worse trouble than anybody I've ever hooked up against. But wait a minute.

Maybe I could still do some kind of business with him. Listen, Jack. Would you work with me to rub out old Dallas?"

Ripley did not hesitate. He was so inured to the thought of death, now, that he hardly felt a shadow of temptation at the proposal.

"Dallas is a friend of mine," he answered.

"Damn you!" shouted Lancaster. "He's the friend of a dead man, then. D'you know that? Ching, you're right. This here is a fool, but—"

"Jim!" called the big mellow voice of Sam Li.

"What part of this'll you have?" asked Lancaster.

"Do you think you are safe with that girl?" asked Sam Li.

"Safe with her? What you mean?"

"Brother," said Sam Li, "the thing that is nearest the heart is often the most deadly. You are sure of her, but suppose that she has been kind to you all this time tonight only because she hopes to make you kind to the other man?"

"What!" shouted Lancaster.

"Take her in your arms, brother!" chuckled Sam Li.

"Sam Li!" cried the girl.

"What's the matter, honey?" asked Lancaster. "What the devil does the Chink mean? Kiss me, Ching, and tell him that he's crazy."

He held his arms half around her when she shrank away from him with a moan.

"Don't touch me!" she gasped.

"Hold on! Hold on!" exclaimed Lancaster. "What's this all about?"

"Keep your hands from me!" cried Ching.

She backed away from Lancaster, and Ripley watched in utter amazement.

"What's the matter with my hands?" demanded Lancaster.

"There's blood on them!" said the girl.

"Lookat, Ching. Don't start being finicky," urged Lancaster.

"I thought I could stand it—for a little—but I can't—I can't stand it! Keep away from me. Don't follow me with your hands! Don't touch me!" shrilled the voice of Ching.

Old Dong began to struggle to rise from his chair of sand. Sam Li held him in place.

"Now, what in hell is this all about? Blood on my hands? Of all the damnedest things that I ever heard!" said Lancaster. "Ching, what's busted loose in you?"

"I loathe you," said the girl. "I've always detested you. I've put up with you for the sake of finding Dong. Now I can't stand it. I'd rather die—I'd rather have a leper touch me!"

"She means it," said Lancaster. "Yeah, she sure means it. And I been the fool all the time!"

"Brother," said Sam Li, "you know that the mind of a girl is the mind of a child. It shines and darkens many times a day and—"

"Shut up!" thundered Lancaster.

"Lemme hear the rest of it," said he to the girl. "There never was a time when you gave a hang for me. You've had your head full of another man all the while, have you? Tell me who he is, then, you crooked little rat."

"He's here!" said the girl.

She had been hurrying back from the advance of Lancaster, and now she paused at the side of Ripley, and her hand reached out towards him, fumbling blindly.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE POWER OF SONG.

RIPLEY sat cross-legged in the sand, close to Dong, and the girl slipped down beside him. She clung to him. The shudder of her body ran through his flesh.

"I couldn't stand it!" she whispered. "I couldn't stand it!"

And a wind of darkness blew through the mind of Ripley, and streaming fires burned in the gloom of it. He could not speak. There was the sing-song chant of Dong filling the interval, and then the

roaring chorus of the Chinamen from the corral.

"I don't mind it so much," said Lancaster. "It's one in the eye for me. But I couldn't learn no younger. You—Ching—you—"

Here wrath stuffed a fist down his throat and he could not speak again for a moment.

"Lookat," said Missouri, "ain't it better this way? Lemme rub out Ripley—and that gives the gal a chance to watch him go—"

"No!" screamed Ching.

"You gotta brain, Slim," said Lancaster. "But I need to think for a spell."

He turned. "I'm kind of sorry that I socked you in the mug, back there, Sam Li," he said. "The kind of ideas that you have, I could use one of 'em, just now."

"We have become full partners, Jim," said Sam Li. "You see—I love Ching—and yet I've pulled the darkness away from your eyes so that you could see her. In all things we must work together. Even as far as the gold mine in China."

"Aye," said Lancaster, "I was a fool to try to get along without you. A plain fool. But back there in the town, when I thought that you'd slipped away from me—when I made sure that the ivory box that used to hold your god—or whatever you call it—was gone—well, I went sort of crazy. I wanted to bump you off."

"Will you kiss me now, Jack?" said the girl.

He kissed her.

"I want you to talk to me, Ching," he said. "I'm pretty staggered. I want you to talk to me."

