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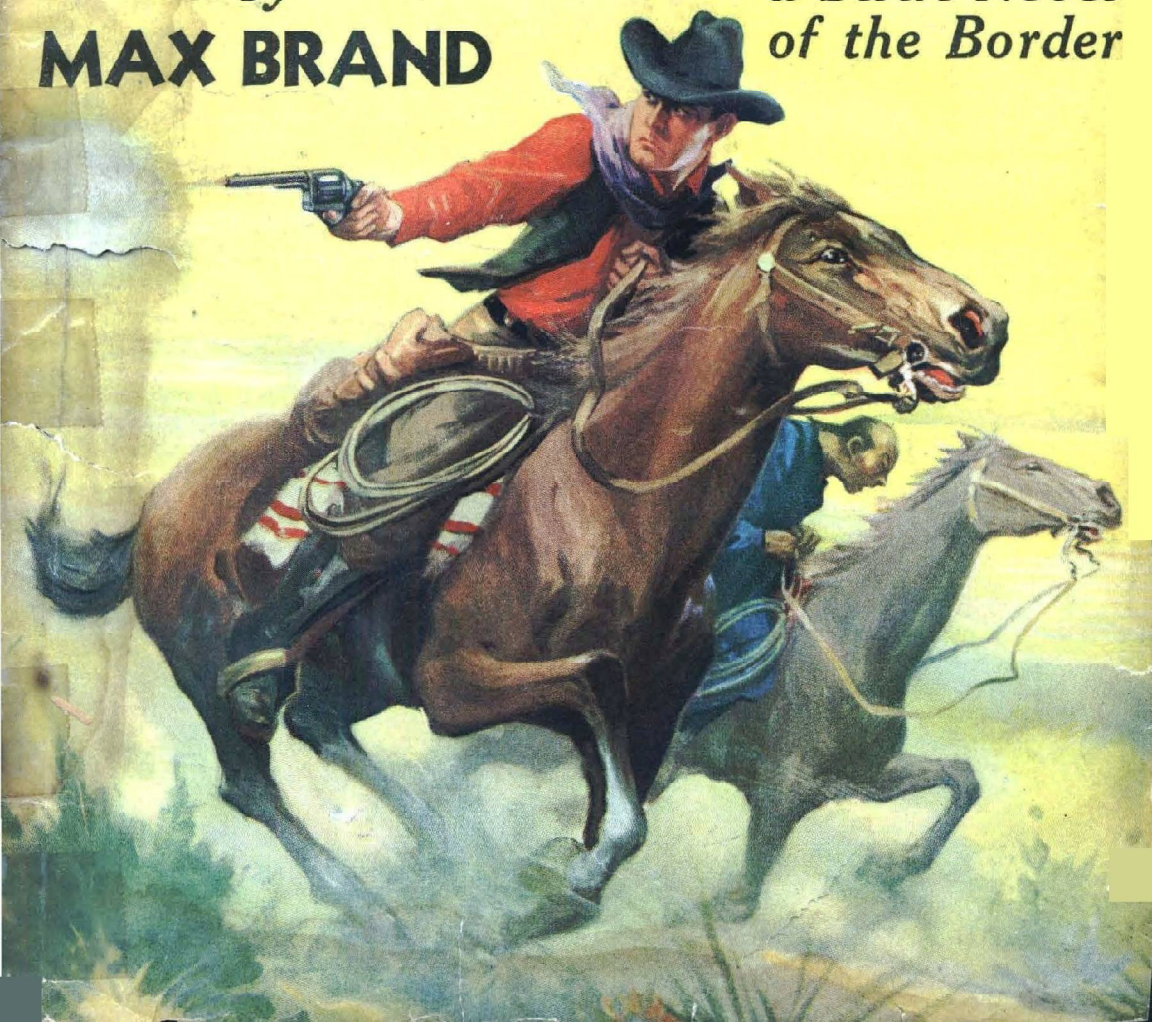
OCT. 20 WEEKLY

Scourge of the Rio Grande

by

MAX BRAND

a Swift Novel of the Border



The phrase that wrecks a MILLION MEN

"formerly with.."

He hands you a card half apologetically, half eagerly. You read across the bottom — "Formerly with." Then follows the name of a company that is a better company than the one he now represents. So with the company he represented before that one, and the one before that one. Down hill . . . pillar to post . . . same line of work . . . but down hill . . . and he doesn't know why.

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Action Stories of Every Variety

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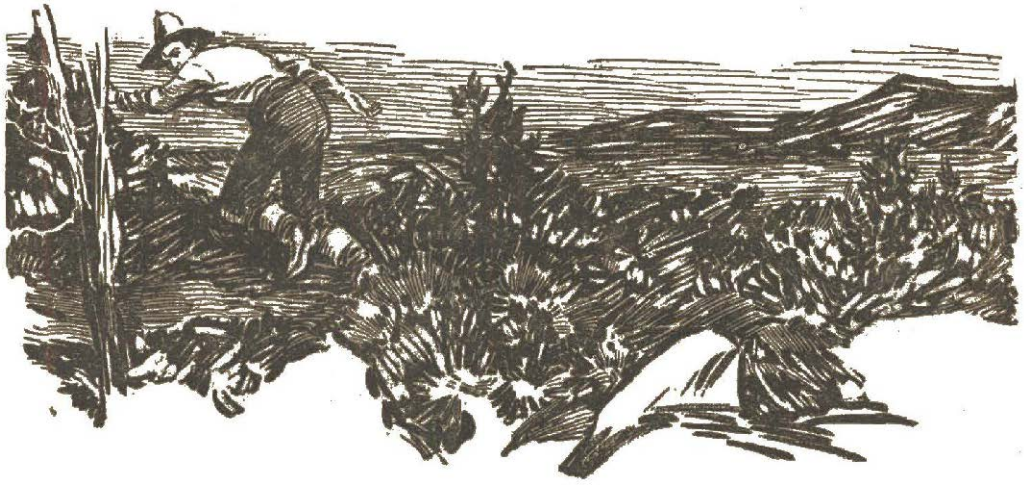
Scourge of the Rio Grande

By MAX BRAND
Author of "The Longhorn Feud," "Brother of the Cheyennes," etc.

Jack Ripley had to decide whether he would spend twenty years in jail or go after the border's toughest hombre

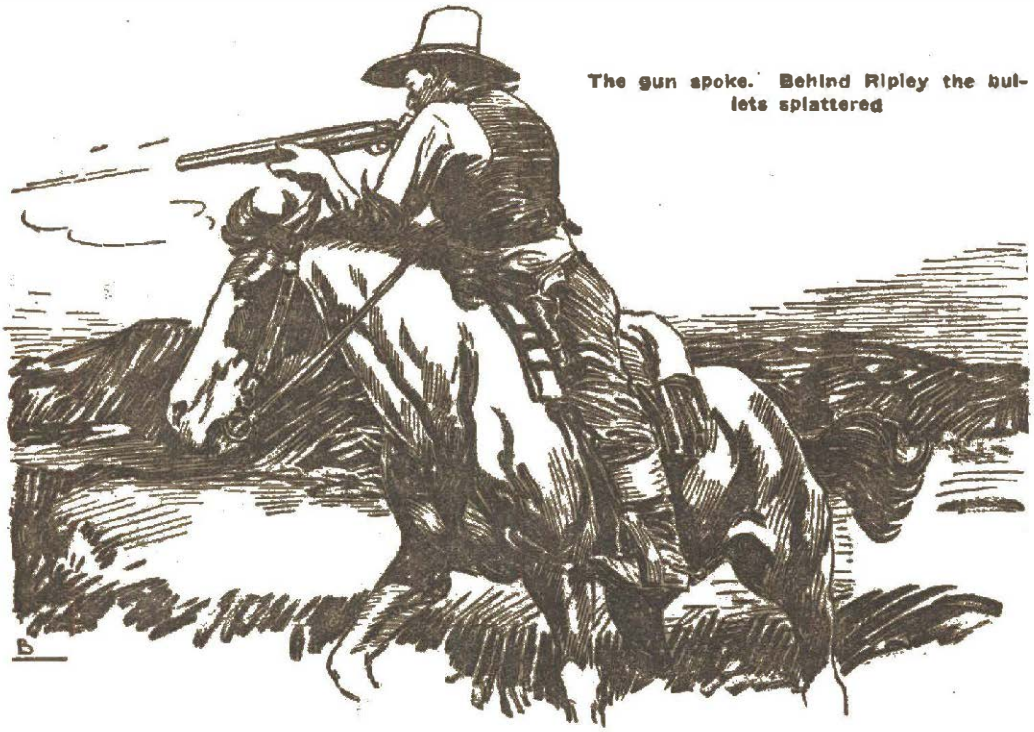


CHAPTER I.

GET RIPLEY ALIVE!

THE pain in Tom Dallas was both of body and brain, but there was only room in his consciousness for that of the mind. He kept a photograph on his knee, a round pocket mirror in his hand, and it was his own image in the glass that gave the marshal such mental anguish. No lady of the mode could have eyed herself with more care than Dallas, she in the privacy of her boudoir and the marshal under the public eye in his office. He held the mirror close, boldly facing the truth; he removed the glass to arm's length and squinted as though he were trying to soften the colors of a futurist picture; but whether from near or far he could not help seeing that his face was too red even for this hot day and too fat even for his fifty years. The upper eyelid was a soggy weight. The line down his cheek continued under the chin, now, a permanent furrow in the soft of the flesh.

He jabbed the mirror back into a vest pocket, took the sweat from his forehead on the back of his hand, flicked it off the forefinger, and looked at the straight line of black splashed on the floor. Afterwards he stared out the window at the blue sky that trembled with heat and at the hills which flowed big from the north past Tallyho. What he saw was a time when "Tallyho" had been spelled with a hyphen and an exclamation point, usually with a note attached to explain how a fox-hunting Englishman had lodged a bit of his native lore so far in the American West. He could remember how Indians with rifles balanced across the pommels



The gun spoke. Behind Ripley the bullets splattered

of their saddles had ridden across those hills, and how a gunbelt had hung loose across the slack of his belly.

The telephone began to ring. It had time to banish the Indians, recall the long years, and stuff the clothes of Marshal Dallas with fat before Deputy Dick Ballin got the receiver off the hook. Dick began to say "yes" at intervals. He hung up and came to the marshal.

"Stillwater," said the deputy.

"A damn mean town," said Dallas. "I remember when Shorty McIntosh and me were—"

The deputy interrupted in haste: "Ripley. They've seen him there in Stillwater."

"I didn't send those men up there to be seeing Ripley. I sent them up there to be grabbing and holding him," shouted the marshal.

"He busted away," said Dick Ballin.

"What happened?"

"He hurt a couple men. Not very bad. Then he got out a back door."

The marshal looked askance at Ballin, found him an unworthy audience for his thoughts, and leaned forward over a small table on which a map was spread. When the eyes of Dallas fell on it, the flat of the paper sank into valleys, rose to naked mountains immersed in blue. An irregular round of pins had been stuck into one section. Empire, Little Medicine, Rusty Gulch, Westward. In Westward was stuck a taller pin with a tiny red pennant attached. The marshal replaced this with a common pin and searched until he found the word "Stillwater." Into this he thrust the red danger signal.

"They're narrowing him down," said Dallas. "Look at here. They're running him round and round and they're narrowing him down like a leaf pulling into the mouth of a whirlpool. They're gunna be having Mr. Jack

Ripley before long. When did this Stillwater business happen?"

"Last night."

"And they don't give us a ring till this afternoon?"

Mr. Ballin said: "What I don't understand, with the big job on our hands and the Chinks still leaking in across the Border, why should such a gang be sent up there to corral Jack Ripley? What's he done, so much?"

"You don't understand?" asked the marshal.

"What I mean to say, he's only sort of hit back when somebody took a sock at him first. He's only been down in these parts about once a year, just about."

"Like Christmas?" suggested the marshal. "Yeah, he circulates, Dick. So does a comet."

It was a point upon which Ballin seemed to feel strongly. "Besides," he argued, "what's he done—I mean, what's he done that's Federal?"

"Shoving the queer, Dick," said the marshal. "That's Federal."

"We've got no proof of that," objected the deputy.

"Take a look at his mug," said the sheriff, lifting the photograph that lay on his knee.

Ballin regarded the lean, handsome young man. He, also, was lean, handsome and young; that was the reason for his slight frown. "He looks like an all right sort of fellow," said Ballin. "Kind of smiling, too."

THE marshal took the picture back. He liked Ballin, but his higher expectation was always disappointed. "He's smiling," declared Dallas, "as though he'd just shot somebody; or as though he was about to shoot."

The jangle of the telephone called Ballin away. "That can't be right," he said. "Wait a minute. Tolman is away south. Go hell-bent after him. Which way would he be heading? Go that way, then, and burn up the ground." He hung up.

"There's Ripley again," he reported. "Broke right through them outside of Stillwater. He's heading south towards Crystal Springs. He's got his nerve along with him, that Jack Ripley."

"He hasn't got nerve. He's got a gray horse. He's still on that Hickery mare, ain't he?"

"That's what they say. He's still got that jackrabbit — that Hickery Dickery."

"He thinks that she's his luck, but she's going to be his finish," said the marshal. "He wouldn't wear the same coat in every town, but he'll ride the same mare, and those that don't know his face, they know Hickery. If a price was put on him he wouldn't last a month. But just now all folks could get out of him would be glory—and a lot of trouble."

"Yeah, a lot of trouble," agreed Dick Ballin, for he was himself a fighting man. "Shall I telephone up there to Crystal Springs to have them on the look-out?"

"Hold on a minute. I gotta look." He peered at the map.

"He's heading right south from Stillwater. That would take him to Crystal Springs," observed Ballin.

"Crystal Springs is no good time," answered the marshal. "But over here—it's an extra fifty miles, but there's a lot happening now in old Hooligan Gulch. A regular gold rush has started for there. That's where he'll go."

"Not if he's traveling anywhere," protested Ballin.

"The only place he travels is where

he wants to go. Ring Hooligan and tell them to keep their eyes wide open and their guns clean. But don't forget. I want him alive; I don't want him dead."

"Well, it's a funny thing," growled Ballin, going back to the telephone.

The marshal paid no more heed to him because he had located, in that instant, the pain which had been troubling his subconscious mind for a long time. It was in his feet. Dallas looked down over his shabby clothes to the immaculate sheen of his boots. There was sorrow in his heart, for it is sacrilege

RIPLEY

to alter a bootlast that has served a man for thirty years.

HOWEVER, this world is more filled with trouble than with joy, and the marshal decided that he would endure. To balance pleasure against grief, he took out a plug of chewing tobacco, shaped to the curve of his hip, and gnawed off a corner. With this old comfort stowed in his cheek he leaned over the map again and fixed the red flag of danger in the word "Hooligan."

Afterwards, he thrust himself out of his chair with a groan. "Have that damn ding-dong Roman-nosed son of a Gila monster, that Sammy, have him saddled up for me, will you, Dick?" he asked.

"What for Sammy?" said Ballin. "Just his gallop is worse than the bucking of most mustangs."

"He's got a mean gait, but he's never played out and he's taken me to a lot of luck. I'm going to need all the luck I can find in Hooligan," answered the marshal.

CHAPTER II.

HICKERY DICKERY.

A CACTUS wren was singing somewhere as Jack Ripley rode down into Hooligan Gulch. The wren was singing for Ripley and the gray mare; and the mare knew it, also. For them a sheet of hammered gold was laid across the rags and tatters of the mountains and the purple dust of evening was pouring through the valley. But the eye pierced this color easily to the town of shacks and tents that lay in the gulch like the drift left by a huge freshet. A pack train was coming down the south trail across the valley, the rear end in the golden haze, the front in the purple, with a little white puff of dust marking every step.

Prospect holes ranged each side of the valley, the deep ones with a gallows-frame above supporting a "whip," others with a mere windlass for lifting the bucket; and yet more were merely shallow pits. There were many noises of creaking from the hoists, the clanging of the single-jacks which worked in the drills, and now the booming detonation of blasting at a depth, now the whipcrack reports of surface shots; but the thin air removed all sound to

a distance and the eye stepped through a prospect so vast that only the margin of the great peace was invaded.

Gold that was gained in this way was, to the eye of Jack Ripley, spoiled by the sweat of the taking. He preferred an insecure happiness to one strongly founded on the old maxims and the hard labor of the hands.

The mare took the zigzag of the descending trail easily, softening the shock of each downward step with the supple play of fetlock joints. By the time she had brought Ripley near the bottom of the valley all the upper mountains and the sky were burning, but they were down in the cool of evening with lights like gilded stars pasted in the windows of the town, here and there. Ripley paused to enjoy that moment of the day. Twenty-four hours of hunger had its spur in his side, but he had learned to take pleasure where he found it. Then he drifted the mare quietly into the town.

The telephone was a new luxury in Hooligan; so was any electricity, but since it had come it was being used generously. As Ripley rode down the single street, his shadow lay before him, behind, and to either side until the great multiple lights of "Conlin's" put out all rivals as the moon puts out the stars. The front of Conlin's was half canvas, half wood, as though a mask and a torch were being held before that face, and Ripley laughed a little, softly. He liked the taste of the laughter in his throat, and the flow of it as of a clean wind through his soul. How many days was it since he had done more than smile? But this was a night that promised laughter, all the arrears paid at once.

He could ride freely down the center of the street because no one would notice him. Miners and dead-beats and gamblers and thieves flowed up and down and across the street, each man hurrying towards a good time. Here and there girls were moving in couples and the currents split away before them, closed quickly behind. They were never jostled. They walked with an air of command and of wealth, but all that Ripley wanted of them was the smaller and the lighter music of their voices. Every woman who walked that street should be made to laugh and keep on laughing in order to qualify the roar and growling of the crowd.

CHING

He was aware of a greater human pressure than he had expected. There were twenty thousand people in Hooligan. Thirty thousand, perhaps.

HE found a stable and turned into it. The stalls were under canvas, in rows. A man sat on a high stool in the middle of the yard with a strong light over his head and a sheaf of money in one hand to make change. It was pay in advance, here; five dollars for hay, grain and a stall. Ripley paid and got a ticket for a stall, Number 42. The fat man on the high stool was sweating with prosperity and the heat from his thick cigar.