"I love you," said Ching. "From the moment you came into the house of Sam Li, I loved you. I sat up that night and held my face between my hands. I had to hold it—because otherwise I would have started laughing, or crying. I lay on the bed, face down. I kept saying: 'Jack Ripley! I love Jack Ripley!' And I didn't believe that it was love, either. I thought that love went step by step. But this was a pillar of fire. It carried me up so high that I could see the whole of the world. I could pick the world up in my hand and blow it away in dust. I had to keep from blowing the world away. Do you think I'm crazy, Jack?"

"Listen to 'em," said Lancaster.

"Women are like food," said Sam Li. "We cannot always be hungry. Music makes us think of women. Flowers and the breath of flowers makes us think of them. We are our own destroyers, Jim. Can't you see how that is true? It is love that we are in love with. White men and yellow men—all in love with love. But tomorrow rubs out today. And one woman rubs out another."

"Say that again," said Lancaster.

"A man in love is a child again," said Sam Li. "Then only one moment in the day is the beautiful moment; only one grape in the cluster is delicious. But tomorrow you will see things in a better way. He will be dead, Jim, and her face will be swollen; her face will be blotched. Grief makes a woman ugly, and grief will make you hate her, because the grief is not for you. I, Sam Li, tell you that within twenty-four hours you will be a free man!"

"You're never wrong, Sam Li," said Lancaster. "Only when you made the play agin me—then you were wrong. But all the other times you're right. Talk some more. It does me a lot of good, the hearing of you!"

"WHEN I went up there to Dalton," said the girl, "I wanted to hold you until Jim Lancaster was set free, because still I thought that he was the only man who could bring Dong to me. He owned the Border, and he would find Dong for me. But I wanted to hold you with my hands, Jack; and every silly word I said, when I lied and made confusions—every word I said, I was loving you more and more. Couldn't you feel that? I went away blind. I was blind with crying. I heard your voice calling me, when I was on the first floor. I had to run, and I didn't know where I was going. Do you believe me, Jack?"

" I've always believed you," said Ripley. " Even when I knew you were lying to me. Love is a way of believing, I suppose. I wish—God, how I wish that I had my hands free and my arms, to hold you. But that doesn't matter. Talk, Ching. I'd rather be blind than deaf, if I could hear you talking in the darkness."

" Dong has to know," said the girl. " He used to be my rickshaw man when I was too young to have a rickshaw. He used to make one and pull me around the garden. I used to hitch reins to drive him. He used to balk. Sometimes he ran away with me.

" When I was very sick, once, the only thing that made me go to sleep was Dong, singing. He used to sing all night for me, when I was sick. So I have to tell Dong."

She added: " First I'll tell him that you are my man."

She spoke, and Dong, panting from his singing, answered briefly.

" He says: ' That is true. Who could you have except the man that is my father?' Tell me, Jack. Do you think that Dong is very ugly?"

" I never thought so from the start," said Ripley.

A hand gripped him by the hair and jerked his head back. The lean, long, half-witted face of Missouri scowled down at him beyond the vast length of arm.

" What keeps me from battin' you right across the face?" asked Missouri, with the heel of a Colt raised, ready to keep the threat.

" Leave them be!" commanded Lancaster. " That ain't even good enough to be a start. Sam Li is givin' me ideas about him."

Slowly Missouri relaxed his hold, and stepped back.

" I dunno why it is," said Missouri, " but it sort of gripes me when I see him with the gal leanin' agin him, loving him with her eyes that way. Look at her hand strokin' his hair smooth agin. It makes me kind of wanta scalp him!"

" You're going to have your innings with him," said Lancaster. " Sam Li, tell that Dong to start in singing some more, will you?"

" I'm going to die," said Ripley. " And I'm not bothered about that."

" If you die, I'll follow you," said the girl.

" No," said Ripley. " There's no waste to a thing like this. I've been riding all over the world, trying to find happiness. And that was wasted. But this isn't wasted, Ching.

" Poor Lancaster, I pity him, and all the rest that are going to keep on living. And you're going to live with them, but in a different way. Hickery!"

The mare came to him.

" There's the only other thing that ever cared much about me," said Ripley. " Put up your hand and rub her between the eyes. She'll know you, now. And listen to me, carefully. The time is going to come when they'll have their hands full. They'll be pretty busy—with me or with something else. And that's the time for you to swing into the saddle on Hickery. And then race her."

" I'll never leave you," said the girl.

" You will," said Ripley, " there's no other command that I can ever give you, but I give you that one. Do you hear me, Ching? I want to think, from now to the end, that you're going to have a chance at life and remembering me. Nothing else will remember me, except you and Hickery."