"That's a mare — that's something worth while — that's a regular damn Hickery Dickery!" he called.

That was very bad, Ripley realized as he unsaddled the mare in stall 42, and began to rub her down with a wisp of hay. If Hickery had become a proverb, how many people knew the face of her rider in this town? A grain of commonsense would take Ripley out of this danger, but he knew in advance of thought that he could not be argued out of his night in Hooligan. He wanted to eat food that other hands had cooked; more than that, he wanted to laugh, quietly, and a lot.

He fumbled the hay and smelled it. It was good. So were the oats that stood in a bin at a corner of the yard with two quart measures at hand and a Negro on guard.

"You the man with the gray, boss?" he asked. "That one can move! Oh, yes, sir, that one can step. When she gallops she cools the eyes, all right. What might her breeding be, boss?"

"Mustang," said Ripley.

"Which? My good Lord! Mustang, eh?" The guardian of the grain put back his head and burst into greasy laughter, an octave above his speaking voice. Ripley gave him a dollar for that laugh and took a measure and a half of oats back to Hickery.

She was almost as drawn with hunger as her master, but she had not touched the hay; she would not touch the oats that he poured in the feed-box. That was the hardest lesson he had taught her, but a needful one when a single bad ration might make her full for a day. She was tough as hammered iron, but the thoughbred, like her master, had never learned the keen commonsense of the range. She whinnied to him now and he loved her with his hand while he gave her the first wisp of hay, the first bit of oats and felt the velvet of her muzzle gathering them carefully from his palm.

"Mustang, eh?" said Ripley. He chuckled, and went out onto the street.

Eating came first, but it was the least important. He went into the first lunch counter, loosened his belt three notches and sat on a high stool. He ate hamburger steak and onions with corn fritters on the side—corn fritters to remind him of slapjacks and let him scorn them the more. He had coffee and a slab of pumpkin pie. When he finished it seemed to him that he had not begun; but temperance is the only stone which will keep a man sharp as a knife every day and all day. He hated temperance, but he had to be sharp. Physical appetite devoured him, but that was part of the fight.

The cook brought a heap of fresh corn fritters on a pancake turner. They were so fresh from the griddle that butter still bubbled at their edges. "Try these, Mister—" he said.

Ripley looked up. The cook drew back a little. His eyes were guilty.

"Do you know me, brother?" asked Ripley.

"Know you? Sure I don't. Have I ever seen you before?" asked the cook.

"I guess not," said Ripley, thoughtfully.

That was how it was hell—to come in off the range and find that even in the thick of towns the guard can never be lowered. The cook, leaning over his hooded stove, began to whistle, but the tune went wrong. Probably he had lied about not knowing Ripley. If so—but a man has to take a chance. For years Ripley had taken little else. He lighted a cigarette, paid his bill, went down the street to Conlin's.

There was such an uproar inside that the canvas walls seemed to billow out-

wards. He slid through the four-deep crowd at the bar and bought a beer. He had to move carefully so that the frame of the gun under his left armpit would nudge no one in the ribs. But the sting of the beer was good against his palate. He could feel it in his eyes, too. And he felt safe. The crowd had closed over him, covered him.

A MAN in black moustaches of a fashion as old as eighteen eighty worked his shoulders through the crowd. When he saw Ripley he stopped, blinked, and his mouth dropped open until his chin was unscreened. Then he thrust forward, holding out his hand.

"Hey, Jack," he said, "you ain't forgot old Blackie, have you?"

The visual memory of Ripley was dim. Somewhere in the past he had seen the shaggy downpouring of those moustaches, but he could not hitch face and place together. But there was honesty in the broken fingernails and labor-hardened palm of the hand. He shook it willingly enough.

"Sure I remember," said he.

"I'm a lucky hombre to pump into you," said Blackie. "There's three more of us holding down a table, inside; but four-handed poker ain't worth a damn. I'm hunting for the fifth man and I'm collecting you."

"There's too much sitting down in poker," answered Ripley. "To-night, I'm circulating a little."

"Wait a minute," urged Blackie. There was a greedy intentness in his eye. "The other three all know you. We been talking about you. Come on in and say 'hello,' anyway."

"Sure I'll come," agreed Ripley.

Blackie took his arm and led him sidelong through the press into the big gambling room. Many shaded lights hung from the ceiling; cones of white cigarette-smoke descended from them upon the flash of cards and dice and reaching hands; and a murmur went up composed of many voices speaking hard and short. Over at the roulette wheel one man raised a yell. He leaned across the table, shaking his fist at the croupier. The croupier considered him for a pale instant, drew something from beneath the table, and hit the complainant over the head. He dropped on his face; a bouncer took him by one heel and dragged him across the dirt floor. A trail of small coins and tobacco was left behind.

"Here we are," Blackie was saying. "Sit down a minute and have a drink. You can take the chair against the wall—"

Ripley, smiling, stepped to the designated chair. The three faces lifted to him; the heads jerked back a little; and Ripley's smile almost went out. One of the three was a little man with dust-colored eyebrows. He pulled something from inside his coat and held it in his lap. One was tall and thin with a blue-flannel shirt three sizes too large at the neck. He reached back to his hip and waited.

"Now—damn you—why don't you sit down?" asked Blackie.

"All right," said Ripley, and slipped into the chair. "I've known all of you fellows, somewhere, but I don't just place you. Except Blackie. Wasn't there a ruction in a saloon up in Montana, and you stuck in the window, trying to get out?"

"YOU remember now, do you?" asked Blackie. "And what you done to me? But that ain't anything compared to what these fellows want out of you."

"They want my gizzard," said Rip-

ley. He turned to the fourth man, a squat draft-horse whose face was blue-black with beard under the skin. His eyes dreamed on Ripley. "You have the biggest grudge. What is it?"

"Tell him, Dutch," said Blackie.

"The way you picked him up and the three of us waiting," said Dutch. "That's what beats me. But I'll tell you, Ripley. You murdered Tad Sullivan in Carson City two years back."

"Tad was looking for me and a reputation," said Ripley.

"Yeah?" said Dutch.

"I'm not arguing," remarked Ripley. "It's your turn, Skinny."

"I'm the partner of Blondy," said the tall man, and jerked his head towards the one with the dusty eyebrows. The little fellow smiled. He had buck teeth which were only covered when he pursed his lips.

"Jed Morrison only has one leg, now," said he.

"I got him to the doc in time," answered Ripley, "but the doc was a dummy."

"That was too bad for Morrison, and it's gunna be too bad for you," declared Blondy.

Ripley, sitting at ease, nodded towards them all. "It's a queer chance that all four of you should be sitting in at one table," he observed.

"No chance at all," answered Dutch. "There's a call out for you. It came up to-day. It's open season on Ripley and the four of us got together because we all know your mug. How come you didn't spot us before you got yourself right into our hands?"

"My private secretary was having a day off," said Ripley.

Dutch said: "Wipe the dirty grin off your face. You're gunna die, kid."

"The four of you will be shooting in self-defense, eh?" asked Ripley.

"We've got in the name of the law behind us," observed Skinny. "Anything we do is hunky dory."

"Tell me how you done it to poor Tad Sullivan," asked Dutch.

"Not without a drink."

"Take mine."

Dutch pushed the filled glass of whiskey across the table. When Ripley lifted the drink, he could see a blood-red high-light floating in the liquor.

"Here's to you, boys," he said. He tossed off half the drink and then shuddered as the whiskey-horrors griped his throat. He lighted a cigarette.

"Why not now?" asked Blondy. He was breathing through his open mouth. Now and then he ran the tip of his tongue over his lips.

"Wait a minute," said Dutch. "About Tad Sullivan—"

A RED-FACED man who walked with a slight limp came through a patch of misty light and into shadow, towards Ripley. Somewhere he had seen that face, but not the red of it. In a newspaper he had seen a picture, or in a magazine.

"There was nobody else in the place when Tad came in," said Ripley. "He walked up behind me and cursed me out. He had a good tongue in his head, if you remember. He told me to fill my hand. Mind you, my back was turned to him, but I saw him in the mirror. He was so hot that I could almost feel his breath. I threw my glass over my shoulder and it happened to hit him in the face. Afterwards—I filled my hand and turned around."

"You're lying," said Dutch, gently. "There was never a day when you would of looked Tad in the face. There was never a day when any rotten crook like you would look a Sullivan in the face!"

The red-faced man who walked with a limp stepped up to the table and laid the muzzle of a revolver on the edge of the green cloth.

"I'm Marshal Dallas," he said. "Ripley, I arrest you in the name of the law. Stick up your hands and touch the ceiling, Jack."

The hands of Ripley rose above his head, slowly, as though through a resisting element. He saw heads turning towards him out of the crowd, but nobody cared. Nobody cared about anything, here in Hooligan. Nobody in Hooligan wanted a thing except gold and ways of spending it, for it is in the spending that gold is sweeter than blood.

"What the hell is this?" asked Blondy, panting like a dying consumptive, flashing his glances between the law and the fugitive.

"It's a lousy frame, is what it is," murmured Dutch. His cheeks pulled back into fat wrinkles; his teeth showed. "He's my meat—"

"Brother," said the marshal, "if you shoot Ripley, I'll most everlastingly let a chunk of lead through your brain."

"It's Tom Dallas, all right. Hold up!" said Skinny. "It's no frame."

"Gimme those hands," commanded the marshal, pulling out a silver-bright set of handcuffs.

"I never was gladder to give my hands to a girl, even," said Ripley, and he held them out to the marshal.

CHAPTER III.

BORDER SMUGGLING.

BEFORE Dallas got Ripley to to Tallyho there were long hours of moonlight, of cold sleeping in the hills, of the dawn when there is too much oxygen in the air, of evening when there is too much dust. And there was golden, scalding heat that fell in a bright mist from the sky and pooled like metal in the hollows. They talked a little about a coyote they saw, and about the sign that crossed the trail or followed it, but most of the way they had the good, strong taste of silence in their throats because Tom Dallas wanted to handle this man with his eyes and weigh and test and probe him,

LANCASTER

quietly, before he attempted to use him as he never had used a man before. And Dallas had spent such a part of his life in the wilderness that he trusted the evidence of his eyes rather than any of the sounds of falsehood that form in the throats and come past the smiling lips of men.

The big, lean body of Ripley he paid little attention to aside from one glance at the thickness through the chest and the narrowness of the hips. He noted more the rifle-straightness of the eyes and their color which was as if the torrents of the Western sunlight had washed some of the blue away. Close the eyes of a man and he may be sleeping, he may be dead; in them lies the difference of life; and that was why the

marshal watched the eyes, and little else. By the time they got to Tallyho he was not sure of his man, but he had a breathless hope that his plan might be a little more than a childish dream.

It was after nightfall when he brought Ripley into his office. By day the room was a place of shelter from the sun, with a mighty picture filling the window; by night it was a ghostly emptiness lighted by one unshaded bulb that hung from the center of the ceiling. Ripley had irons on his hands and on his feet.

"Smoke?" asked the marshal, lifting a sack of Bull Durham with brown wheat-straw papers.

Ripley kept on smiling. Animosity narrows the eyes of most men, but the gaze of Ripley remained curiously bright and open.

The marshal rolled his own cigarette with fingers gone suddenly clumsy. "I wanta talk to you," he said. "Not for fun. I wanta do business with you."

"The hell you do," said Ripley.

"You're sour," observed the marshal. "What's the matter? Can't you take it?"

Ripley continued smiling. He looked negligently away towards the window, a black eye with four glittering facets.

"Do you know what I've got on you?" asked Marshal Dallas.

"Nothing Federal," answered Ripley. "And you're a Federal agent."

"Pushing the queer. Handling counterfeit is a Federal offense. You shoved over some of the queer in Tucson, two years back."

"That's a lie."

"Sure it's a lie. But I can prove that it's true."

"That means about fifteen years, doesn't it?"

"Or twenty."

"All right. I'll talk to you, then. I'll talk business." Ripley added, softly: "Damn you!"

"I'm getting old," said Dallas. "I need young hands and eyes to work for me. You take a badge and go to work for me or else you take fifteen years in the pen."

"Where do I work?"

"Anywhere from El Paso west."

"I've got fifty friends down here, and half of them are crooks," said Ripley. "I won't go after them."

SCARFACE

"You don't have to go after them. You only have to get one man for me."

"Who's the man?"

"Tell me first if you'll take the job."

"Not if the man's a friend of mine."

"Have you got any friends that's worth fifteen years in the pen to you?"

Ripley again discarded words and looked over Dallas with an impersonal curiosity.

"Well," said Dallas, yielding the point, "here's a picture of him."

THE photograph showed a lean face, already cast for middle age, but not yet worn and furrowed—a man probably in his early thirties. Ripley nodded.

"That's all right," he said. "What is he?"

Dallas sighed, in the greatness of his relief.

"Jim Lancaster is one of his names," he said. "Height six feet one; weight, a hundred and eighty; walks with a slight limp in the left leg; distinguishing marks, a small mole on the right cheek. Are you taking the job, Ripley?"

He could not help leaning forward. A vein like a big blue earthworm crawled out across his temple. Ripley watched it.

"I get Lancaster how?"

"Dead or alive," snapped the marshal.

"And then I pass in the badge—and I'm through?"

"You are."

"What has Lancaster done?"

"You have to spend some time in the jail, anyway. I'll take you over there and show you what Lancaster is doing."

Ripley stood up. "Are we shaking hands on it?" asked Dallas.

"Wait a minute. That Tucson job you hang on me with a dirty frame-up. You get that fat man with the glass eye to testify against me?"

"It's a frame, all right. And the fat man does the lying for me. Are we shaking hands on the Lancaster deal?"

"I'll get Lancaster or be gotten; but I'm not shaking hands with you."

"I take your naked word, eh?"

"I don't give a damn what you do," said Ripley.

But Dallas persisted: "From now on I don't have to worry about holding you? You're held to my job till you get Lancaster?"

Ripley took a breath that raised his chest. "That's the way it seems to be," he said.

"Not how it seems to be—what way is it?"

"Well, your way—till I've finished Lancaster."

"Good," breathed Dallas.

He went over to the table and unlocked the drawer. A slight shiver ran through him when his back was turned to Ripley, but he took from the drawer a key with which he freed Ripley from the irons on hands and feet. He threw the manacles into the corner, where they fell with a clanging crash. When he glanced back Ripley was settling back on his heels. He had been on tiptoe—until he had changed his mind. The first impulse still gleamed in his eyes.

"We'll go on over to the jail," said Dallas, and led the way out onto the street.

Tallyho was quiet, but not still. Bellowing laughter sounded from the saloons, the noise withdrawn behind walls, and out of the Mexican half of the town rose a little pulse of sound, irregularly beating, made of the thrumming of many guitars.

IT seemed to Dallas that the tall man beside him was touched a little by every noise, as a tree is stirred by wind. There was a pausing quality in his step as though he were prepared to spring in any direction. And he seemed to go a shade more slowly through the shadows of the trees. For the citizens of Tallyho, through a great outburst of public spirit, had planted little trees up and down the main street and the high-riding moon cast on the white of the street inky stains from the tree tops.

Yet all of these hesitations of Ripley were slight things, like the stopping and starting of a dog too well trained ever to let the leash grow taut.

The jail stood off by itself, the most expensive building in the town—square, heavy, dependable. The sheriff took his prisoner into it past the tow-headed jailor who stammered: "Hey! I thought—I thought—"

"That's the trouble with you, Bud," said Dallas. "You're always thinking a pile too much. Take us to that Chink—that Wung Su."

They went down a narrow corridor. One light from the ceiling overcast the cells with dark or penciled the interiors with the shadows of the bars that fell across the sleeping inmates—ineradicable stains on some of them. So they passed through a door into a separate group of four cells.

"All tool-proof, in here," said the marshal, and stroked one of the bars fondly. "Hey, Wung! Wung Su! Wake up!"

A little figure leaped from its couch. A pigtail bounced behind its head like a jumping snake. Now he stood barefooted, in flimsy shirt and trousers of cheap cotton, close to the bars. His face was round as a ball of yellow clay, with the features clumsily pinched onto it, or thumbed out. He kept bowing a little up and down with his hands crossed on his breast.

"Wung Su, where from you come?" asked the sheriff. "This number one gentleman. You tell him."

The eyes of Wung Su grew blank with the strain of mental effort. "I Wung Su born San Francisco," he said. His voice had a rippling, mourning intonation that flowed up and down. It was a childish voice that would never grow deeper. His incapable hands made gestures. "Water so—hill so—Mahket Stleet—Gollen Get—Wung Su born here—"

He paused. He came closer to the bars and his eyes entreated tall Jack Ripley, who suddenly put a hand through and patted the shoulder of the Chinese boy. The shoulder bone was sharp as a wooden edge.

"Poor little devil—what's he been saying?" asked Ripley. "Born in San Francisco?"

"That's what they all say. The dealers get hold of the boys in China, ship 'em to Mexico, and work 'em over the Rio Grande. On the way over, in the ship, they all have lessons. They learn how to say that they were born in San Francisco—if they're caught by us—and they prove that they know San Francisco. Understand? Water out here—the hills are back there—the Golden Gate to the north. Here's Market Street. And over here is the place where Wung Su was born. Wung Su came down here looking for his uncle, but no can find."

"Chinks are all right," said Ripley. "What's the matter with Chinks?"

"After these boys get inside the States they go to work in laundries and starve like mongrel dogs. Anywhere from Chicago to New Orleans. They work for years paying off the passage from China and the cost of smuggling into this country. They're slaves. They die off. They live on a handful of rice and a beating a day. The swine that gather 'em in China tell them they're going to a heaven, and take them into a hell. This here trade of running Chinks over the border is the dirtiest business in the world, Jack. And I'm gonna stop it. Come over here and I'll show you your quarters for to-night."

HE unlocked the door of the cell opposite to that of the Chinese boy. They went in and sat side by side on the hard bunk. The stale sweetness of cookery could never be cleaned from this air.