She kept the palm of her hand against his cheek. The fingers were cool. Her whole body was cool. There was no warmth in her. There was only fragrance.

" Ching," said Ripley, " isn't it true that Dong has those crazy coolies in the hollow of his hand? Then why shouldn't he use them for us?"

" How can he?" asked the girl.

" I've been thinking. If he could start them moving, they'd come up the cañon here in a flood. Could Dong make them strike where he wanted them—and leave us safe?"

She stared at him. " No wonder Jim

Lancaster is afraid of you!" she said. "Now I understand—"

"He can sing them a Cantonese song—something that will wake them up—drive them crazy—start them charging—"

"And even Sam Li doesn't know enough Cantonese to understand what the song will be about!" said the girl. "Oh, Jack, it's the first taste of hope!"

She leaned and began to speak rapidly, close to the ear of Dong.

"What's the matter with those Chinks now?" asked Lancaster, suddenly. "What's happening down there in the corral, all at once? Do you make it out?"

For, in fact, as Dong continued a chant, the answers that came to it from the corral were simply brutal grunts, in a vast, bestial chorus.

"I don't understand," said Sam Li.

"What's the song about?" asked Lancaster.

"It's Cantonese that Dong is singing, just now," said Sam Li, "and I don't know that tongue. Hardly a word of it."

The girl was translating the song, saying first: "Listen! He knows the right song for the trick! Do you hear them growl in the rope corral? He is singing."

The answer from the rope corral was a wild uproar. The ropes were slashed and broken all across the front. A flood of humanity was loosed suddenly down the valley.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

VICTORY AT LAST?

IT seemed to Ripley like a fantasy, one of those swiftly changing pictures that come into dreams. He could see the pigtails bobbing, or floating straight out from the heads of the Chinamen. He saw something else—and that was the flashing of the knives that jigged up and down in their hands as they ran.

"Call the rest up! Tell 'em to charge!" yelled Lancaster.

He ran forward, shouting: "Missouri—tell the rest of 'em to charge! If they once get outside of the valley, God knows where they'll scatter to—"

With two guns poised in his hands, Lancaster turned to watch the effect of Missouri's wild yell to the men at the mouth of the ravine.

Those horsemen of Lancaster's, from their higher position, must have had a clear view of the sweeping danger. Through the dust that boiled up around the heads of the Chinamen, the guards surely could see the glitter of the knives in the moonlight, and yet they charged straight in.

The nearest ones came in a good bit ahead of the rest. They whirled their horses along the face of the throng, shooting into the air, yelling like fiends to turn the human herd as though it had been composed of dumb, four-footed beasts. Some of them whirled their quirts. But they might as well have struck at the face of an avalanche.

Ripley saw a strange and frightful thing. A cowpuncher's quirt was caught at the lash end. Two hands of yellow iron clung to the whip, and since it was tied to the wrist of the rider, the Chinaman was yanked from his feet and dragged on his face. Nevertheless he maintained that incredible grip. And the rider was dragged far back in the saddle, until a sidestep of his horse jerked him out of his stirrups. He was caught out of the air by a hundred Chinese hands.

At the same moment, one of the Chinamen in a frenzy actually hurled himself with outspread arms at the forelegs of another galloping horse, and beast and rider went down with a crash. What happened to them no one could tell. The Chinese might have torn them to shreds—or simply cast them to one side and gone on, trampling over the bodies. Ripley could not say. But he saw the effect on the other guards. They hesitated, checked their rush.

"Shoot! Shoot to kill! Shoot to kill!" Lancaster was yelling in command.

But if they fired, it might bring disaster and death to the two fallen comrades. Indecision, confusion came over those cow-

punchers. They were brave enough to take every chance in the world—but now they did not know what to do—and the yellow throng through the dust and the moonlight looked like a phantasm, a nightmare. Gradually the riders gave way—then, suddenly, they fled.

An arm of cloud that slid over the moon; suddenly its face was tarnished like dirty silver and by that light Ripley saw the paper-white flash of a small knife which Ching had spied in the sand and picked up. She slashed twice, and his hands and his feet were free.

Lancaster, with all the danger of the rush of the Chinamen before him, saw that rising, and whirled to get at his chief enemy.

And there was the huge figure of Sam Li standing with raised, empty hands, thundering out in that gong-like voice words of great command.

To Lancaster, the truth must have come with terrible suddenness. One moment, he had many men at his command; and a crowd of human wealth was roped into a corral for him.

The next moment his men were scattered, the horses were swept away in a stampede. And his slaves had turned into a yellow river of vengeance, screeching as it rushed at him.

That thunderclap of astonishment probably accounted for his moment of delay. But now he was turned, shouting out: "You'll go one step before me, Ripley!"

And he fired.

Ripley had made no effort to dodge. But the cords had stopped the blood in his feet and he staggered crazily as he tried to run in and close with big Jim Lancaster. His hands were half numb, also, from the pressure of the cords about the wrists.

It was the witlessness of his feet that made him run veering, like a snipe in the wind; and the bullets of Lancaster kissed the air about him but did not strike home. The dimness of the light must have accounted in large part for the inaccurate shooting. That same dimness let Missouri Slim almost take Ripley by surprise.

Missouri was not shooting. A gun was not his chosen weapon at this moment. Instead, he had pulled out a long hunting knife and he came at Ripley from the side with the face of a contorted devil.

Ripley flung his body sidelong through the air, at the knees of the tall figure. It was a swift attack but not so swift as the knife hand of Missouri.

And as Ripley struck the legs of Slim, the latter's knife sliced through the flesh along Ripley's left ribs, and the weight of Slim's hand thumped heavily against his back.

They went down in a heap, a confusion.

"Cut his throat, damn him!" yelled Lancaster.

But Ripley had caught the knife-arm of Missouri inside the crook of his own elbow. He made one twisting effort and heard the bone of the arm crack and smash.

Then he was up with Slim's revolver in his grasp. Missouri himself, one arm dangling, got up more slowly, cursing in a voice as shrill as the scream of a woman.

Off there on the right, clouds of dust streamed upwards towards the tarnished moon, and through the dust the Chinese were coming on them; but Lancaster had no thought for that rushing danger. He wanted one life before he gave up his own.

His sombrero was off. His long hair, caught by the wind, blew to the side, streaming across his shoulder. He had waited with poised gun to get in a well-sighted shot as the heap of Missouri and Ripley dissolved.

But Ripley was already shooting from the hip as he stumbled forward. He saw his first bullet strike into the sand and knock up a thin spray. His second jerked Lancaster sidewise.

Then a heavy impact knocked the gun out of Ripley's grasp and left him with an empty, bleeding hand.

It was only one stride more, however. He closed that distance with a shout, striking out for Lancaster's head. Their two bodies beat heavily together, fell. And, in falling, Ripley found his weight on top.

The feet of the charging Chinamen were

almost on them. That meant death to them both, perhaps. But in falling he had wit enough to jerk his left elbow across and drive it into the face of Lancaster as they struck the ground.

The strength went instantly out of Lancaster's long, lean body. He lay still—not senseless but half stunned, his eyes wide and empty as they stared up towards the sky.

There was one glance for Ripley, then, and only one. But the picture he saw was something that would never leave the brain.

Missouri, a little on the left, had been struck by the advancing wave of the Chinamen. That wave tossed him up, as rushing water will toss a fragment of dry wood. Ripley could see the crazy, broken gesture of the smashed arm. Then the wave swallowed the flotsam. Missouri Slim disappeared and left in the air one ringing, echoing scream to curdle the blood.

In that same single glance, Ripley saw huge Sam Li attacked by a little figure of a man with a great, polished skull, with a snake of pigtail hanging down at the back, twisting, leaping of its own accord, as it were. That was "Starvation Willie," of course.

Whatever he had heard from Dong, it was enough to make him choose Sam Li as the great enemy. And a burning zeal had driven the little man far ahead of the others, to use his knife.

That knife Ripley saw gleam in the air and then the blade disappeared into the breast of Sam Li!

There was one other picture to complete the scene. Still at his post, leaning back, his head raised, Dong was singing. And in his weak arms the poor fellow held the girl close to him, to save her from the dreadful flood.

It seemed a miracle to Ripley. He, whose life had been shielded and who had finally been tortured almost to the verge of death, was now the great master and, with his voice, ruled all the madness of this scene.

That single sweeping glance had showed Ripley the essentials of the wide picture before him. Then the uproar of beating feet overtook him. In the air there was that strange pungency which he had noted before.

Hands gripped him with such force that his flesh was bruised and his clothes ripped away in great sections, but the strength of the Chinese was merely used to cast him aside.

Perhaps they had seen him fighting their battle against the great enemy, and that was why they spared him.

He, dizzy, staggered, reeled away a little to the rear and saw the flash of knives driving down towards the spot where Lancaster had been lying.

There would be no saving of that life. But what of Ching? The throng was already pouring past her. And old Dong could be seen dimly through the dust with his head canted back, his horrible mouth gaped wide in the song that had meant death to so many strong men.

One figure remained standing. Like a tower stood the vastness of Sam Li, with men pouring over him.