"That's what I want you for," said the marshal. "To break the back of this smuggling business. Jim Lancaster is the head of it. Get him for me, and the machine will break. He's the one that put the engine together and keeps the cogs oiled."

"Yeah?" said Ripley.

The marshal looked at him with a side glance of troubled thought.

"What's the matter, Jack?" he asked. "You see what the idea is. If you finish Lancaster you're doing a good job for everybody—Chinks and whites."

"Yeah?" said Ripley. "But about that poor damn Chinaman, across the aisle? Suppose you find out he *is* born in San Francisco—and give him a white man's chance?"

"What you mean find out he's born in San Francisco? He never saw the place."

"A first rate Federal marshal can find out anything he wants to," declared Ripley.

"Uh huh!" grunted the marshal. "I follow your drift now. Well, I could fix up the poor kid, I suppose."

"Thanks," said Ripley. "Dallas, you're damned white!"

"That's all right," declared the marshal. "Take this key. When you think a good time has come, reach through the bars and unlock the door of your cell. The same key will fit that back door at the end of the aisle. And you know where your mare is kept. In the barn behind my office."

"Is there a guard outside the jail?"

"Yes. I've put one on."

"You'd better call him off again."

"If you can't get through one guard you'll never get to Jim Lancaster."

"I haven't got a gun."

"You don't use guns any more—except on Lancaster."

Ripley sat up straight and peered.

"The marshal put me under lock and key and set a special guard on the jail. But the fugitive melted through and got away. Is that it?"

"I've got a reputation to protect," answered Dallas.

He waited for no more words, but stood up.

"So long," he said. "Maybe I'll be seeing you."

"Yeah. Maybe."

Dallas went out from the cell and clanged the door shut. The bolt hummed a minute in the lock, while Dallas paused across the aisle to speak to Wung Su, jerking his thumb back, several times, towards Ripley.

When the marshal was gone a voice of joy still rose softly from the cell of Wung Su. Two little yellow hands extended through the bars in thrusting gestures that tried to take the place of speech.

Ripley stretched himself on the bunk, turned his back on this gratitude, and was instantly asleep.

CHAPTER IV.

EASY ESCAPE.

HE had set in his mind a little alarm-clock which would sound after three or four hours. In about that time, Ripley wakened, sat up, and pulled out the key from his pocket.

If he used that key he was launched on a chase with the law after him and Jim Lancaster ahead of him. He kept weighting the key on the tip of his finger. Against the madness which Dallas demanded of him, bulked the certainty of fifteen or twenty years in jail.

He made a cigarette and smoked it

out. The white smoke worked through the bars and extended unshaped hands towards the light. At last he stepped his heel on the butt of the cigarette and slid his hand between the bars. The key fitted the lock easily, turned it as though it worked in oil.

He made the first step towards freedom, into the aisle. To a man condemned to fifteen years of cell-life, even that corridor would seem an open desert of space.

Someone was snoring. Not the little Chinaman. He was already gone from his cell and the marshal had kept the first promise. In the end, if good were poised against evil in items, there would be no broken promises checked on the record of Tom Dallas, but that he should have laid the weight of his trust on Ripley set the teeth of that young man on edge. The whole gesture of the marshal had been big and casual, as though in one day's ride he had penetrated to the heart of his man and judged him sufficient. He had not named probable hangouts of Lancaster, or described the chief adherents of the smuggler. As though he spoke to a master, he had named a subject to be dealt with and there closed the matter.

Ripley tried the rear door. It opened easily until, through a narrow crack, he looked at a world of white moonlight, more garish than the sun. A thin current of the outer air, the sweet night air, set him breathing more deeply. Then he closed the door to a hair's breath of light, for he heard sand swishing around footfalls; and now he had a dim glimpse of a rider who went by on a down-headed mustang with a sawed-off shotgun balanced on the pommel of the saddle. The sight of that gun was a physical pain to Ripley. At short range it needed no more aiming than the spray of a garden hose.

The horse turned the corner from view. Ripley was instantly through the door. He grudged the second needed to close it; then his boots were in the soft white of the sand. Someone began to laugh, with a brawling, drunken persistence. And yonder was a clump of high shrubbery.

He made for it at full speed. The sand yielded, watery, under the drive of his boots. Each forward stride cast a sheen of fine spray before him.

"Hey!" yelled a voice from the rear. "Hey---come back! Halt, there—"

A double-barreled shotgun needs no more aiming than a garden hose, he remembered; and he doubled his work. The gun spoke. It had a sharp, short bark without the deadly resonance of a rifle. Behind him, the bullets splattered. Then he dived into the shadows of the brush like a fish into the divine dark of water.

The guard was still yelling. He had never stopped. The mindless persistence of that voice enraged Ripley, but he had worked through the brush to the farther edge and had to lie still with the hoofbeats, sodden in the loose soil, hurrying towards him; beyond, lay a brief open stretch, then a scrub of small trees. Other voices had wakened. A door banged with heavy weight and with a clangor as of metal on metal. That was the door of the jail, perhaps.

What had Dallas wanted? Legal murder instead of a prison term; to bait his captive and then watch him die; to see how a mature man could be led with hope thinner than a ray of spider's silk.

The mustang came crackling through the brush. Ripley looked up and saw the horse striding short, the rider bumping heavily in the saddle. The brim of his sombrero flopped, also. The revolver in his hand waved up and

down as he turned the broncho through a circle to scan the shadows of the brush, and then darted it away for the scrub of trees.

Ripley got out of the bushes on the run, heading for the house on the left.

"Hey! Lookat!" shrilled a boy's voice.

He saw the white figure of the lad in a nightgown at an open window and then heard the comforting boom of a man who was saying: "Shut up and leave him be. Leave him have his chance, if he's won it."

SO Ripley got past the corner of the house, dodged through more brush, and cut down his pace to an easy stride. Voices kept pealing. A troop of riders made rapid thunder down the main street. And here he was behind the marshal's office at the door of the barn.

He shouldered the sliding door back with care, damning the rusted wheels which screamed at speed and groaned at slowness. Inside, he saw the gray mare like a ghost, a mist. The second saddle he hefted was his own, with ten vital pounds of weight saved in its making, since it would never have to withstand the shocks and jars of roping cattle. The good mare turned her head as though she would help him. Two jerks drew the cinches tight. He dragged on the bridle and mounted. Then he was in the deadly flood of moonlight, jogging Hickery Dickery towards the hills. There was no use burning up her strength until she was sighted and then—let them catch her if they could!

He went up a slope with the noise of the town collecting small beneath him. He could see light after light appear in windows, and the hills shouldered towards him like friends.

Dallas had been right, and a man who could not pass through such a danger as this would never deal with Jim Lancaster.

As the hills flowed away behind him he knew where he would go, the one place. He had plenty of friends, but who save Jose Oñate would be glad to see him now? The thought startled him. If he sifted life there remained to him the gray mare and that greasy-faced Oñate. Other men who remain in one place strike down longer roots and more adheres to them; to him, who had been so long in action, there was left little except the swiftness of the years. The thought troubled him until he lifted his face to the bare sky and breathed liberty so deep that he was happy again.

The hills parted. He had a view of the Rio Grande in shadow and moonlight, black glass and white. On the bend of the river stood the town of Los Altos. The distance made it no larger than a full-page illustration; from the height he could see the streets, the loom of the old Spanish church, the double row of trees dotted regularly around the plaza. Men prefer to spend their small lives on a tiny stage. Jack Ripley came down out of boundless space into the little town like a hawk from the sky to a perch in a tree, with a muttering of hoofs instead of the whirring of wings. He went through Los Altos with the liquid dust spilling black or white from the feet of his horse.

BEYOND the verge of the town he came to a small adobe house set close to the bank of the river. The air was suddenly cool and humid, for the moon, as it hung in the west with distended cheeks, showed Ripley fields of green vegetables. And yonder,

with its shafts pointing down into the ground, was the cart with which Oñate peddled his crops through the streets of Los Altos.

He dismounted and pushed the door ajar. Soft snoring made the darkness trembie.

"Jose!" he called gently. "Are you there, Jose?"

The snoring stopped.

"Mother of heaven!" said a groaning voice.

"Are you there?" repeated Ripley.

"My *señor!*" cried Jose Oñate. "Maria! Do you hear? It is his voice. Anna, Juan! Up! The *señor!*"

He came stumbling, half-dressed, through the doorway, holding up his hands. His teeth flashed, his face was seamed with laughter in the moonlight.

"Quickly, Juan. It is he—and the mare is still with him. Kind God, what a happiness to send us by night. I was dreaming of good, strong new wine, and roast kid. But this is what I find!"

Little Juan put the mare away in the shed. He went to her without fear, and she warded him off till she remembered him. Afterwards the fire was kindled, the lamp lighted, the iron pot of frijoles thrust into the blaze on the hearth. A chicken squawked once in the darkness after moondown and squawked no more. It was scalded and plucked. Little Anna and Juan tried to get the feathers off, but all their wits were in the shining of their eyes as they watched the stranger and Maria had to take over the work. The fat of her brown arm trembled as with vigorous strokes she stripped away the feathers. In no time at all the chicken was frying, the frijoles were bubbling like soft chuckles, the tortillas were ready, the brown-red of the wine was staining the glasses.

Oñate himself had been walking around the room opening his arms and striking his breast in joy. Now he rolled some frijoles in a tortilla which he had torn in half, stuffed his mouth with the food and washed it clean with a great draught of the red wine. After that, while the guest was eating, Jose Oñate picked up Anna and showed Ripley to her.

"There is the man!" said Oñate. "My friend of the world! Do you see him? They had the rope around my neck and he paid for the horse they said I had stolen.

"From his own pocket—and he never had laid eyes on me before. Use *your* eyes—wide—wide—so that they can swallow a man. You were a baby when you saw him before; now you are a big girl to remember. Mother of heaven, his glass is empty! Maria! The wine!"

CHAPTER V.

CHING.

RIPLEY lay at his ease in the heat of the afternoon on a pair of goatskins that softened the rounds of a willow Indian-bed. His head was raised far enough for him to look through the doorway at the willows along the river bank and at the unending plain that stretched beyond, shimmering with heat-waves. Maria, on the threshold, half in sunlight and half in shadow, scrubbed out wet cornmeal for tortillas. The meal glistened on her knuckles; on the back of her hand some of it had dried to white. She sang at her work very softly for fear she might disturb the thoughts of Ripley, and now and again she flashed her smile at him. She had a mole on her fat chin and it seemed

to move with a volition of her own when she was singing.

That was when the voice of a man sounded outside the house. Young Juan made answer.

"Amigo," insisted the stranger. "You go tell him—I'm an amigo."

"Nobody here!" shrilled Juan. "I tell you, nobody here! Nobody—not one! My father is in Los Altos—"

"Amigo!" insisted the man's voice. "You tell the big man that I'm a friend."

Ripley took out the old-fashioned Colt which Oñate had given him. It was ancient, but he had proved that it shot true that morning. Maria got up from her work. "Go back into the corner, *señor!*" she pleaded. "I'll keep him away!"

He looked about him at the home-made broom, the irons by the hearth, the peppers red and green and golden and brown that hung in long strips across the ceiling. It seemed to him that the house of Oñate contained happiness enough for the entire world, and that wise men would give up dangerous chance in order to till the ground and water it, and make the green things grow. But since he had chosen the other way, they were on his trail.

Maria began to gesticulate. Then a man who looked bow-legged in his leather chaps stepped into the ken of Ripley. The face of the man was crooked, but not so crooked as his smile. A scar made a white zigzag from the temple to the jaw.

"Hello, Warren. How are you, Chuck?" said Ripley. "Come right in."

Chuck Warren dodged almost out of sight, the impact of the voice struck him so by surprise. Then he mastered himself and came right in. His smile deformed him more than ever, but Ripley shook the extended hand. Not even money—not even a published reward—would ever win Chuck to the side of the law, and he could hardly represent a direct anger.

"It's a long time," said Chuck.

"What brought you here?" asked Ripley. "The garlic?"

"You bust clean from the jail in Tallyho. You head this way. And Jose Oñate's your friend," said Warren, briefly.

"Yeah. That's easy," agreed Ripley.

"I'm bringing you news," said Warren.

"About what?"

"About a way out. Old Dallas is hot after you, ain't he? I'm showing you a way out. There's somebody up high that could use you, kid."

"Who?"

"You'll know him when you see him, I guess. The biggest man on the border, and it means money. I'm sliding out of here. Be back after sunset. Then I'll take you into Los Altos. Will you be waiting here? I've got to go."

"Sit down and have a drink of this Mexican red."

"If I hang around here, somebody'll see me and wonder why. Think fast, kid."

"I'll be waiting here after dark."

"That's great. So long." He went to the door and turned. "Call off the dogs when I come back, will you?" he asked. He hooked a thumb at Maria and disappeared beyond the doorway.

IN the dusk he came again, and called from a distance. Little Anna held the hands of Ripley when he stood up. "If you go, you won't come back," she said.

"This is home for me, Anna," he told her. "Of course I'll come back."

She shook her head. Her face went ugly and puffed with restrained

emotion. "One time a big brown dog came off the road and stayed with us one night and a day. He had a sore foot that he kept licking. But in the dark he began to whine. We opened the door and he went away. He never came back! He never came back!"

Jose Oñate snapped his fingers and gestured. Maria took the girl away and Ripley went out into the night. All the time he was saddling Hickery he could hear the little girl sobbing. Her voice began to make a sing-song in his thoughts. He would never come back. He would never come back!

When he got up to the road Chuck Warren was waiting. All the way to town he kept confidentially close, leaning his head towards Ripley.

"The best break you ever had in your life," he declared. "The biggest thing that ever happened to you."

"And you picked me out for it? I'm going to owe you something, Chuck," said Ripley.

"Don't laugh," said Warren. "No matter what this is, don't laugh!"

They got through the town. There was no wind. The heat lay thick across the streets until they came to a short row of houses on the very bank of the river. They could smell the Rio Grande and the wet cool of it was in the air.

The buildings were adobe, low, whitewashed, with narrow windows cut through the thick of the walls. They stopped under a wooden sign. A glint of light from a neighboring window let Ripley spell out: "SAM LI, SILKS AND TEA."

The proximity of some great thing made the voice of Warren soft, as they dismounted, and he said to Ripley. "I dunno why he wants to see you here. Take it easy with him. The chief's straight, but he's damned hard and short."

He tapped at the door. Echoes of the knocking walked away softly inside the house. Then the light of a carried lamp wavered across a window, staining the lips of the casement with yellow. The door pulled open and a girl stood back from the entrance to let them in. She was dressed in a tunic and trousers of black silk with a rich gleam of embroidery on it. With a raised hand she shielded her eyes from the glow of the lamp, but the light struck the hand to translucence and oiled to sleekness the hair which was drawn flat back from her forehead. She was not young, thought Ripley, but newly made of an ancient ivory.

"Hello, Ching," said Warren. "Here's Jack Ripley. The chief wants him, and you're to take him in."

She made a curtsy in which only the knees moved, a flexion so easy with grace that the flame hardly stirred in the throat of the lamp she held.

"Very good to see you," said the girl. He could look straight into her face, because her eyes were not raised above the third button of his shirt. He would have liked to look longer. For the first time he could see why many people love Chinese art.

"So long and good luck," said Warren, and closed the door.

THE girl led the way across the shoproom, folds and gleams of colored silk appearing on the shelves, and brushed through a hanging into an inner hall. The light flowed back over her shoulders; the end of her braided hair flipped up and down a trifle.

She stopped at another hanging and pulled it back. Ripley passed into a little room where he faced a huge squatting idol with a face of smooth, hard, yellow stone, and the body of

black. The idol came to life by lifting its downcast eyes. It rose and became a man as huge as any that Ripley had ever seen, smiling over a double flow of chin, extending a vast, yellow hand.

"I am Sam Li," said the Chinaman. "I am happy to see you, Mr. Ripley. My friend who wishes to see you will be here very soon. Please sit down."

He offered, with a wave, a low couch, and Ripley sat down. A sing-song phrase of Chinese bubbled from the fat lips of Sam Li. The girl let the hanging fall and disappeared.

"We'll have tea in a moment," said Sam Li. "My friend should be here quickly to see you. I'm sorry."

"Not a bit. Hope I'm not keeping you up," answered Ripley.

"Happiness is better than sleep," said Sam Li, "and Ching and I are happy to serve our friend. Even by lamplight." He laughed a little, shaking his shoulders as he sat down again, and his fat face was shaking, except for the great forehead of hard, yellow stone. If brains filled the enormous dome of that skull, they could not be the brains of ordinary men. "Kind hearts," said Sam Li, "waken more easily than singing birds. And now—see!"

There was almost nothing in the room except a tall cabinet against one wall and a large bell-shaped object covered with black silk. Sam Li, pulling back the cloth, opened a door, and at once a dozen canaries streamed out of the cage. They whirled around the head of Sam Li, their wings a shining yellow mist through which he kept on laughing until Ripley began to feel that Old King Cole must have lived in Asia.

Sam Li whistled. At once the canaries lighted like jewels of gold on his arms and shoulders except one that tried vainly to perch on a button of his coat and kept whirring its wings to make up for a lost balance, and one that perched on the bald top of his brow.

The thick lips of Sam Li pursed. Out of an absurdly small, round hole a whistle fluted and instantly a dozen canaries were answering in a musical jargon, ruffling their feathers and quivering their tongues with the might of their song.

Ching came, bringing a tray of tea. She almost kneeled, putting it on the floor before Sam Li, and at once the golden cloud of canaries left the man for the girl. One of them perched on her ear and took hold on a beakful of hair to steady itself. And they all kept on singing until the room was filled with a delightful clamoring.

"See, Mr. Ripley," said Sam Li, "that music leaves the old and goes to the young. But hush them, Ching, or we can hardly talk."

SHE went to the cage and took the little birds from her arms and shoulders to pass them through the door into the shrouded cage. Last of all, she held up a finger and the bird from her ear dropped onto it. The canary seemed in a great rage, steadying himself with beating wings while it pecked at the finger. But this one, also, was put with the others and the silk veil dropped over musical little complaints.

The girl looked down at the finger which had been attacked. She pressed it against her chin for comfort and then laughed.

"That one!" she said. "What an eagle in his heart!"

Sam Li extended to her the cup which he had filled with tea. It was jade green, delicate as an eggshell; but

it was safe in the hand of Ripley, for who can learn to pick locks unless there are brains in the tips of his fingers?

He looked openly at the girl because he wanted her to laugh again; her laughter had filled his heart as water brims a well with brightness that overflows. Even laughter was different in her from big-throated American mirth; for her head had tilted somewhat to the side and a little down, almost as though she were ashamed.

"Now they are quiet inside the cage," said Sam Li. "The silk surrounds them. To them it is a mystery as dark and great as our night. Perhaps there is something over us, Mr. Ripley, that draws the blackness around us and then holds up the sun like a lantern and laughs when all the little people run out into the morning."

A bell tinkled, far away, and sent the girl towards the door until a second distant jangling stopped her. Sam Li rose with a hushing rustle of silks.

"I must go, but I come again, soon," he said, and he flowed from the room, bending his head as he passed through the door.

The girl stood by the wall with her hands crossed over her breast and her eyes lowered to the floor so that her face had almost the blind look of a statue. Ripley could not tell whether she were sun-browned or the Mongolian yellow. Feeble lamplight was hardly enough to let him distinguish the difference.

He swallowed more tea and as he looked up she was crouching to fill the cup again. She leaned into his mind. The nearness of her face confused him, and he could only look down at the delicacy of her hands.

"Have some tea for yourself, Ching," he suggested.

At this she stood suddenly back against the wall again. Her eyes went up and down. So did her hands in deprecation.

"How should a woman taste such tea?" she asked. "It was picked leaf by leaf. It was dried with sun and prayers!"

She showed how it had been picked and the loose sleeve, flowing back from her arm, showed a bracelet that, like a golden snake, clasped her above the wrist.

"If it only grew a leaf to a bush, and the bushes only grew on a south bank of the emperor's garden, it wouldn't be too good for you, Ching," said Ripley.

"Ah, all of you talk to make Ching so happy that she will laugh," said the girl, and she began to laugh a little at the same time.

RIPLEY looked away as he listened to that quiet music, for there were strings in his heart that responded with a faint echoing. He wanted to have her close again. This time he would watch how she stooped from ankles and knees and waist, a flowing movement.

"I'm through with the tea," he said.

She came and leaned for the small tray, and instead of watching all of her he could only study the hands, again. That was why he saw the golden snake slip a little on her arm, and the skin it exposed was clearest white!

He could not move for a moment. She was in her place again, looking down at the floor, before he swayed to his feet, exclaiming: "Ching, you're not the daughter of Sam Li."

"I belong to Sam Li," she said.

He thrust forward his hand. It was sun-blackened and therefore he pulled

it back again. "You're whiter than I am, Ching," said Ripley.

"I belong to Sam Li," answered the girl.

"Belong? How can you belong to a Chinaman? They have slaves on the other side of the water, but not here!"

"Are you angry?" asked Ching in alarm at his emotion. "Listen to a thing that will make you happy again."

She held up a frail hand and whistled; instantly a canary trilled back a note from the cage.

"Ah, do you hear?" asked Ching. "That is the strong one who picked at my finger. He is so brave that he will even answer me from the dark."

Ripley began to smile, and at that she whistled again and a whole phrase of ecstasy came fluting from the cage.

She would not talk of herself willingly, but he knew that in time he would be able to lay hands on whatever mystery closed her in this house with Sam Li. An anguish of unspoken questions tormented him, and yet it was better to leave her for a little while like this rather than to rush her out at once into that brazen light which squinted the eyes of those free women of whom he had been speaking.

Sam Li came back. The gross fatness of his cheeks wabbled with his steps. "He is here, Ching," said the Chinaman. "Take Mr. Ripley to him."

He added to Ripley: "So you have come to the golden gate of fortune. Peace and happiness go with you!"

CHAPTER VI.

LANCASTER'S PROPOSAL.

SHE took a lamp and led Ripley out of the room. Sam Li was bowing with a ponderous ceremony. "Another time I shall see you, Mr. Ripley," he was saying in his perfect English. "Make me happy by coming here, one day. Those for business go to the front door, but those who want a welcome come to the back of the house."

Ripley followed the girl down the hall again to a room at the rear of the place. The hushing sound of the river and the damp of its breath came through the window.

A man wonderfully narrow, wonderfully tall, stood in the farthest corner motionless, like a guard. A heavy cartridge belt sloped down to the revolver on his thigh. Another figure leaned above the lamp on the table, puffing at his cigarette until the end of it glowed and a curling cloud of white mist enveloped the lamp. As he straightened Ripley saw the lean, hard face of that Jim Lancaster whose capture would mean for him peace with the law, freedom, and hands cleansed forever from his past. This was indeed the golden gate of fortune, and fate, by some miracle of kindness, was filling his hands with opportunity.

If only that figure with the face of idiotic length had not been stationed there in the background, at watch!

"Any cool beer?" asked Lancaster, paying no heed to Ripley.

"At once," said the girl. Her slippers whispered away down the hall, while Lancaster turned his attention to Ripley.

"You're young—damned young for what I want of you," he said. "Sit down."

Ripley remained standing, with one hand resting on the edge of the little deal table that stood in the center of the room. Out of the corner of his eye he could see a flat shallow at the bend of the river with small eyes of starlight looking up from it.

"Sometimes the older they are the harder they fall," said he. "Who are you?"

At this the thoughtful glance of Lancaster went over him again. "You're one of these tough kids," said Lancaster. "I've seen them before. But when they break, they break through the bone. What have you done? Tell me about yourself. Have you any sort of a record?"

"I've cut a lot of wise hombres down to my own size," said Ripley.

"Meaning what by that?"

Ripley smiled on him, the same faint smile which had sent a journeying chill through the blood of Dallas.

"Don't be a damn fool with your pride," snapped Lancaster. "This is business. Can I use you or can't I?"

"Probably not," said Ripley.

He felt an almost dizzy sense of coincidence, but, after all, if a fellow like Warren could trace him to his hide-out, a mind like Lancaster's would be able to find a use for him. The grim eyes of Lancaster showed him his past in a clearer light. He had felt that he was simply drifting through early, irresponsible years enjoying life as it came to him.

To others, to Lancaster, he must seem to have preferred crime calmly and coldly until he had become a tool for evil, hardened, tempered, fitted by experience to the hand of Lancaster and his gang.

"You're the kind," said Lancaster. "I can use your kind. I can use them as long as they know that I'm a shade harder and meaner, still. Do you think you could understand that?"

Ripley smiled again.

"I'm not going to waste a lot of time," said Lancaster. "We do business or we don't. It doesn't depend on you. It depends on me. That's why I say: Tell me something about yourself."

There was a silence. The girl came in with bottles of beer on a tray. Lancaster put his arm around her. "How's everything, Ching?" he asked in his best manner.

At this she shifted her head, slowly, and let Lancaster look right down into her smiling eyes. Like wheels over the hollow arch of a wooden bridge, the heart of Ripley bumped twice, and was still.

"I am happy!" she said.

"Are you?" asked Lancaster. "Think I could make you any happier, one of these days?"

"Ah, yes," said the girl.

"I'm going to find the scar-face for you. You can tie to that. Now run along."

She went towards the door quickly. She was like ivory, with peach-bloom transfusing it. Her slippers went softly down the hall.

"Beauty, eh?" said Lancaster. "Damn her, but she's a pretty thing."

He made two paces across the floor, snapped his cigarette out the window, and returned to his theme.

"If I take you it's something big," he said. "You know me?"

"I don't know you."

"I'm Jim Lancaster." He waited.

Ripley was stone. He relented to say: "You run Chinks over the border?"

"So they say. What about it?"

"The Chinks are all right," said Ripley, cautiously.

"I want a man I can trust," said Lancaster. "The law wants you and that will keep you straight with me. Warren and the rest say you're honest—for a crook. You seem made to my hand. And this job would mean a lot to you. Say—a hundred a week. No,

make it a hundred and fifty. Think fast, Ripley."

THINK fast? He was thinking in terms of miles and hours that shot up like stardust through his brain. Not very many hours before he would have his chance at Lancaster if luck held for him. And, in the meantime, there was Sam Li to investigate and that mysterious leash in which he held Ching. There was Ching herself. He held the thought of her as she had held the lamp; it poured a radiance over his mind.

"Think fast?" said Ripley. "Wages like that do the thinking for me. A hundred and fifty a week? That'll suit me."

"You don't care what sort of work it is?"

"I do care. We'll take one job at a time."

"One job at a time? You mean that you'll be free to step out from under any time you don't like my ideas?"

"And you can fire me with a wave of the hand any time I'm on your nerves, Lancaster."

"You could quit me in the middle of a trail?"

"That's my idea."

Lancaster said: "Missouri, what you think of this hombre?"

"He's too damn pretty to suit me," said the tall shadow with the idiotic length of face.

Lancaster grinned. "He won't have a pretty job, though." He nodded at Ripley. "I'm going to take you on, kid."

"When?"

"Now. You start now. If I could leave the border I'd do this myself. You can do it for me. There's a new shipment of Chinks landed in Mexico, bound for the U. S. A. Coupla hundred yellow boys, coming overland now through the Sierra Blanca. You know those mountains?"

"They're a lot to know," commented Ripley.

"They'll likely take the north pass. You find 'em."

"All right."

"I'll give you a note to Dan Tolliver, riding herd on them. It'll tell him to turn over a scar-faced Chink to you. You won't mistake the Chink. Somebody widened his mouth for him with a knife, once, and they say his grin goes to his ears. You take that Chinaman and bring him up here. Bring him to me. No, bring him right into this house."

Ripley nodded.

"Treat him like he was gold and don't let him wear out on the way. The biggest thing in the world hangs on it for me. A hundred and fifty a week? If you come through with that Chinaman I'll give you a bonus that'll put a permanent bulge in you."

He went to the door and called: "Ching! Oh, Ching!"

A door opened. "I come!" cried the voice, the last note wavering out as she started running. She was breathless as she reached the threshold of the room where the three tall men looked down at her.

"This fellow Ripley is going to get your scar-face and bring him up to you," said Lancaster. "Think he can do it?"

She looked at the feet of Ripley and slowly upwards, her glance stopping short of his face. In her expression, all emotions except happiness were obscure and dim, and yet it seemed to Ripley that he saw a little hardening of disdain about her mouth.

"He will go as you send him and come as you call him," she said.

Missouri burst into a deep, rolling vast guffaw.

"Shut up, Slim," commanded Lancaster, chuckling a little.

"May I go now?" asked the girl.

"Go along," grinned Lancaster. "I guess we know what you mean."

He was still broadly amused when the girl had left them again.

"Her and me, we figger the same way on this one," said Missouri Slim.

"You haven't the brains to figure," snapped Lancaster. He explained to Ripley: "I wanted the girl to have a flash at you because the scar-face is a big thing in her life. If she didn't like you, forget it."

"Sure," said Ripley. "That's easy."

It was one of the hardest tasks of his life, but he managed to smile straight at Lancaster and keep the bulldog out of his eyes.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Bullet-Proof Glass

IF a steel-jacketed .45 pistol bullet is fired directly at a window made of bullet-proof glass, one inch thick, it will go about half way through. Generally the window won't even crack. Such glass, used in banks, is made of alternating layers of plate and of window glass, with transparent celluloid between. The sheet is laid on a hydraulic press and kept for hours under a pressure of three or four hundred pounds per square inch. The result is a transparent pane similar to automobile glass, only much heavier.

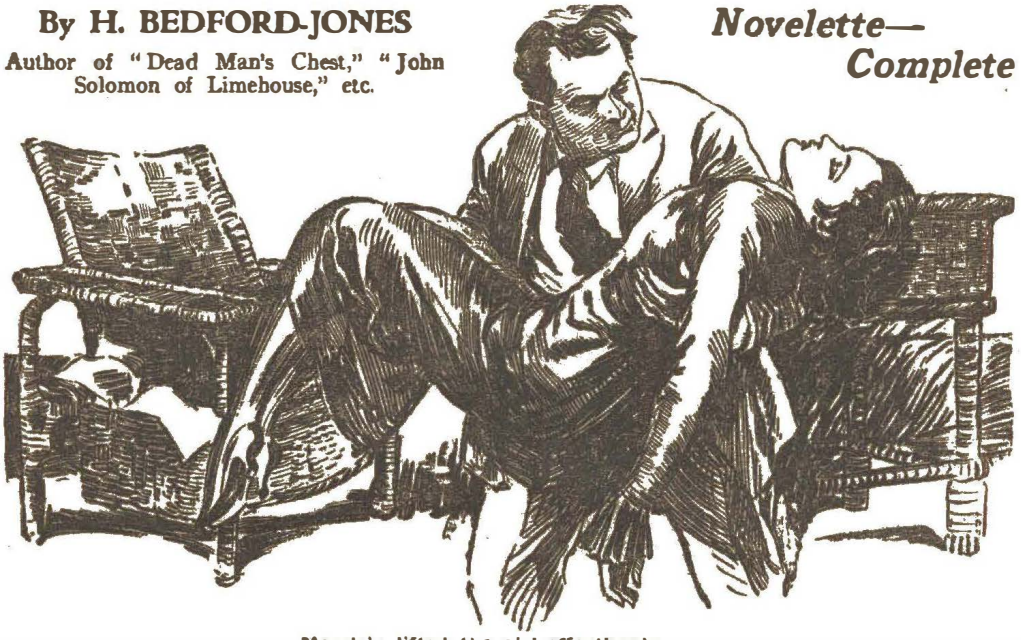
Another new form is called "one-way" glass—used in windows it allows those inside to see out clearly, but any one outside can see only the vaguest shadows within. Colored glass is not easy to make, and some manufacturers keep their methods a secret. One developed a rose-colored glass, but the chemist found he did not know how he had made it. He had to spend six months finding out. Ruby glass is the most expensive; it is colored by dissolving gold in nitric acid and pouring the solution into the powdered mixture.

J. W. Holden.

The Deathly Island

By H. BEDFORD-JONES
Author of "Dead Man's Chest," "John Solomon of Limehouse," etc.

Novelette—Complete



Mandrin lifted the girl effortlessly

CHAPTER I.

MURDERER'S FATE.

STUART reached Diego Suarez, on the north tip of Madagascar, on the tenth. He went ashore and at the splendid post office near Coral Point made inquiry at the *poste restante,* otherwise the general delivery. A letter addressed to Captain Charles Stuart was produced, and after identifying himself, he obtained it. He turned away and tore it open, to find a brief, unsigned note:

> Meet me at Windsor Castle Wednesday morning about ten.

He tore up the note thoughtfully. Wednesday. That was to-morrow. He knew the writing; it was that of his brother Eben. Windsor Castle! Had the man gone crazy?

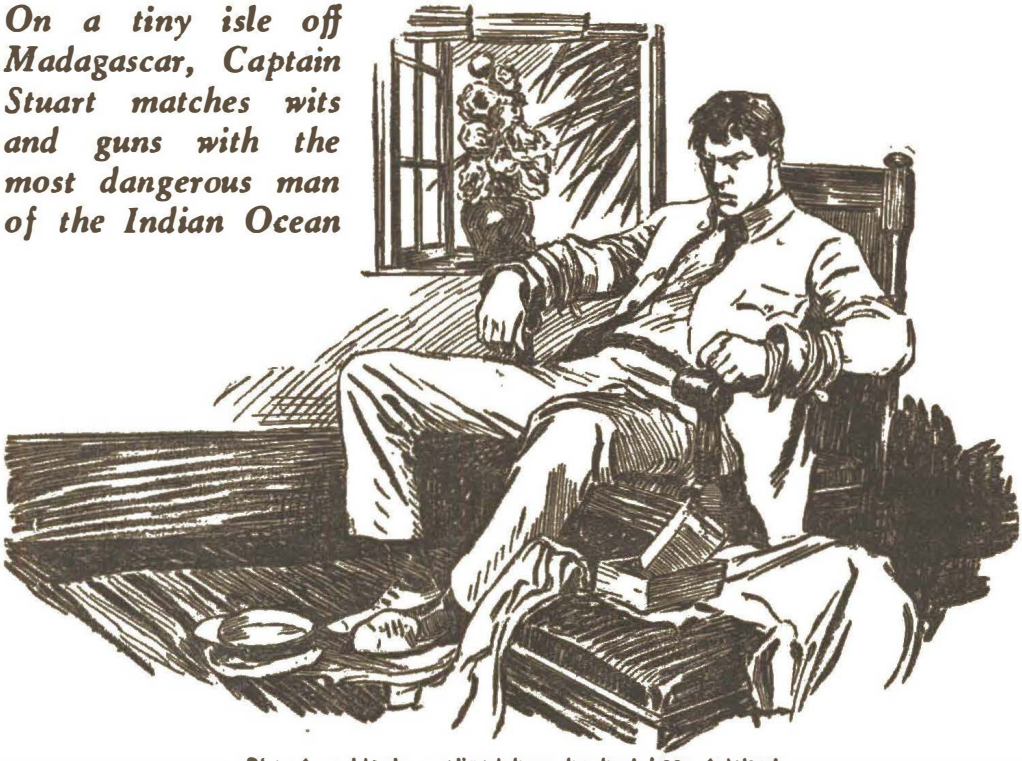
Stuart made his way to one of the sidewalk cafés, dropped into a chair, ordered a cool drink, and frowned. Eben must have received his cablegram, then. But why this insane message? It had been posted here in the city. Why didn't Eben come aboard, or meet him? In trouble, of course. He might have expected it. How often had he sworn never again to jeopardize his own name and life by pulling that worthless scapegrace out of a hole?

"And," Stuart muttered angrily, "I suppose I'll go and do it again—and again. After all, he's my brother. The scoundrel! I suppose it's forgery once more, or worse."

There was no denying the fact that Eben Stuart was no angel.