Gradually that tower swayed, but it did not fall.

The little men were brushed away like ants by the giant. Ripley saw the huge hands striking. He heard the mighty voice of Sam Li shouting out a battle cry.

A glory came out of the dying Chinaman and filled the astonished soul of Ripley. He had not dreamed that one man could do so much with empty hands!

But the tower was leaning, it was falling, it was down; and the crowd of leaping, screeching Chinese poured in.

They rushed down the valley in vain pursuit of the dust clouds which told how the men of Lancaster, giving up the cause when they saw their master fall, had now disappeared through the side ravines, each man now a fugitive from the vengeance of the law.

Another picture rushed over the mind of Ripley. Old Dallas in his office, his worn, kind face lighting with the triumph which had crowned his life of service on the Border.

His, after all, was the credit for the great victory—his, and Dong's!

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

JACK'S FUTURE.

LOOKING before him, Ripley saw Missouri lying, so twisted, the shape of his body so frightfully deformed, that there was no need to step to him to see if he were dead.

He had been broken by a hundred hands.

Still further back, two other forms made small, dark spots on the ground—they were those chosen men of Lancaster who had ridden in so gallantly, so brutally, to stop the charge of the Chinamen. They would rise no more.

And Lancaster himself lay on his back with one arm thrown over his face, as though his last gesture had been to shut out the horror of the distorted faces that loomed above him.

His clothes were rent by the knife slashes. His body was wet with blood. The peculiar, stifling, pungent odor still hung in the air. The dust was thick.

The dense mass of the Chinese still raced towards the mouth of the cañon, and the jerking pigtails tossed above the rolling dust cloud.

Far up the ravine the noise of the charge travelled. It diminished as the running Chinese diverted into this cañon and into that. And presently even the dust clouds had lifted. There was only the silent beauty of the moon, and the empty valley, and the prostrate forms.

Ripley went stumbling forward. Pain from his wound bit into him. His side was a-drip with blood.

He saw old Dong lying exhausted. Ching was leaning over the prostrate form of Sam Li. He was beginning to struggle into a sitting posture. He kept his great left arm across his body.

"Get the kit of bandages!" cried the voice of Ching. "Do you hear, Jack? We still can save him!"

"Be still, Ching," replied the booming, muffled notes of Sam Li. "But get the canteen, there. I am thirsty."

Ripley brought the canteen and held it at the lips of Sam Li as the giant drank. His face was unmarked except for the blow of Lancaster that had left a dark stain from the mouth to the chin. As for the injuries that lay under the cover of the crosswise arm of Sam Li, his own voice spoke for them.

"Knife wounds always are painful; because even the sharpest knives will do a little tearing. However, I am glad that they struck deep enough. You know, Ching, that it is better to taste the wine, and then to drain the glass. So with me—I shall be at rest soon."

She was on her knees. She looked like a small child before the giant bulk of Sam Li, as he sat cross-legged.

"Let me help you, Sam Li," she pleaded. "Let me stop the bleeding."

"You cannot catch the life, Ching," said Sam Li. "You can catch the wind more easily than you can catch the life. Every breath empties something from near my heart, and something that will not return. But that is all right."

He made a gesture with one hand. "Catch up the life and give it back to me, Ching. You have such pretty hands that even my life ought to come back into them, if you try hard enough."

"Are you going to laugh even now?" she asked.

"Tell me how you shall remember me?" said Sam Li.

"The day when I sat in the corner and cried because my father was gone, and you talked to me until *I* was laughing," said Ching.

"Will you remember me that way?" asked Sam Li, dreamily.

"Yes," said the girl.

He bowed his head for a moment.

"Turn your head, Ching," said Sam Li.

"Yes," she said.

She stood up and turned away; and Sam Li made a gesture to Ripley. He came instantly to the big Chinaman, who held out a hand; and that hand Ripley gripped

with both of his. A vast pressure threatened to snap his bones. The head of Sam Li jerked down. The grinding of his teeth was like the breaking of bones.

"Sam Li!" cried Ching, suddenly.

"So!" said the Chinaman, and all his body relaxed and leaned backwards. Ripley lowered him to the ground. "Now, Ching," said Sam Li, faintly. "Now it is nearly over."

She was instantly beside him on the ground.

"Hush!" said Sam Li. "You are young and beautiful, Ching, but you are not Chinese. Ask Dong—because there is a good man—ask him to sing one chant for me!"

She spoke to Dong, and at once the weird, unmusical song broke from the lips of the coolie.