Neither was Cap'n Stuart, for that matter. You could see in his hard, brown, weathered features that he was not the man to avoid a fight. He was just thirty; impatient of fools, his gray eyes had a stern bite to them. But

On a tiny isle off Madagascar, Captain Stuart matches wits and guns with the most dangerous man of the Indian Ocean



Stuart suddenly realized how he had been tricked

that bronzed face was level-eyed and strong. No weakness in it. A straight keen look square in the eye, and if you didn't like it that was just too bad for you.

A man came to Stuart's table and with a murmured apology took the opposite chair. Stuart flashed him a glance, then nodded in surprise. It was one of the harbor officials who had inspected his papers.

"Oh, hello," said Stuart. "Have a drink?"

"Thanks, no. I merely desired to ask *m'sieu* a question."

"At your service."

"Is *m'sieu,* by any chance, a relation of one named Stuart, who was until recently assistant manager of the packing house?"

"The stockyards?" Stuart's lips curved thinly. "Do I look like I'd have any relatives in that business?"

"But yes," said the officer seriously. "*M'sieu* does not look unlike him."

Stuart shook his had. "Afraid I can't claim the honor. Is he an American?"

The other shrugged. "Who knows? Perhaps. The police have been in search of him, and it occurred to me that *m'sieu,* being of the same name—"

"No, no!" Stuart broke into a hearty laugh. "Why, what has he done, anyhow?"

"Different things, *m'sieu.* Murder, for one. He is accused of having killed the King of Amber Island and stolen his daughter's pearls, which are famous—"

"Wait a minute."

Stuart sipped at his drink, while the astonished Frenchman stared at him. Was he mad? This was Madagascar, yes, the strange, huge French colony between Africa and the Indian Ocean.

That made it all the queerer. Windsor Castle! And now the King of Amber Island.

"So," said Stuart. "This rascal kills kings, does he? Or did I hear you aright?"

"*M'sieu* does not understand. Amber Island is around the cape, off the west coast. It is like this," and on the tablecloth the officer drew with his fingernail. There grew the triangular outline of Cape Amber, that enormous mountain mass which forms the very northern tip of Madagascar, connected with the mainland by a narrow isthmus.

Here on the east side of the isthmus was Diego Suarez, the second greatest harbor in the world. And over to the west of the neck, the officer made a dot.

"Amber Island, *m'sieu*. An Englishman named Desmond bought it many years ago and made his home there—"

"An Irishman, you mean," said Stuart. "No Englishman could be named Desmond."

"It is all the same, *m'sieu*. He came to be called the King of Amber Island, partly in jest, partly in earnest. Well, two weeks ago he was here, visiting, with his daughter and his yacht. He was found dead in the suite he occupied in the Japan Hotel, yonder. The pearls of his daughter, pearls almost as beautiful as she is herself, were gone. This Stuart had been there, his fingerprints were found; he, too, was gone."

"And the girl?" questioned Stuart sardonically. "Also gone, no doubt?"

"But no, *m'sieu!* Now she has gone home with the yacht to bury her father there, but she knew nothing about the murder. Ah, what a woman! Not in Paris, not in Lyons, will *m'sieu* see such a young woman! Well, she will make a good island queen, with her father's money and so forth. However, allow me to warn *m'sieu* that if this man of the same name should try to get away on the schooner, it would be unpleasant."

Stuart thanked his informant warmly, assured him with truth that he would allow no murderer to try and leave on his craft, and then asked if there was by chance any place in town known as Windsor Castle. The officer laughed, and pointed to the map he had drawn on the tablecloth, putting his finger on the isthmus—that ridge of high, craggy peaks circling around back of the city.

"Here, *m'sieu*, lie two peaks like castles—Windsor Castle and Dover Castle, they are called. If *m'sieu* wishes, he can visit Windsor Castle easily, with porters and a filanjana; it is only twenty kilometers away. From there one obtains a view of the most magnificent."

So, then it was no insanity after all!

STUART went back to his schooner thoughtfully. Murder, eh? Pretty bad. Brother or not, this ended the business. Certainly Eben would get no lift aboard the schooner. Murder and robbery—whew! "How often shall my brother offend me, and I forgive him?" Well, this was something different, if it were true. If!

"And I'll find out, quick enough," Stuart muttered grimly.

Once aboard the schooner, he felt better about it all; this was his home, and he was never quite at his ease ashore. Five years before, upon coming into a little money, Stuart had done what many another man would like to do. He bought this little craft and went places. He was that kind,

and he had no ties to hold him down. He had found none.

For the past two years, he had been knocking about the strange and savage coasts of Madagascar and parts adjacent, from Zanzibar to Mozambique. He got on well with the French. He liked the natives. Whether or not his cargoes paid mattered little to him. A keen-faced, hungry man, always seeking, seeking he knew not what, he knew not where, ever searching over the horizon. Life meant little to him.

His seamen were Sakalavas, brown island men, merry and eager. His mate was a queer, lop-eared old rascal with a gray beard and a dirty turban; an Arab, Rais Yusuf by name, but one of those Arabs whose ancestors had been the prime seamen of the eastern seas for five hundred years. Stuart was a little aloof from them all, so that they loved him the more.

Night fell. Dinner over, he opened up a roll of newspapers he had fetched aboard and began glancing through them. When he came on the story of Desmond's murder, he grunted savagely but forced himself to read on. Yes; one Ebben—that was the way they spelled it—Ebben Stuart, an official of the packing house. He had disappeared. With a growl, Stuart cast the papers aside, then picked one up again. A picture caught his eye. The picture of a young woman, poorly printed. His eye kindled at sight of her face.

"Ah!" he murmured. "There, by gad, is a woman for you! Wonder who she is."

He looked at the caption, and threw the paper away with an oath. Mlle. Felice Desmond, from Amber Island.

Stuart went on deck and stared out at the shore lights. A big city, this; a city of factories, shipyards, commerce, French civilization. Automobiles cheek by jowl with the native filanjana, the seat perched on poles that men carried on their shoulders. All Madagascar was like that, contrasts everywhere. Tropical jungles and vast mountain uplands. Cities hundreds of miles of paved roads, but no connection with other cities except by train. All in process of building. An empire slowly forging ahead. Aviation fields alongside native perfume factories, dockyards with Arab dhows at their gates.

In the morning a tourist office arranged everything. Stuart enjoyed the contrasts of his excursion; a ricksha, or push-push, as it was called here, down to the dock. Then a steam launch up to the head of the bay, where the road began. Then the filanjana. He perched in the chair as the porters swung along, and the guide pointed things out to him. He had a big lunch-basket that two of the men carried slung on a pole, all for himself; or so he said.

THE trail rose and rose, twisted, climbed. Finally, on the mountain neck, they came to a native village with one of the long, unpronounceable Polynesian names of the island. Brown men from far over the sea, in a forgotten day, had settled Madagascar, coming in their war canoes from the East Indies.

And there was Windsor Castle up above on the crest. One of those strange freaks of nature which abound in Madagascar, looking for all the world like a turreted castle, but now with a staircase ascending the precipitous sides, an easy path for tourists. Stuart climbed to the rocks above and two men brought along his lunch basket. It was still early. The guide wanted to earn his pay, but Stuart

gave him money and curt directions.

"Go away. Take your men and go down to the village and stay there. I wish to be alone. After an hour, come back and see if I am ready to leave."

Well, God knows all English and Americans are mad, said the guide, and with a shrug obeyed the orders. Stuart watched the men descend and vanish from sight. Then he turned to the jumble of rocks.

"All right, Eb," he said grimly, and then lifted his voice. "Are you here?"

Eben was there. He came forth into the sunlight, a tattered, unshaven, nauseous figure, but he carried himself jauntily. Little could be seen of his face for beard and dirt; he was slender, wide-shouldered, arrogant.

"Hello," said Stuart, eying him. "Hungry, eh? Well, save your talk. Pitch in and eat, then talk later. That's my advice. You'd better follow it."

Eben flinched a little at the grim note in that quiet voice, then shrugged.

"Fair enough," he responded. "Glad to see you, old chap. I'm famished, for a fact. I have some native friends, but their idea of food isn't mine. And wine, real wine! Say, this is great—"

"Eat," said Stuart. "And save what's left. You may need it."

He turned his back and, while his brother tackled the food like a starving man, began to appreciate the place to which he had come. There were few like it in the world. Off to his right fell away the land, and all the wide Indian Ocean lay outspread there in its endless desolation. To the north towered the savage green masses of Cape Amber. To the left lay the ocean again, the Mozambique Channel, running down to the south where the Mitsui archipelago seemed to blend with the land once more. Islands by the hundred. One could see fifty miles and more from this point.

"Where's Amber Island?" demanded Stuart.

The other rose. With this question, he knew that Stuart knew everything, but little he cared. Swaggering over, he pointed. Stuart saw a spot of green, nothing more. Far away and distant, over to the westward and south. By bird flight, only a few miles perhaps, but to reach it one had to round the whole of Cape Amber.

Presently Eben lit a cigarette, rose, sighed again with repletion, and came to where Stuart stood.

"Well, we might as well have it out," he said. "You know?"

"I've heard a lot of things." Stuart turned and the gray eyes stabbed. "True or not?"

Eben Stuart chuckled in his soft, evil fashion.

"You've pulled me out of a lot, Charley," he said. "This is the last time. Now I'm made. I've got everything all fixed."

"You don't leave Diego Suarez aboard my craft," Stuart said calmly. "The police have their suspicions."

"That's all right. I don't have to." Eben nodded down the line of the west coast. "All I need is some money and I can reach Nosi Be, and once there I'm taken care of. Now I'll show you something that'll knock your eye out."

FROM under his ragged shirt he took a chamois bag slung on a thong about his neck, and pulled at the knotted draw-strings. He went to the head of the staircase and looked down, saw no one approaching, and returned. Out into the sunlight he poured pearls—two necklaces, gorgeous shimmering things, loops and strands of iridescent loveliness.

"Look at them!" he said in a low voice, his eyes greedy. "Millions!"

"So it was all true." After one glance at the pearls, Stuart fastened his eyes on his brother's face. "All of it."

"Bosh! If I hadn't got them, Mandrin would have had them."

"And who is Mandrin?"

"That French chap. Her father's secretary. He tipped me off in the first place and got me in with 'em. He's got his own game over there, wants the girl; but he couldn't get away with the pearls. Somebody else had to do that, away from the island. He thought I was a safe one, the rat! He's learned better by now."

"So you double crossed him, eh? You would."

"Oh, I knew I could count on you, when it came to the scratch. You'll be rid of me for life now. Doesn't matter about the girl. She has plenty, and when Mandrin gets through with her she won't care about a few pearls."

Stuart turned away and looked out to sea. After a moment the cleanness of it, the great solitude of sea and sky, somewhat washed the dirt out of his heart and brain. It was hard for him to restrain himself, at first. Thought of that girl's face, of this man, of the unknown Mandrin, sickened him.

"Five thousand francs will do the trick," said Eben Stuart, now looping the pearls back into the chamois bag.

Stuart turned to him, reached out, quietly took the bag and let the shimmering pearls stream back into it. He drew the strings tight and knotted them. Then he thrust the bag into his jacket pocket and met his brother's suddenly startled gaze.

"They go back to her," he said calmly. "I'll give you the five—"

"None of that, damn you!" The bearded features flushed with utter fury, purpled with a wild sweep of rage. "Hand 'em back, Charley! I warn you—none of your fine notions, now! Give 'em here."

"No," said Stuart with terrible finality. He was like a rock, uncompromising, silent.

A low, passionate oath. The glitter of steel. Swift, deadly, the other man

CAPTAIN STUART

hurled himself like a striking snake, a foamy spume of saliva about his lips, sheer madness in his eyes. Stuart grappled him, but was borne backward. That burst of insane rage carried superhuman strength. Barely could Stuart keep the knife from his throat.

The two men reeled, staggered, then lost balance and went rolling across the ground. It was a wild, furious scramble, a heaving of intertwined bodies, a thrashing confusion. It ended abruptly, without warning. Stuart found himself free, and leaped to his feet. His brother lay face down, one hand doubled under him; that hand still gripped the knife, but the knife had sunk to the heart of the man.

A cry of incredulity, of horror, of grief, escaped Stuart's lips.

After a time he picked up the basket, repacked it, and started down the staircase. The guide and natives came to meet him, relieve him of his burden. He went on down to the village and got into the filanjana again.

His face was like bronze, inscrutable, set, emotionless.

CHAPTER II.

STUART GETS A SHOCK.

AFTER a very thorough search by police, Stuart got his clearance papers and took his schooner out of harbor late that afternoon, for Nosi Be.

With the monsoon fair, it was no trick to beat around the head of Cape Amber, but none the less it was a matter of days. Stuart had plenty of time to think about affairs. Not those that were past; he pretended no grief. Now, as always, he looked ahead.

He could not find Amber Island in the pilot guide. This Admiralty book held to the old native names; with the help of Rais Yusuf he identified it finally and learned little about it, except that it was four miles long and three wide, was fairly close to the Madagascar coast, and had an anchorage which at this monsoon was excellent.

The massive, rockbound cape fell behind, and the schooner leaned over to the thrusting monsoon and ate up the miles. Stuart had not looked again at the pearls, or even untied the chamois bag's drawstrings. They meant nothing to him, their beauty was not his. As for their money value, this was not his either; it merely drew a shrug from him. Some men are like that. Others go into a delirium when a fortune lies in their palm.

They picked up the island toward sunset, and ran in under the land for the night. With sunrise, Stuart stood down toward the anchorage. He had expected to see the Desmond yacht there, but only buoys marked the spot. Trees, from this approach, masked the entire island except for a rocky headland to the westward. At the head of the cove appeared a small wharf, with a number of sheds.

"Make fast to the buoy yonder," said Stuart to Rais Yusuf. "Then lower a boat and put me ashore. Keep watch. The usual signals if I want to come off, day or night."

No one appeared in sight. When he stepped ashore and walked up past the sheds, the place seemed like an uninhabited island. Probably no visitors ever came here; except for the native fishing boats, these seas were empty of traffic.

Then, in front of him, the trees suddenly opened out. Here between them appeared a wide, straight walk paved with dazzling coral sand. Looking up that slowly ascending avenue between the trees, Desmond saw what must be the house—a splotch of white, three hundred yards or more away. He advanced toward it.

A spot of color grew. Between the trees at the end of the avenue was a white mast. It bore the flag of France, halfway up its reach. Stuart recalled that the "king" of this island was just dead and buried. He patted the cigarette tin in his pocket and went on. The pearls lay in that tin, carefully coiled and laid away.

Early as was the hour, the morning was hot. The sunglare on this white coral sand was refracted back tenfold. Smooth, heavy white sand, white as snow, but so thinly strewn as not to clog the feet. Queer. Stuart halted and looked along the sand with sudden

astonishment. No mark of feet here; no footprint except his own.

"Hm! Looks as though they kept it brushed," he muttered, then removed his cap and wiped his brow.

Now, as he advanced, he could see the house ahead of him; a low, two-storied structure fronting toward him. All about it were greensward and gardens in an open circle, bounded and hemmed in by the thick growth of trees. As he looked, rainbows suddenly mounted in the sunlight. Misty water spurted in fountains in front of the house, to right and left of the opening between the trees. Sprinklers, of course; then there must be a pressure system and even electricity. Why not? Still, it was a surprise.

So close grew the trees to right and left of the avenue that they formed a green wall, impenetrable, except for arched openings from time to time. These gave glimpses of a regular jungle of trees and vines that lay behind. Ahead, Stuart could now descry the circular garden space about the front of the house. He was perhaps fifty feet from the end of the avenue when something stirred beside him. A figure had slipped into one of the arched openings there and was staring at him in blank astonishment.

A slender, lovely figure, wearing only sandals and white silk pajamas, soaking wet halfway to the knees. Bareheaded. Massive plaits of blue-black hair were piled about a charming elfin face—blue eyes, slim cheeks. A thrust of character in the chin and mouth, the eyes defiant and unafraid. The face of that newspaper picture; Felice Desmond.

"Well, of all things!" she exclaimed in English. "Who are you? Where did you come from?"

Stuart had not the faintest idea of giving his name; not for a time, at least. He took off his cap and smiled, enjoying the loveliness of the picture she made, enjoying it with a frank and wholesome delight.

"Now I must believe in fairies, or rather in wood-nymphs!" he exclaimed. "Either that, or else I'm dreaming, which isn't at all likely. Fair spirit of the trees, my name is Charles, and I've come from my schooner which lies in the cove."

FELICE DESMOND

"Oh, indeed!" A laugh flashed in her eyes and was gone. "Well, unhappy mortal, what is your business on this island?"

"I'm not unhappy," Stuart said with a chuckle. "My business lies with a lady, whom I never saw. Her name is Desmond, but I suppose she's French in spite of it, and therefore unpleasant and probably bearded in spots, reeking with perfume instead of soap and water—"

The girl broke into a laugh like silver bells.

"Mercy! You have queer notions about Frenchwomen, wandering sailor! And just what may your business

be with this female dragon? Come, confide in me; you may have need of help from the fairies before you're through."

Stuart nodded gravely. "I've no doubt of it. My business is to give her a message from a dead man, a message of warning; and to restore certain property which she lost far away from here. Can you tell me where to find her?"

Now the blue eyes probed into him for a moment, no longer laughing.

"You'll find her at the house yonder. She's a horrible person, worse than you ever imagined, but she does her best, poor thing. Let me advise you not to mention any property, lost or otherwise, until you are alone with her. As for your message of warning, perhaps she does not need it."

"I fear she does," said Stuart quietly.

"Well, go your way," she said, with a shrug. "Unless you'd like to come and wander through the trees with me and get your feet wet. It's supposed to improve one's beauty."

Stuart smiled. "That doesn't apply to fairies, whose beauty is perfect. I'd love to join you, but business presses."

"All right," she rejoined. "But remember one thing—it's a discovery I've just made for myself, and it's important. Don't drink any coffee. Good-by."

She was gone, slipping away among the trees like a fairy indeed. Stuart replaced his cap, produced a cigarette, and lit it thoughtfully.

"What the devil did she mean by that?" he mused. "Was it a warning or merely a joke? No; she's not given to useless words. Something queer here! She had a queer look, too, until I made her laugh and forget herself. White and strained. Is it possible that she's found out about that rat Mandrin? Hm. She's not the kind to stand any monkey business from him. I don't savvy it at all. One thing sure—she's great. She's great!"