A deep, bass murmur issued from the throat of Sam Li, faintly. His great head turned a little from side to side. Beside him a pool of darkness was spreading on the sand.

His voice ceased.

"Sam Li!" cried the girl.

The hand of Sam Li, with a last movement, moved towards her and was still.

"Sam Li!" cried Ching. "Sam Li! Sam Li!"

ON the hottest day of the year, Tom Dallas was sticking pins into another map, consulting a sheaf of telegrams as he put in one marker after another. Now and again he mopped his forehead with a bandana and again pored over his work; and again, on the flat of the map, his imagination raised the mountains and sank the valleys. Here it caused a muddy water-hole to lift through the sand, and there it ran the double gleam of a railroad through the wilderness.

When the tap came at the door and it was pushed open, he did not turn his head, but the high-pitched voice of his deputy struck in a jangle on his ears: "Marshal Dallas—here's Mr. Jack Ripley!"

The marshal got out of his chair, pulled off his glasses, and straightened by degrees. His back was not as strong as it should have been and sometimes it felt like old wire that had been bent so many times that it is ready to break.

The door was closing behind Ripley, and the white flare of the street was being shut away.

"Here," said the marshal, as he grabbed the hand of Ripley. "Here—sit down here—"

"That's your chair," answered Ripley.

"That's why I want you to take it," answered Dallas. "In my chair you can see my ideas better. Wait a minute. Telegrams. Telegrams from Washington. Telegrams from five sheriffs. Telegrams from the governor of the state.

"They mention a gent named Ripley, but they give the credit to Tom Dallas. That's the way it ought to be, because I had the brains to use you. Sit there. You see that map?"

"Yes," said Ripley.

"Counterfeiters!" said the marshal. "Damned, ornery, low-down counterfeiters, Jack. Fellers that don't work for their living, but they pass out one dollar bills so doggone good that I pretty nigh wish for a barrel of them myself. I could use a pocketful of those one dollar bills. Understand me?"

Ripley put his hand on the map, opened his fingers, and disclosed the bright, steel shield of a deputy marshal.

"Hello," said Dallas. "Want it raised to something? By the way, the price on Lancaster will be through in a coupla days—"

"Keep it, Tom," said Ripley.

The marshal came hastily to him and leaned one hand and a great part of his weight on the shoulder of Ripley. And Ripley looked squarely up into his face.

"What's the matter?" asked Dallas.

"I can't use that kind of money," said Ripley. "I'd—I'd rather use counterfeit."

"All right—all right," murmured Dallas. He turned suddenly on his office deputy and shouted: "Get the hell out of here, will you?"

The deputy vanished.

"All right," said Ripley. "You look sort of quiet, but sort of happy. But what's the matter? There's a lot of money on Lancaster."

He added: "But a lot more glory."

Ripley said: "I've just been burying three men, Tom. Any one of the three was as good a man as I am. You keep the badge, and the glory, and the cash."

"Suppose the cash goes to charity," said Dallas. "But what's the matter with you, Jack?"

"There's another reason," said Ripley. "I'll show it to you pretty soon."

"Loosen up, old son," urged the marshal. "I expect some thanks, before long, for setting you on the new trail."

"I've got to settle down a bit before I can send you thanks," said Ripley.

"But what are you going to do, Jack?"

"I don't know. Go to China, perhaps, on a wild-goose chase."

"China? They're choppin' off the heads of people out there, now. You know that?"

"I know. Out here, we shoot 'em."

"Ah ha," nodded the marshal. "You don't like it. You don't like guns when you've got a right to use 'em. Is that it? I had a dog, once, that would never use a tooth or bark a bark in my yard. All the thieves in the world could of walked into my house and that dog would of licked their hands. But when I walked out onto the street, that doggone dog would light into anything on four legs. Nigh to costing me a lot of money, one day, when it bit a mule, and the mule kicked it right through the front door of Molly Applethwaite, and into Molly's two year old baby; and Molly swore that dog had bit her baby. And doggone me, but I had a time. The same way with you, Jack. When you were outside the law, a gun was a handy tool for you. Now you got a right to use a Colt, you don't want it. It's the mean streak that's in most of us, all right."

There was another tap at the door, and it was pushed open by a slender girl in black. The marshal jumped up and jerked off the sombrero from his head.

"Yes, ma'am?" he said. "Anything I can do for you?"

"This is Tom Dallas," said Ripley. "My wife, Tom."

"Good God—I mean, good Lord!" said Dallas. "Come in, won't you?"

"Thank you," said the girl.

She walked to a chair in the corner.

"I'll wait here," she said. "If I'm not interrupting."

"Have you got the rig outside?" asked Ripley.

"Yes."

"I'll be out in a minute," said Ripley. "I have to say goodby to Tom."

Dallas went towards the door with her.

"Young lady," he said sternly, "it ain't what you're taking away from me — it's what you're taking away from the Border!"

She smiled up at him and was gone.

Into the buckboard that waited close to the door, a Chinaman helped the girl. It was the ugliest Chinaman that Dallas had ever seen, with a mouth hideously enlarged by huge smiles, but he helped the girl with an almost fatherly, possessive air, and when she was in the seat, she smiled down at him with such tenderness that he might have been a father indeed.

"And that's what's happened, is it?" said the marshal. "That's why you got the dizzy look? Well, I understand. You wouldn't be no good to me for a coupla years, I guess. But I don't understand the black she's wearing. Somebody in her family, or somebody in yours?"

"It was a Chinaman," said Ripley.

THE END

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

ARGOSY pays $1 for each letter printed. Send your letter to "Argonotes" Editor, ARGOSY, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

"JAN of the Jungle," Otis Adelbert Kline's last *Jan* story, published in ARGOSY during the spring of 1931, has just been purchased by Universal Pictures. It will be filmed under the title, "The Call of the Savage."—And while we are talking of *Jan,* those of you who have been yelling for another story about this amazing character will have your hopes realized early in January, when ARGOSY will publish a novel called "Jan in India."

HEROES of the bullring:

México, D. F. Mex.

Apropos of Stookie Allen's pictorial record of Juan Belmonte as a man of daring, and of the letter from a reader in Streator, Ill., commenting on Belmonte's recent return to the bullring after years of retirement, it might be of interest to note that such a thing as a successful "comeback," if possible but rare among prize fighters, *has never been registered in the history of the bullring*. Witness the tragic end of Sánchez Mejías, Juan Belmonte's brother-in-law, who was gored to death in the plaza of Manzanares on the 11th of last August, his first engagement after several years' retirement. It simply "can't be did." Yet the depression, with its train of calamities, is forcing these courageous old-timers to face death once more, in a desperate effort to recoup their vanished fortunes. Sánchez Mejías was to bullfighting what Gene Tunney is to the prize ring. An educated and accomplished gentleman, he followed his dangerous profession for the love of it; and at the time of his retirement he enjoyed great popularity. M. VIGIL.

A FAMILY of ten ARGOSY fans:

Havana, Fla.

The expression, "It takes all kinds of people to make a world" is only too true in the case of ARGOSY fans. Sometimes I burst forth into mirth when reading the "Argonotes." Here's a man who fairly detests fantastic stories, and right by his side is one who loves 'em. Another likes Westerns, while his fellow man gets ill at the mere thought of a Western. Others speak of *Bill* and *Jim* as fondly as if they were their brothers; a few lines below some reader laments, "If you don't fire those two old crows from your magazine I'm gonna stop buying it!"

All this passed lightly over my head until they started panning "Men of Daring" and "Argonotes." Gee whiz! Those departments are the cream of the mag. Can't we have a well rounded out magazine without all this ruckus?

There are ten in my family, ranging from forty-six to ten years, and they all read the ARGOSY. I prefer fantastic stories, "Women of Daring" and "Argonotes." And we have an A. Merritt fan and one or two *Peter the Brazen* nuts. Mother is keen about *Hazeltine* stories. Kid brother just eats up "Men of Daring" and "Stranger Than Fiction." The rest of them take in the whole mag with equal pleasure; then it's passed on to the neighbor. G. ISABELLE SMITH.

ANYTHING but ARGOSY is safe:

Kernville, Calif.

Here's a real happening from a little village hidden away on the Kern River in the lower reaches of the high Sierras. Being a newspaper reporter covering this section for a large city daily, and writing an occasional something for the magazines as I do, I am the recipient of a large amount of reading matter, all of which is constantly being "borrowed" by the natives.

The ARGOSY is one of the magazines affected—very much so—and until recently it was unobtainable on the local news-stand. I was forced to send to Bakersfield, fifty-three miles away over a a mountain road, for my weekly copy. I am in the habit of laying my copies aside until the continued stories are complete, and then reading them without break. That is I try to "lay them aside." I can leave, with safety, four-bits anywhere in sight in my cabin, but some one is constantly swiping my copies of ARGOSY!