It was the only word he could summon up.

THE fountains of water lowered and sank to nothing as he advanced. He came to the house entrance, crossed the bay of a wide veranda fitted with easy wicker chairs and lattices to keep out the light, and swung the knocker on the massive door. Its boom rang through the house with hollow reverberations.

A bolt was shot. The door swung back, and a brown servant stared slack-jawed.

"Good morning," said Stuart in French. "I am Captain Charles. I have come to see Mlle. Desmond. She is here, I think?"

"I do not know, *m'sieu*," came the fumbling response. "Will you enter, please? You may wait in the reception room. I'll tell M. Mandrin that you are here."

"Tell the lady," said Stuart sharply. "I have my orders, *m'sieu*."

Except its luxury, there was nothing regal about the reception room into which Stuart was ushered. Everything was highly expensive and very comfortable. On one wall was an oil painting of a young man over which a bit of crêpe had been draped; this, obviously, was the girl's father. His face was like hers, and the character behind it.

A rather small man in a red silk dressing-gown came into the room.

"What a surprise!" he exclaimed. "I did not know any vessel had arrived. I am Jules Mandrin, secretary to the late M. Desmond."

Stuart gave the name he had taken. He distrusted small men; too often they had an inferiority complex that made them frightfully dangerous. This man was rather plump and very white; too white. He had a pleasant manner and sharp eyes. His hands reflected the whiteness and plumpness of his face.

"My schooner is in the cove," Stuart went on. "As I have a matter of business to discuss with Mlle. Desmond, I took this occasion of stopping in. The news of her father's death came to me at Diego Suarez. It must have b en a terrible shock to you all."

"Ah, *m'sieu,* you do not realize what a shock!" exclaimed Mandrin. He came closer, flung a glance at the doorway and hall, and lowered his voice. His penetrating dark eyes rested on the face of Stuart as he spoke.

"To her, *m'sieu,* above all. That is why the yacht has gone to Nosi Be—to fetch a doctor from there. The poor young lady! You should have seen her before, *m'sieu,* to realize the frightful change. Last night she was desperately ill. I have not yet inquired this morning; I do not know whether her maid is about or not. There has been sickness, and most of the natives have been sent to the village at the other end of the island. The work has all been stopped."

"What work?" Stuart asked in his direct fashion.

"Ylang-ylang extract—the base of perfumes. That is the big industry in this part of the world, *m'sieu.* It is what we in the island do."

"What's wrong with the young lady?"

Mandrin gestured vaguely. This directness was obviously disconcerting.

"Grief, *m'sieu.* It has—must I say it?—most unhappily affected her both in mind and body. One must be extremely careful what is said. Now, if *m'sieu* has a matter of business to discuss, it were best handled with me. I have assumed charge of affairs for the moment, under the will of the late M. Desmond."

"I see," said Stuart, regarding the man attentively. "But this is not strictly business. It is a message from a man at Diego Suarez and it will give her very happy news. However, you spoke of sickness. What sort of sickness?"

MANDRIN thrust his head forward a little, and his eyes rolled.

"Must I tell you, *m'sieu?* That is another reason we have sent for a doctor. Men have died, among the workers. I do not know much about these things, but some say that it is the plague. And if that is so, we shall have trouble. But you will excuse me, *m'sieu?* I must go and inquire about the young lady. When you talk with her, be very careful, I pray you, not to say anything that will cause her worry or concentration. Allow me to have some coffee sent you while you wait."

"Thank you," said Stuart, and produced his cigarettes. Mandrin bowed and left the room, plump, stepping softly, deferential and humble.

"Her head, eh? The damned liar!" thought Stuart. "Thank Heaven I met her, or I'd be tempted to believe him. And thank Heaven poor Eben told me the truth about this rat! Trying to scare me off, eh? He's a sharp one."

Mention of plague, that scourge of eastern seas and lands, would have frightened off nine seamen out of ten.

Not from fear of death, but fear of quarantine, merciless and rigid weeks of it, passed in the next hot and stinking port they might reach. Sent the yacht for a doctor, eh? That was just rubbing it in. What was the fellow's game, then? Was he really trying to get the girl for himself, as Eben had said flatly? Nonsense. A worm does not mate with a star—and yet, who knows but the worm has ambitions?

The grim run of Stuart's thoughts was broken by the entry of the same servant who had admitted him, a Hova or Sakalava from the mainland. He brought a tray on which was a gorgeous silver coffee service, and poured a large cup of steaming black Nosi Be coffee. When Stuart questioned him, the man merely shook his head and left the room in silence.

Stuart glanced around the room. On the center table was a huge vase of scarlet hibiscus blossoms, evidently picked that morning. He emptied his cup into the vase and then lit a cigarette.

Before he had finished it, Mandrin reappeared, now clad in whites which lent his plump countenance a ghastly pallor.

"*Mademoiselle* is descending," he announced, then came forward and spoke softly. "And remember, *m'sieu*, I pray you remember my warning!"

Stuart nodded reassuringly and turned to the door as Felice Desmond entered. And in this moment he had the shock of his life.

The same girl he had met, yes, now wearing a mourning gown of gossamer black—yet not the same. The fine keen eyes were dulled and listless, the lips drooped, the face lacked life and animation. Mandrin introduced Stuart and she held out a languid hand to him.

"I am enchanted, *m'sieu*," she murmured in French. She was vacuous; like an idiot.

A spasm of horror seized upon Stuart.

CHAPTER III.

FELICE TALKS.

"I UNDERSTAND that you wish to see me, *m'sieu?*" she said listlessly, still in French.

"That is why I came."

"Oh! You came in a ship?" Her face lighted up a little.

"Certainly."

She turned to Mandrin.

"I am going down to the shore with this gentleman to look at his ship and see the ocean," she said with a sort of petulant decision. "I am going alone. We were talking last night about accounts. I forget just what it was—do you remember?"

Mandrin bowed. "Yes, *mademoiselle*. The household expenses for the past year."

"Oh, was that it? Well, well, have them ready for me to see when I return, and if they are not satisfactory I shall have my father speak to you when he comes back. That is all. Give me the parasol that is in the hall."

Stuart stood speechless. Mandrin stepped into the hall and returned with a sunshade, which the girl took. She went to the door. Mandrin paused at Stuart's elbow.

"Humor her, *m'sieu*, for the love of Heaven!" he said under his breath. "Assent to all she says. You see her condition."

"But yes," assented Stuart, and then followed the girl outside.

He offered his arm in silence, and she took it. They descended the steps

and started toward the avenue of trees. Her silence weighed upon him.

Then, suddenly, her fingers squeezed his arm.

"Did you drink that coffee?"

"No." Stuart was startled by the vibrancy of her low voice.

"Good. Don't talk. Trees have ears, and we're watched."

His heart leaped. All pretense, then! She was herself, after all! Yet the whole thing was astonishing to him. It was astounding that this girl, who was mistress of the island, should act in such a manner.

"Then," he could not help saying, as they drew near the sand-swept avenue, "you know about Mandrin?"

"More than you, perhaps," she replied. "Perhaps less. Don't talk now."

The white coral sand stretched ahead, between its leafy walls of trees. Stuart stared at the sand. To his questioning surprise, there was no mark anywhere on it; his own footprints had vanished. The girl stole a sidelong glance at his face, caught his expression, and again her fingers touched and clamped on his arm.

"It's brushed, the moment any one comes," she murmured almost too softly to be heard. "That's the one thing he doesn't suspect or hinder. He thinks it a mere whim—"

She was silent again, staring empty-faced before her, the reflected sun pitiless to her vacant features under the white parasol.

Stuart walked on in bewilderment. He sensed strange, unuttered things, ugly things. It all seemed unreal, impossible. Mandrin back there in the house like a fat white scorpion—

Ahead, toward the end of the white sand strip, moved a figure with a broom. A native. He was carefully backing away, brushing out his own and Stuart's footprints. Now he halted and stood watching them, removed his hat in salute to the girl. She gestured to the sand behind and the native walked backward again toward the house, obliterating their tracks.

PRESENTLY the mask of trees drew near, the sheds, the path to the wharf. At the end of the wharf there was a seat of boards, with a little roof over the top for shade. As they set foot on the planks, the girl drew a deep breath as of tension relaxed. She pointed to the seat ahead.

"There. That's the one place—the one place—no one can spy on us."

She looked at the schooner, without comment. They came to the seat, and she dropped on it, making room for Stuart beside her. He looked at her, and saw that her face was again that of the girl he had met.

"So it's all put on?"

She nodded. "Where do we begin? What brought you here?"

"Your pearls," he said. "I've brought them back. I got 'em from the thief."

"Oh! That man—that—" She broke off, shivered a little, and bit her lip.

"Stuart. He's dead now. He told me all about it. Mandrin was behind the job, wanted the pearls himself, but dared not steal them himself. Stuart did it, and double crossed Mandrin. Shall I give you the pearls now?"

"No." She gave him a queer look. "Did the police kill Stuart?"

"He was killed in a fight, by his own hand." Stuart was emotionless as bronze, but he could not keep a curious note out of his voice. The girl's blue eyes probed into him. "The police know nothing about it. I

brought the pearls and the warning."

"Why didn't you keep them? They're worth a fortune."

Stuart turned and looked at her. Under his gaze a little color stole into her cheeks.

"Oh!" she said, as though he had spoken. "Oh! I understand. I didn't mean to joke that way, really. I didn't know there was any one like you alive. You're a queer man."

"I please myself."

"So do I, by Heaven! So did father!" she burst out. Fire leaped in her eyes, her voice. "I please myself! It's a good motto."

"A bad one, for happiness; that is, for a woman like you. But never mind. You please yourself—well, what does the situation here mean?"

She relaxed, drooped. "It doesn't mean that, anyhow," she said bitterly. "You had best give me the pearls, go aboard your schooner there, and skip out. I'm in a trap."

"That's why I came." Stuart offered her a cigarette, took one himself, lit a match. "Tell me. I can't comprehend it. You're wealthy, powerful, mistress here."

"No. None of those things."

She puffed at her cigarette. Stuart was shocked by her words; a calm statement of fact, so contrary to all appearances as to seem incredible. After a moment she went on quietly:

"But why should I tell you all this? You're a stranger."

"No." Stuart came to his feet, strode up and down the dock, and halted before her. He rose and fell a little on the balls of his feet—a habit he had, as though the deck were rising and falling. As she looked up at him, he met her gaze squarely.

"No. I came because you needed help. Why? Not from the goodness of my heart. Because I saw your picture in the paper, that's why." He spoke slowly, deliberately, in his calm way whose very restraint spoke so deeply. "I've gone up and down the seas a long time, pleasing myself. The time came for me to see your picture, to come here. Now that I've met you, I can say only one thing to you. I've known you a long while. Feel offended if you like; that's my whole word to you. I am at your service."

She smiled slightly, but under the black gossamer gown her bosom was rising and falling rapidly, and her blue eyes were like stars.

"Offended? I think it's wonderful," she said. "Sit down again. Words carry, and I must not speak too loudly."

Stuart obeyed.

"FATHER was like most Irishmen," she said. "A dreamer, but not thrifty. Money meant little to him. The island, the business, everything is mortgaged up to the hilt. A year ago, a company was formed. I was at school in Capetown. When I got back here a few months ago, I found Mandrin in charge of everything. My father was not well. His stock was of no value; it was fixed so that he could be thrown out at any moment Mandrin liked. There was only one thing father had kept out free and clear to leave me—those pearls. They are worth a fortune. Mandrin heard of them too late to get his fingers on them. It is impossible to fight that man; he is like a rubber ball half empty of air. You push it in at one place, and a bulge comes at another place."

She tossed away her cigarette.

"We came back here from Diego Suarez and I buried my father. And

what happened? Three of the servants died. There was talk of plague. Most of the natives went up to the village, the work was abandoned. Mandrin sent the yacht off to Nosi Be. He and the captain understand each other. And I became sick for the first time in my life—sick in my head, as you saw me appear at the house. I could not think clearly about anything. This last time this happened, two days ago, Mandrin made love to me, though I remembered little about it. Always at night this trouble began. I figured things out. The coffee had a slight, queer taste, so I knew it was the coffee after dinner. Last night I had it served in my room, emptied it out, said I felt ill and went to bed.

"This morning, before any one was up, I slipped out. When you saw me, I had been over to the native village, trying to get hold of the one man I could trust. He was dead. I have known that I was watched, spied upon, guarded. Most of these natives fear Mandrin and obey him. I have come to have a terror of spies. That is why I have the avenue brushed—to watch for footprints of those who follow me. Eyes are watching us now. Well, that is the situation, my friend. What do you make of it?"

"A lot more than you've told me."

"True," she admitted frankly. "Some things I shrink from saying or thinking."

"Hm!" said Stuart. "In two minutes Rais Yusuf can have a boat out and at the dock. Why not come aboard this minute and leave here?"

Her eyes sparkled, the color leaped in her face.

"Oh! Yes, by all means—if you'd only been able to tell me before!"

"Well, why not? Life's more important than anything else, isn't it?"

"I suppose so. There's a box of things I must have; miniatures of my parents, a few things of my mother's. Could we go back and get them?"

Stuart thought of the pistol under his shirt, and smiled.

"Why not? It's daylight; nothing to be afraid of, certainly. No one can stop you."

"But where would you take me?"

"To the end of the world."

She met his gray eyes, and with a laugh came to her feet. Then, as she faced about toward the shore, she stopped short and shivered slightly.

"I don't know. I must have those things; but you don't understand. Something about the place brings a frantic terror to me."

"This place? Your home?"

"I hate it. I'm afraid of it. There's nothing to be afraid of, you say; that is true, and yet I'm afraid. You don't know how implicitly Mandrin is obeyed by our natives. You don't know how his frightful, inhuman brain—"

"Men are men," said Stuart calmly. "You're suffering from the effect of those attacks, or poisonings, or whatever they are. Drugs of some kind. They've left you with a deep fear of Mandrin. Well, let me handle him."

"Can you?" She looked at him with startled, questioning eyes.

Stuart smiled a little.

"Let's go up to the house," he said. "You needn't pretend any more. Here, wait one moment."

He stepped to the end of the wharf and waved his arm. A figure in the bow of the schooner made response. Stuart gestured. The figure waved again.

"All right." Stuart turned to the girl. "They understand. A boat will

come ashore and wait for us. Let's go."

They walked up the wharf toward the trees, and were lost to sight.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRAP.

"WALK in, get your stuff, and walk out," Stuart said, as they neared the house. "No talk. Better let me stay with you. Don't bother about clothes."

"I can't wear these."

"Suit yourself. There's no danger."

"Wait downstairs for me, then. I'll not be five minutes."

Better not be."

They walked in. No one was in sight. The house was silent, apparently empty. With a wave of her hand, the girl went on upstairs. Stuart turned into the reception room, lit a fresh cigarette, walked up and down.

The silence became oppressive. Stuart frowned; he felt jumpy. Had her words, her terror, infected him? Nothing to fear from that plump little rat of a Mandrin, certainly. And yet he was suddenly uneasy. At sea, he would have laid it to intuition, would have suspected something amiss. Here he was out of his element, knew not what to think. The silence, the lack of all sound, the emptiness of the house, had a queer cumulative effect on the senses.

He listened for footsteps upstairs, heard nothing, went out into the hall. He opened an opposite door, near the foot of the staircase. A dining room here, shimmering with glass and silver services; no one in sight. Stuart turned back into the hall, irresolute. A door farther along the hall swung open, and Mandrin appeared.

"Ah, captain! So you have returned," said Mandrin.

"Exactly." Stuart regarded him impassively. The smooth, plump face smiled at him.

"And do you like our island, Captain Stuart?"

"Very much—"

Stuart stopped short. The man had called him by name. The realization was like a shock to him. Mandrin smiled into his gaze.

"And you did not drink your coffee. That is too bad—"

"No palaver," snapped Stuart. "How d'you know me?"

"Your brother spoke often of you, in Diego Suarez. And you look like him." Mandrin put his head on one side, surveying Stuart. "Did you see him? Did he give you any message for me, perhaps?"

"He's dead," Stuart said. "I believe he told everything about you and the pearls. You'd better go ask the authorities."

Mandrin lifted his brows. "So? He played a double game with me."

"Are you complaining?" Stuart asked caustically. "No use. You're scotched."

Mandrin turned. "I'd better see to those reports the young lady desired. About the business, the company, everything. Poor young lady! She has forgotten just what it was she wanted to know. Are you remaining long, Captain Stuart?"

"Long enough to see you hanged, if necessary."

Mandrin rubbed his hands, stepped silently away, and was gone through the doorway whence he had come, closing the door silently behind him.

Stuart remembered the girl's simile of a rubber ball. The man was all give, no fight. Hard to battle such a

creature. So Eben had talked about him, eh? Was it possible that the girl had guessed something, too? No, hardly likely. She would not have trusted him, had she known the truth. This was why he had concealed it.

Why had she not returned? What did the singular manner of Mandrin mean? Stuart glanced at the stairway, at the hall above, then impulsively dropped his cigarette into a vase of flowers and started up the stairs two at a time. His encounter with Mandrin had left him smoldering.

IN the hall above, he hesitated. Two doors stood open, one was closed. He could see no one. The closed door led to the front room. That would be hers, no doubt. He knocked at it, had no answer, tried it. The door opened to his hand. He glanced into a bedroom. Scarlet hibiscus blossoms filled a huge vase in the window. And she lay there beside the table—outstretched on the floor. A small bag, half open, was on the table by the vase.

Stuart was beside her instantly, lifting her head. Yes, she was alive. A faint, no more. The best remedy is nature's way—he extended her on the floor again, stood up, looked around. No one else here. What had caused it? She had not even changed her dress; had just put this bag on the table, half filled it with papers and other objects, then fallen over. Why? Nothing Mandrin had done; the fellow had been downstairs all the while.

An open door, a bathroom at one side. Stuart glanced at it, then looked at the windows. All closed. That was singular. The heavy odor of the flowers hung on the air. He turned, with the idea of getting water from the bathroom to revive her. Oddly enough, he could not move. His feet seemed glued to the matting on the floor. He looked down at them, put out a hand to the table; a feeling of suffocation rushed upon him. Everything whirled around—he remembered only the horrible sensation of whirling, revolving objects, as he fell.

When he wakened, he was sitting in a chair, in the same room. A heavy armchair. He was by an open window that looked out across the garden and lawn. His head was hanging on his chest. He looked down at his arms, tried to lift his hands, and could not. His head cleared; he perceived that his wrists and lower arms were securely bound to the arms of the chair with strips of toweling. And the open window—who had done all this?

His senses steadied, his eyes focused; the fresh air restored him rapidly to himself. He became aware of two figures. They were only a few feet distant, yet they took shape before him slowly. In all, several minutes passed before things ceased to whirl.

Mandrin was lifting Felice Desmond to the bed, feeling her pulse. Even in his bemused condition, Stuart took note of the effortless ease with which Mandrin lifted and handled the young woman; not so much sheer strength, as agility, as knowing how. This, and his own position here, and the girl's story, showed him everything in a flashing second. How Mandrin, this soft white worm of a man, had eaten his way into Desmond's confidence and home and life, until like a worm indeed, he had digested everything. Craft and guile. These had conquered. And behind them must be an indomitable will.

It was a sickening vision.

Mandrin dropped the girl's arm and turned. With his easy, silent step he

came toward Stuart, nodded amiably to him, and smiled. He reached out his arms to the big vase of hibiscus blossoms; a towel had been flung over the scarlet flowers. Mandrin picked up the vase in both hands and then paused, looking seriously at Stuart.

"You know," he said in his manner of assumed humility, "she must have received the full strength of the scent. That means she will sleep for some little time yet. Just to make things more comfortable, I will set the flowers out."

He went with them to the bathroom, and presently returned, wiping his hands.

Stuart repressed an oath. He understood now; there was some poison used, some drug, about the flowers. It was all a trap, and both he and Felice had walked into it. With a frightful effort, Stuart forced himself to repress all impulse and use his head. If he were to be himself, this horrible worm of a man would conquer him also. Nothing would win, could win, against this creature but a brain perfectly controlled, absolutely restrained. If he once lost his self-control, Stuart knew, he would play into the creature's hands.

MANDRIN came back, drew up a chair, produced a cigarette and lit it, pulled up an ash-receiver, and then leaned back and regarded Stuart blandly. The dark eyes in that white and hairless face were like deep pools. They were hypnotic. Stuart thrilled a little to the thought. Here was one secret of the man's rise to power, beyond a question.

"You are very foolish," Mandrin said calmly, "to deliberately pit yourself against me, when you might have gained much by my friendship. Your brother told us that you were unreasonably virtuous; so I was warned against you. Now tell me the truth. Is he dead?"

"Yes," said Stuart.

"Where are the pearls?"

"Aboard my schooner. Hidden."

Mandrin nodded. Stuart had been so astonished by the question, thtat he blurted out the lie without thinking—consequently, without betraying that it was a lie. Evidently Mandrin had not searched him, except for weapons. The pistol, he could feel, was gone.

It is true that the pearls, hidden as they were, would attract no attention.

"Since you did not skip out with the pearls, as you might have done," mused Mandrin, "it is evident that your brother was right. Money does not tempt you. Does she tempt you?" And he gestured toward the figure on the bed.

"According to my brother, she tempts you."

"Your brother was a rascal and understood very little. She is nothing to me. It is true that I must marry her in order to legally complete my work here, remain master of the island. That is all. Perhaps we may arrange a trade."

From the words of Felice, from her hints, Stuart knew that the man lied. Here was a trap being set for him, then. He nodded coolly.

"Perhaps. The pearls are where you can't get them. How badly do you want them?"

Mandrin smiled a little at this question.

"I want them," he replied, "badly enough to offer you your life in return for them. A boat from your schooner is waiting at the wharf. I have men with rifles watching it. The morning is wearing on, Captain Stuart."

"You mean—"

"If we come to no agreement, you die. Your men die. I take your schooner."

"Bah! You would not dare."

Mandrin smiled. "You forget one thing. The body of your brother has been found, it has been guessed that you met him, took the pearls from him. I have every right to kill you and take your schooner and the pearls. True, the authorities are not in search of you except for questioning—but let the pearls be found aboard your schooner, and that is justification enough for any action I may take."

"What?" Stuart stared at him. "How do you know all this?"

"The one thing you forgot. The radio. We get daily reports from everywhere."

Mandrin slyly enjoyed his triumph. Indeed, Stuart realized that the man must be speaking the truth in this respect.

"All right." Stuart relaxed in his chair. "What do you propose?"

"Justice," said the white, plump little creature, and smacked his lips. "You will give me a letter to whoever is in charge aboard your vessel, telling him where to find the pearls; instruct him to give them to me. When I have them, I will give you a receipt for them on behalf of Mademoiselle yonder; you will be clear, you will have done your duty, you may then go your way, and take twenty thousand francs with you as a reward. If you would like an hour or two with the young lady before you leave the house—"

"No," said Stuart. "Where will I be while you get the pearls?"

"Where you are now," Mandrin said.

"Think I'd accept your word to pay the money and set me free?"

"I will pay the money to the man aboard ship who gives me the pearls."

"Hm!" grunted Stuart, and reflected. "And then poison me."

"No. I would have no reason to harm you. And I never do foolish things. You must take my word, and realize that it is backed by logic."

"True; I suppose it is," murmured Stuart. He looked down at the floor, frowning; the sun came in through the open window, striking on the hot striped matting around his feet. In places the rice-straw was worn and frayed. It must be very old.

"There is one objection," and Stuart looked up. "My mate, Rais Yusuf, speaks French and English and Swahili, but he reads only Arabic. And I cannot write Arabic."

"One of my men can write it," said Mandrin. "Does he know your signature?"

Stuart assented. Mandrin rose, went to the door, and clapped his hands. Immediately, a Malagasy servant appeared. Then there were men in the house; this was what Stuart had most desired to know.

"GET paper, ink and a brush, and come here to write a letter," said Mandrin. Then, as the man disappeared, he glanced at Stuart and smiled in his sly way. "I think the young lady had better finish her sleep in the library," he said. "She will be safe there, and I will keep the key."

He went to the bed, lifted the girl without an effort; Stuart noted the swing of his back and shoulders. Then, quickly, Mandrin carried her out of the room, and through the open door Stuart saw him turn to the stairs with his burden, and vanish. The agility of the man was astounding.

After a moment the Malagasy appeared again. Before he was well into the room, Mandrin returned; he was not even breathing hard. Stuart eyed him with a certain respect.

"Will you dictate the letter in French, and this man will write it in Arabic, if you please?" Mandrin said, and resumed his chair.

Stuart nodded. He did not make the mistake of bargaining for what he wanted. He would ask for that casually, negligently, at the end. No taking chances with this sly rat. The Malagasy wrote in swift Arabic as Stuart began to speak:

RAIS YUSUF:

The bearer of this letter is a person to whom you must give no offense. Take him aboard the ship and see that you treat him with every courtesy. Take him down to my cabin and show him how to open the secret drawer of my desk. Let him take what he will.

"You place much emphasis on the treatment to be accorded me," said Mandrin suspiciously.

Stuart shrugged slightly. "If you do not like my letter, write your own and I will sign it. This Rais Yusuf is a rough fellow who has little courtesy."

Mandrin nodded, and produced the pistol he had taken from Stuart.

"Free his right arm," he told the Malagasy, "let him sign, then bind his arm to the chair again. And do not stand between us."

The brown man obeyed. The slit towel did not bite into the skin as a cord would have done; Stuart was perfectly able to sign the letter. When he was again tied fast, he glanced at Mandrin.

"I suppose I may have a cigarette?" he asked casually.

"Of course." Mandrin produced one, came to Stuart, placed it between his lips. He struck a match and held it until the cigarette was alight. Then he turned and gave the pistol to the brown man.

"Keep watch over him until I return, and do not leave this room," he said, and flung Stuart a sly look. "Try to bribe him if you like, threaten him, say what you please. It will be of no use. If I do not return in half an hour, you will be shot. *Au revoir!*"

And he departed, swiftly, silently, exultantly, slamming the door behind him.

CHAPTER V.

STORM.

STUART puffed at his cigarette, a grim amusement in his gray eyes.

One of the prime principles of prestidigitation, otherwise the art of magic, is to so center the attention of the beholders upon unimportant matters, that they miss the more important trifle which may even be obvious. Stuart was no magician, but in this case he had applied the principle with complete success. So far as Mandrin was concerned, at least. That gentleman had been too busy to do the one thing which Stuart had feared.

Turning his head, Stuart looked from the open window. He could see a portion of the green garden, and the beginning of the white avenue of coral sand. The figure of Mandrin appeared, now wearing a sun helmet, and passed from sight down the avenue.

Stuart relaxed. The moment had come. The Malagasy sat motionless in his chair by the door. His eyes were fastened upon Stuart unwinkingly, in a constant, steady gaze; his brown features showed no emotion, no

intelligence. He held the pistol on his knee. A flat, deadly little Colt. The one safety catch was off. The other one would yield to a pressure of the trigger finger, of the hand, while the weapon was fired.

Stuart glanced down at the floor as he puffed. Upon one slight motion of his lips, now depended his whole scheme of escape. He could not afford a mistake. He puffed rapidly, until the cigarette, half consumed, showed an inch-long ember of red tobacco. Then Stuart pursed his lips and let it fall to the floor. It fell exactly where he wished.

The brown man did not move.

Veiling the eager suspense in his eyes, Stuart moved in his chair a little, eased himself into the position he needed; his arms, bound to the chair, gave him a powerful fulcrum. Suddenly he saw the Malagasy's jaw fall. The man looked down; a startled expression came into his eyes.

From the worn, frayed matting, hot and dry as tinder in the sunlight, was ascending a thickening spiral of smoke. The red ember of the cigarette had caught it alight.

With a mutter, the brown man left his chair. He looked at Stuart, halted, held the pistol in his left hand, and leaning forward, extended his right hand to pick up the fallen cigarette. As though on a coiled spring, Stuart's foot shot out with terrific force. His boot took the hapless Malagasy squarely under the angle of the jaw.

The brown head was snapped back. A gasping groan escaped the man. The pistol fell from his hand. Then he collapsed and fell forward on his breast; but as he lay, his head was twisted queerly sideways. That frightful impact had broken his neck.

Stuart slid down, got his feet on the floor, pressed the chair back. He stood up. He was forced to lean far forward, lifting the heavy chair behind him with his bound arms.

The bed was a high, massive, ugly affair with carven panels along the sides and top in Malagasy fashion, and huge carven posts; it was solid, more solid than the very house itself. Stuart backed toward one of the corner posts, gaged his position carefully, then flung himself backwards full weight, so that the bottom brace of the chair was smashed against the carven bedpost.

He toppled to the floor with the ungainly chair above him. Awkwardly, he gained his feet and repeated the action. This time, the bottom rung of the chair splintered. The bedpost remained wedged between the two hind legs of the chair. Stuart threw all his weight first to one side, then the other. Desperately, he redoubled his exertions. With a rending crash, one of the rear legs gave way.

THE curl of smoke from the matting had become a spreading glow which sent up increasing quantities of smoke. A sickening smell of scorched flesh filled the air; but the Malagasy was past feeling the fiery glow that touched him. A tongue of flame licked up toward one of the window draperies.

Stuart smashed the chair against the solid bedpost, again and again, still forced to stoop under the burden. Sweat poured from him. Twice he fell to his knees, but rose again to repeat his efforts. The second hind leg smashed out, then one of the front legs. With a tremendous effort, his whole body arched like a bow, he forced the seat out of the chair.

The back and arms still bound him fast, but now he could stand erect.

Again he hammered at the bedpost with the carven wood constraining him. Flames were licking across the floor, were mounting along the window drapes. Panting, exhausted, every nerve and muscle at tension, Stuart got the chair-back hooked about the bedpost, then pulled one of the arms from its socket. That was the end.

Trembling, streaming with sweat, he freed his left arm, then his right. A swift step, and he picked up the fallen pistol, and slipped it back into the holster under his shirt.

Flames were all about the table now. Unhurried, Stuart went to it, caught at the open bag there, and lifted it back from the smoke to the bed. From the half-filled handbag he stuffed everything into his jacket pockets, regardless of the bulge. This done, he went to the door, opened it, stepped into the hall. A rush of smoke poured after him. He closed the door and turned to the stairs.

On the landing he paused, suddenly startled. There against the wall hung a huge German barometer. Stuart glanced automatically at it and froze. A low whistle escaped him. The glass was falling. The needle had swung over to "Storm." If the thing were working, then there was no time to lose. He knew all too well the frightful rapidity with which weather comes up in the Mozambique Channel. Fair as was the day, an hour hence might see a hurricane raging; and the schooner was in no position to ride out a blow where she lay, or anywhere about here.

Stuart went on, seeing no one, but hearing a rising crackle of flames from the chamber he had left.

The library, he guessed, must be the room from which Mandrin had come, below the staircase. Gaining the lower hall, Stuart passed rapidly back to this door and tried it. Locked.

"Felice!" He ventured a call, but had no response. He drew back and flung himself against the door. It held, but promised to give way at another attempt. As Stuart drew back again, a native appeared, darting out of the reception room—a brown man who held a rifle. At sight of Stuart he halted and jerked up his weapon, a cry bursting from him.

Stuart whipped out his pistol and the Malagasy pitched sideways. The rifle exploded, the bullet going into the ceiling. With a leap, Stuart hurled himself at the door. It burst inward beneath his weight and he went rolling, then came to his feet. The room was dark, but for the light from the door. Shutters over the two windows were apparently locked. On a couch close at hand lay Felice Desmond, her eyes closed.

From any other room, Stuart knew, the gardens could be reached by means of the long windows. Not here, however. He caught up the girl in his arms, and grunted to think of how easily Mandrin had handled her weight. He bore her out into the hall, saw no one but the native he had shot, and turned back toward the next room. To flee by the front way and the avenue of coral sand would be suicide.

THE door opened to his hand. A sunlit room, a laboratory of some kind, no doubt for work with the perfume bases which formed the island's industry. Stuart went to one of the windows, laid the girl on the floor, and another instant saw the window and screen swung open. The ground was only a foot below the window level.

As Stuart bent to lift her, Felice opened her eyes. She looked up, saw his face close, and a smile touched her lips. Stuart caught her up in his arms and laughed.

"Come along. No questions. Put your arms about my neck."

She obeyed, drowsily. Stuart stepped out from the window and carried her across a stretch of flowerbeds to a hedge. Beyond were trees. He smashed through the hedge. From somewhere in the house, from somewhere outside, were rising shrill yells. A trail of smoke suddenly burst upward from the front of the house.

The trees closed them in, shut out everything. Then, feeling safe, Stuart set her down carefully and stood up. She came to one elbow, staring at him.

"What has happened? What are we doing here?"

He smiled a little, lit a cigarette, and sat down beside her.

"You were right to fear Mandrin. Poison by inhalation; the flowers, the hibiscus blossoms. Not poison, perhaps, but some drug. No matter. He got us. I've brought you here, and my pockets are stuffed with everything in that bag you were packing. Your house is afire. It's our one chance. While it blazes, can you guide me through these thick trees to the cove? We can't go by the avenue. Are you up to it?"

He was delighted by the swift comprehension in her eyes. She must have slept off the drug. Then she sat up, the old eager decision in her face, her blue eyes alight.

"Yes, yes; of course I can. Oh, what fools we were to come back for anything? Where is Mandrin now?"

She glanced at him half fearfully. Stuart's gray eyes wrinkled amusedly.

"Waiting for me. I agreed to give him the pearls for my liberty. He went aboard to get them from my schooner, taking a letter to my mate, Rais Yusuf. That old rascal is shrewd."

"Then the pearls are—why, I thought you had them with you?"

"I have, but Mandrin didn't suspect it. I told Rais Yusuf to show him the secret drawer in my desk. I have no desk, no secret drawer, and Yusuf is well aware of it. I did not tell him to let Mandrin go ashore again—and he won't. Old Yusuf understands me."

"Oh! Then he's aboard your schooner?" she asked, and Stuart nodded. "In that case, Captain Stuart, look out for your schooner!"

Stuart's brows lifted. "You know my name?"

"Of course. I knew it from the first." She broke into a little laugh of amusement at his expression. "Your brother had spoken of you. Then there is a resemblance; not a likeness, though. You're at the other end of the earth from him. Why didn't you say who you were?"

"I thought you might not trust me," Stuart said simply. Her eyes warmed upon him.

"Do you think any one who exchanged words and looks with you, would not trust you? But what are you smiling about?"

"Mandrin," he replied. "I just recollected that he promised to leave twenty thousand francs aboard the schooner. If he took that money with him, Yusuf will have it by this time. I know that old thief. Well, so much the better! The money will belong to you."

While he spoke, Felice came to her feet, listening to the sounds that reached them.

"We had better go," she said. "I'm all right."

"Good. Yes, we're going to have a bad blow, if your barometer tells the truth. Better make time. Can you walk now?"

She nodded. For the first few steps she was unsteady on her feet, but the effects of the drug passed swiftly, and she was soon quite herself again. A crackling roar of flames reached through the trees, and above the trees was visible a mounting plume of black smoke and fiery particles. Men were shouting in wild uproar.

MANY imperceptible paths, no doubt made by bare feet, wound among the trees. Felice treaded them swiftly, surely, never pausing. The shouts and yells, the crackling flames, fell dim behind them. Presently the girl paused, and gave Stuart a look.

"They are calling for Mandrin," she said. "There may be men on the wharf. He has brought natives from the mainland who obey him implicitly; he has given them arms."

"Go ahead," Stuart said calmly. Her eyes widened a little.

"Do you always go ahead?"

"In case of doubt, yes," and he smiled. "One never gets anywhere from fear of making mistakes."

She shrugged lightly and went on. Stuart followed her closely. After a time the glitter of the sea appeared through the trees, then the two of them came out abruptly on the beach, just to one side of the wharf and sheds.