Two-three times, I have asked the local newsdealer to include the ARGOSY in his order for magazines. "Too many magazines now, s'e. They don't sell."—"Give your readers a change of diet," I insisted. "Order five copies of ARGOSY

for a trial." He did—four of which were immediately reserved for weekly purchase. He now receives ten copies, and they melt away from his news rack within a day or two after they are received. Lately he was telling me, in preparation for the coming opening of the Big Blue Mine, he plans to increase his weekly order to twenty copies

All of which gives me a great feeling of relief, for perhaps my copies will now repose in open safety, and in consecutively correct order. I shall now be able to tell "borrowers" where to buy their copies for a dime—ten cents—the magazine to become their own, so obviating the "worry" of returning it.

You magazine lenders had better copy my plan. Impress on your dealer the importance and the added revenue of ordering more copies.

O. O. OLDHAM.

A WIDE-EYED lady speaks:

Denver, Colo.

All your letters printed in "Argonotes" seem to be from men. Well, here's one that "ain't." I'm a lady—or claim that distinction. I've been reading ARGOSY since the day I found it in dad's collection of mags. Of course, I read it wide-eyed. Who wouldn't?

"Creep Shadow!"—and do I creep!—it's simply great. And the illustrations . . . I may be half through an installment, yet I turn back ever so often to see that illustration at the story's beginning.

I always read the letters in "The Readers' Viewpoint" with interest. Why? Because I think they're nutty. Why criticize at all? Why not say to yourself: "This is fiction—damned good fiction." Why worry if "some engineer" does "kid an author," as Mr. War Williams so emphatically states? It's the story that counts.—Of course we want "The Readers' Viewpoint," and we wouldn't give up that page for a bag of gold. But let's see—how would this do for a change? Say you—or I, or even the hired man—should read a story in which we found a lot of technical errors. Why not say to ourselves: "The author's profession is writing. He's an entertainer. And boy, he entertains!"—What if he does get into deep waters once in a lifetime? What if he does make errors that irritate? My gosh, I'm a lawyer, a second-story-man, a clerk, a waiter; yet I, too, pull a lot of boners.—Yep, a lot of them. And no one screams to high heaven about it. The poor author! Why should I point out to him all his peccadillos.

I'm for the author, first and last. Bring on your story—smother we with your words, descriptions, action! I love it! To hell with technicalities!

However, let me stop raving and say that "That Son of a Gun Columbo" was the best story I've read in all my story-reading career. And I mean I've read carloads! If ARGOSY can print a story like that, no wonder it's the mag that our sweethearts, our husbands, our bosses swear by

I'm supposed to be a lady, and ladies know when to make an exit. . . .

HELEN JACKSON.

ARGOSY as a model of style:

Ona, W. Va

I cut my reading teeth on ARGOSY back about 1915. Since then I have gone rather literary and have acquired a taste for classical literature and the highbrow magazines. But I still have ARGOSY on my reading list. I like the wide variety of its adventure stories, and the clear style in which its authors write leaves little to be desired. In fact, as a teacher, I often recommend ARGOSY to my pupils as a model for clear-cut, vigorous writing style.

I like all your writers, but I am especially fond of the stories by Theodore Roscoe. I have followed him since his first ARGOSY story, and I predict that he will go far. His "Colombo" was truly a masterpiece.

As long as ARGOSY holds its own, it will hold me.

M. L. HANNA

PERSONAL preferences:

Little Rock, Ark.

There are too many novels, novelettes, and serials in ARGOSY, and not enough short stories. I don't have time to sit down and read for one or two hours at a time, and I prefer the short story—the story that can be read in from fifteen to twenty minutes. In this week's ARGOSY there are three serials, one novel, one novelette, and only *two* short stories! I should like to see more short stories and once in a while a short short

Of course, this is a personal preference, and many other readers might not sanction such a change. I have a friend who never misses a copy of ARGOSY. He says he prefers novelettes and novels; yet I sometimes wonder if there are not other readers who would like to see more short stories and fewer serials.

LYNN HUBBARD.

LOOKING AHEAD!

A GRAVE MUST BE DEEP!

Horror! Chills! Creeps!—Have you ever met a *Zombie?*—There's a particularly bad one in this new mystery of voodoo magic in the sinister Island of Haiti. A new novel by

THEODORE ROSCOE

To Hell for the Devil

Detective Cafferty wasn't content to drop the case—he followed a fiendish kidnaper into the French Foreign Legion. A complete novel by

Richard E. Wormser

The Rats of Mahia

A priceless necklace of sapphires had led to murder in the South Seas, a murder which Bellow Bill Williams had to solve. A novelette by

Ralph R. Perry

Glory Grabber — The tale of a publicity-mad seaman who loved the "life-saving" racket too well, by **Robert Carse**

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