Stuart laid his hand on the girl's arm, checking her, halting her. His gray eyes flitted from wharf to sky, and back again.

A haze thinned the fierceness of the noonday sun. The schooner rocked at her buoy to a long, slow swell. There was a slight offshore breeze, but a mass of cloud was piling high into the southern sky.

Toward the end of the wharf stood two stalwart Malagasies. They carried rifles and were directing frantic shouts at the schooner, where no one appeared. Alongside the wharf floated the boat, with Rais Yusuf lolling in the sternsheets. He and the oarsmen appeared sleepy, indolent, and were exchanging repartee with the two natives above.

"Come along. No one else in sight here," said Stuart. He glanced at the sky again. "We've no more than twenty minutes before the blow hits us. We must haul off."

"But those two natives there! If you don't get the schooner away—"

"We won't by talking about it."

He stepped out briskly toward the wharf. Rais Yusuf saw the two figures and straightened up, then rose and went forward to the bow of the boat, and stood there. The Malagasies, who were facing the schooner, did not see Stuart and the girl until they were coming out along the wharf. Then they both whirled around, stared, hitched up their rifles.

Felice uttered an angry order. They shook their heads.

"Go back," said one of them in French, and lifted his rifle. "Go back, do you hear?"

Stuart put hand to pistol, then halted. The boat was floating down the side of the wharf. Rais Yusuf moved; his teeth flashed in a laugh, and the sun glinted on his knife as he struck upward. His knife plunged through the leg of the Malagasy who had spoken, and with a yell the man leaped aside, lost balance, fell into the water.

The other brown man flung up his

rifle, aiming at Suart, but the pistol spoke first. To the two sharp reports, the man whirled around and fell half over the edge, then slipped off and was gone. Already the first brown man was on his feet, up to his neck in the water, and Rais Yusuf stood laughing at him.

"No time to lose, effendi," he cried to Stuart. "The little man is safe locked in the cabin. The glass is falling."

Stuart stepped down into the stern-sheets, gave his hand to Felice, and as she joined him the men dipped their oars.

They were all grinning widely, and flung barbed words at the Malagasy who stood there in the water, cursing them.

Felice touched Stuart's arm. He met her wide, anxious eyes.

"What will you do—what will Mandrin do?" she breathed. "You'll not shoot him?"

"Do you care?"

"No. But somehow I have a horror of seeing him perish—I would never forget it—"

"I understand." Stuart nodded. "He's poisonous. All right. Rais Yusuf, you'll take charge at once, get the boat in, stand out to sea. Or—wait! Leave the boat overside; make it fast to the buoy, leave it. We always have the other one."

Rais Yusuf assented calmly.

A moment later they swept in under the ladder of the schooner. Stuart mounted first, helped Felice to the deck, pointed to the scrap of awning and the chair in the stern.

"Wait there," he said, and headed for the companionway. He flung out his arm to the column of smoke and flame ashore. "Your house is burning."

She shivered a little, flung a glance ashore, then smiled.

AS Stuart passed down the ladder, he understood perfectly how the girl felt about this man locked in below.

He felt the same thing now; as though he descended to meet some loathsome reptile. All his will power drove him down that ladder. He shrank terribly from facing Mandrin. Not from fear. Some quality of the man brought prickles to the spine.

At the foot of the ladder, Stuart turned to unlock the door of his cabin; the key was on the outside. He caught out his pistol and held it ready. Would this creature have turned into a wild beast, seeking only to rend his enemy? He unlocked the door and thrust it open, then stood back.

"Come along, Mandrin."

Mandrin emerged, empty-handed, the dark eyes in his white face like pools of evil. Stuart gestured with the pistol.

"Up the ladder, and move sharp. We're leaving. The boat's waiting for you—go ashore and be damned to you."

Mandrin stopped short and glared at him. The man's fingers clenched and unclenched; in his gaze was a hatred unutterable, beyond all words. Under the icy gray eyes, he turned to the ladder in silence.

Face to face with the man, Stuart experienced a sudden revulsion of feeling. What nonsense, to fear this little creature! He stepped forward, as Mandrin reached the ladder and started up. He followed the other closely.

Halfway to the deck, Mandrin's foot slipped. He did not turn around. He did not look back. His foot slipped,

that was all. Stuart saw it slip—then the other was on top of him, falling backward, knocking him headlong to the bottom of the ladder and crashing down with him. It all happened in a split second of time. As Stuart tried to fire, he struck the deck with terrific force and the pistol flew from his hand.

Then Mandrin was upon him, and a knife glittered.

Stuart felt the steel drive into him. Strong as he was, against the rippling muscles of this creature he was like a child. He tried vainly to fight; his blows had no effect. He tried to reach his feet. With one hand Mandrin held him down—a hand like a vise. Again the knife glinted and struck down, drove home. Writhing, thrashing about, Stuart wrenched it out of the man's hand. Then Mandrin was gone. Up the ladder with a leap, an incredible leap like that of an animal.

As he lay, Stuart's fingers closed on the lost pistol. He jerked it up, fired at the shape above. Just as Mandrin reached the deck, the shot rang out. It was answered by a wild cry. Stuart gained his feet and threw himself at the ladder. He scrambled up. caught one glimpse of Mandrin at the rail. The schooner had just cast off, the canvas was fluttering out, she was turning, heeling over to the breeze.

Stuart flung up his weapon and fired again—too late. Mandrin was gone in a plunging dive that carried him out of sight.

From Rais Yusuf broke a wild yell of fury and dismay. Felice came running, caught Stuart as he staggered. Blood was pouring down his side, his right leg. The pistol fell out of his hand. In the air was a keen humming, a singing whistle; the whole southern sky, up to the zenith, was a fury of cloud. Barely in time, the schooner was away. Thirty seconds and she would be able to clear the headland.

Stuart looked down. He shook loose the girl's hold, rid himself of his coat; it was pinned to him. The knife had gone through the side—through the pocket, stuffed with papers and the cigarette tin of pearls. He laughed and pulled the knife point from his hip. He threw it and the coat down the companionway to safety.

Then he keeled over with a little sigh, and Felice caught him.

The roar of Rais Yusuf brought a brown man to the wheel. The old Arab rushed to the side of Stuart, tore away his shirt, laid bare the two slashes in his side. He grunted in relief, then lifted Stuart in his arms and carried the limp figure down the ladder and on into the cabin. When he had laid Stuart in his berth, he turned to find Felice at his side.

"You here? The hurts are nothing. He must be bandaged and kept quiet—"

"Leave that to me," she said. Rais Yusuf pawed his beard doubtfully.

"You? But you are a woman. And this is work to be done carefully."

"Get out!" Anger flamed suddenly in her eyes. "He told you to take charge of the ship; do it, then. Get back to your post before I call the men to whip you on deck!"

Rais Yusuf grinned delightedly and stalked out. At the door he turned as though to speak, but checked himself abruptly as he saw the girl lean over Stuart, touching his cheek with furtive, tender fingers. He closed the door and chuckled in his beard, then went for the deck with a rush, and slammed shut the companion hatches.

"By Allah, there is a woman fit for him!" he cried gustily, and looked back at the boat.

Mandrin's figure had reached it. Mandrin had put up both hands to the gunwale, drawing himself up. He hung poised there for a long moment. It was queer that his amazing strength was not equal to that little lift. Then, as he hung thus, half out of the water, a growing splotch of water-thinned crimson widened out between his shoulders. Stuart's first bullet had not missed.

Fascinated, Rais Yusuf watched, and saw the two white hands suddenly lose their grip. The figure of Mandrin plunged down and did not come up again.

Rais Yusuf spat over the side—then turned and rushed for the wheel as the hissing line of wind and foam struck upon them. And the whole shape of Amber Island was blotted out in an instant, forever.

THE END

Algerian Well-Divers

THE valley of Oued Rirh in the Algerian Sahara is noted for its oases, which are fed by an underground river of the same name. For many years people have lived in the valley, drilling wells and growing date palms. But the wells always had a way of suddenly going dry, and the palms would die before they could be unstopped. As a result there grew up a semi-religious band of R'tass, the well-divers, who rush to a clogged well like firemen to a blazing store. The date-planters revere them almost as saints.

When the "eye" of a well has become "blinded," the first diver strips, plugs his ears with wax and takes a huge gasp of air. He dives into the well—a hundred and thirty feet or so deep—bearing a basket. Three or four minutes he may be gone. Then he returns with the basket full of the mud which has been stopping the well. Others repeat the job till water flows again.

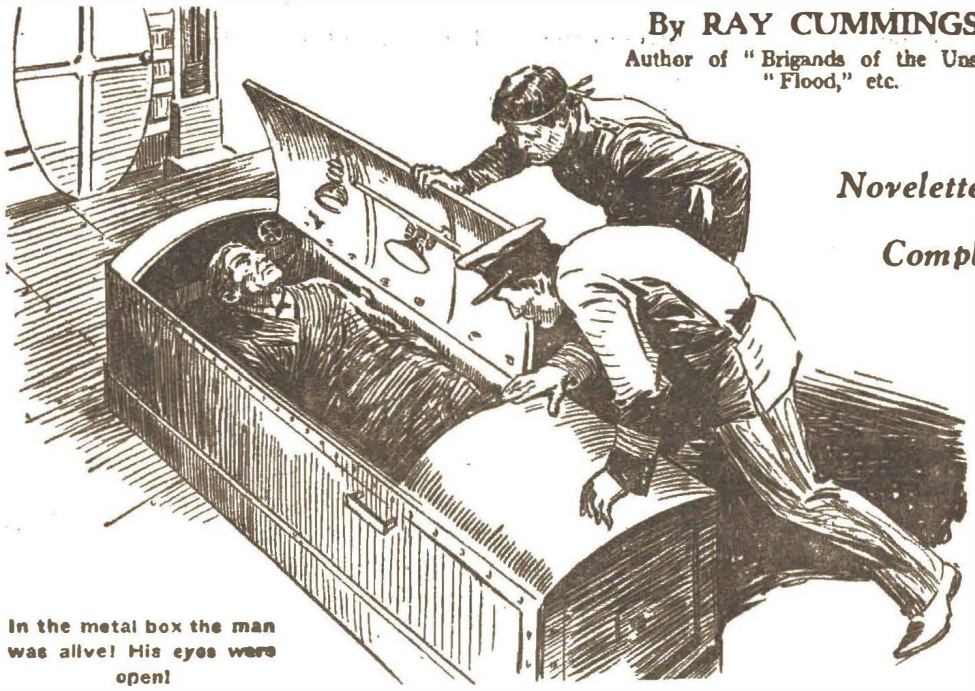
Delos White.

Earth-Mars Voyage 20

By RAY CUMMINGS
Author of "Brigands of the Unseen," "Flood," etc.

Novelette—

Complete



In the metal box the man was alive! His eyes were open!

An unknown power dominated the world's richest banker—so diabolic that even the psychic girl from Mars could not fathom it

CHAPTER I.

THE EAVESDROPPING RAY.

DUSTY FRANE lounged against the catwalk rail of his helio turret, on the superstructure roof of the *Stardust,* and stared with enthusiasm at the dark-haired, heavily cloaked girl passenger coming up the boarding incline.

"By the code, Alan, cast your gaze on that! If she isn't a little beauty, I'm a motor-oiler."

Alan Aldáne, tall, blond Chief Navigator, shifted to a better point of vantage, and bending with elbows on the rail, peered with an equal interest.

"You're no motor-oiler," he laughed. "Who is she? Santley's daughter?"

"Who else? But his ward, not his daughter. That's the old money-pot, right in front of her."

The scene was dim with shifting tube-light and shadow, but the short boarding incline which led from the *Stardust's* rack up to her deckporte was fairly illumined. A carrier with hand-trunks preceded these last two of the embarking passengers—William Santley, Interplanetary financier, and his ward Valdora.

Santley, whose vast banking interests embraced both the World Federation and the Martian Union, was said to be the richest man in either world. Alan gazed curiously; he had never seen Santley before, only the news teletypes of him. The lights of the boarding incline showed him briefly now—

a tall, portly man of sixty-odd, with a black triangular hat, and a dark cape enveloping him.

He followed the carrier through the porte of the *Stardust's* glassite deck wall and was lost to view among the little group of passengers on the deck who had gathered to see him come aboard.

Then Alan's interest swung to the girl. She was small and dark-haired. The hood of her dark traveling cloak was flung behind. Her dark hair, parted in the middle, waved over her ears and was gathered into a knot low at the back. She passed through a shadow; came, briefly, into a spot of glare. He saw that the hair was a dark frame for a pale oval face of delicate, classic beauty; a complexion of faintest pink-tinged pallor, startling contrast to the red lips, thin black brows and heavy eye-lashes... She followed her father into the deck shadows.

Alan shifted his position on the helio catwalk. He saw Santley and the girl passing into the door oval of the cabin superstructure. The door was almost under Alan. No chance to see her further.

Dusty was laughing. "Well, I can say you didn't miss anything. A real heart-pounder, isn't she? The teletypes never did her much justice, did they?"

Alan's heart was thumping, but he grinned back at Dusty. "A beauty. Earth doesn't produce 'em quite like that. Venus girl? I remember the newscasters said something about—"

"From the Venus Free State," Dusty informed him. "A parentless. The old money-pot and his wife went to Venus last opposition—met her—took a fancy—and adopted her. Had her in a training school in England up to a Lunar ago. She just went to live with them recently. Mrs. Santley was sick. She died three days ago. I suppose that makes Valdora and the old money-pot a lot closer so that he's taking her on this business trip with him. But he won't have her long. What a marriage prize for some erg-filled, handsome young man! Now you take me, for instance—"

But Alan jumped down the little catwalk steps and went forward along the superstructure roof to the control turret thirty feet away. The *Stardust* was ready to rise. Dr. Eders was leaving the control turret—a small, saturnine fellow from the German province, the ship's physician and surgeon.

"Hello, Alan. Got them aboard at last. Now we can fly-off. Did you see old Santley's daughter? I hear she's a real beauty."

Eders was lowering himself down the vertical ladder, ten feet down from the control turret base to the forward deck triangle. He grinned up at Alan. "I hope she gets pressure-sickness. A pleasure to doctor her."

"Sure," said Alan. But he said it stiffly.

He felt a sudden annoyance that this girl's beauty should be bandied around the ship.

CAPTAIN GRANT was known for his swift accelerations; under his orders Alan had the *Stardust* through Earth's atmosphere and well upon her course within a few hours. By Earth-time, Atlantic Seaboard 40° N., the fly-off was in midmorning. Captain Grant never spared his passengers pressure-sickness. His course this voyage led fairly past the Moon. The *Stardust* swept out of the sunlight into the giant cone of the Earth's shadow; the varying, inevitable changes of air-pressure within the ship's glassite dome

caused many of the passengers illness. But Dr. Eders was doomed to disappointment. Valdora Santley was not stricken. She came with her father to the noon meal, and there Alan met her—at the small table with Alan at one end and Captain Grant at the other.

Captain Grant said: "Miss Santley, my Chief Navigator, Alan Aldáne."

As simple as that; but to Alan it seemed that all which was worth while to his life was just beginning.

The *Stardust* was a small vessel. Usually crowded, on this voyage there chanced to be no more than a score of passengers. The six or eight small tables in the moonlit, starlit salon this first meal were largely vacant. But the passengers in evidence, Alan saw, were the usual mixture of Martians and Earth people, traveling upon their diversified personal errands. There were, this voyage, none from the Venus Free State, save Valdora Santley.

At this first meal only one Martian appeared.* He sat across the room from Alan, at a table with Dr. Eders and Dusty Frane, the little fiery-haired freckled helio operator. His name was Set Grof. A distinguished looking fellow, with coarse black hair shot with gray, long to the base of his neck. In age perhaps forty Earth-years. In stature he was a full seven feet. He sat in the oversize Martian chair allotted to him, chatting with heavy, throaty Martian voice but in perfect Earth-English. He was garbed for this meal in conventional Earth-clothes of a business gentleman—ruffled white shirt and tight tubular black trousers. The great gray-brown column of his muscular throat was incongruous encircled by the Earth-style neckpiece.

Alan vaguely understood that this Set Grof was an inventor; a researcher in the realms of experimental physics. He had the working model of a mechanical invention with him now. He had applied recently to the World Patent Office—so he informed Captain Grant—for Earth commercial protection of his basic idea which was still a secret. Alan had seen the model of the apparatus come aboard, carefully handled under the personal supervision of Grof himself. A big oblong box with what seemed to be a series of little battery containers set like turrets along its top. Grof had it now in his big sleeping cubby.

Alan heard Grof say to Dusty: "I have never been to your Moon, Mr. Frane. Tell me about it. Restricted existence there for those of your little colony—all under glassite in a vacuum."

But Dusty made a poor conversationalist; his attention was largely on this other table where Valdora sat beside Alan.

Captain Grant said, "A great pleasure to meet you, Mr. Santley. And your charming daughter—by the starways, if I live to navigate the most distant nebulae, I'll never expect to meet such a beautiful young girl."

It annoyed Alan; even this grizzled, paunch-bellied old captain flattering the girl, so that Alan sat stiffly eating, hardly speaking or looking at her, determined that he would not be classed with all these others, cheapening her beauty by discussing it.

He found it a breath-taking beauty. So flawless at first that it was unreal. But her personality warmed it; made it human. She spoke, this meal, very seldom. She took the captain's compliment with a swift, deprecating glance, a slight heightening of color in

*For all of their gigantic stature and robust health, Martians are peculiarly susceptible to the harmless but distressing pressure-sickness.

her pale cheeks, and then she seemed to forget it. A girl of seventeen or eighteen Earth-years, perhaps. But she was perfectly poised, seemingly unconscious of her beauty, or her position as Santley's daughter.

"NAVIGATION by celestial mechanics must be very intricate, Mr. Aldáne—you seem so young for a Chief Navigator—"

"Eh? Oh—well not so intricate, Miss Santley—"

Alan cursed himself. It seemed impossible to talk normally to this girl, with his heart so unreasonably pounding. He forced himself to be casual. He said, "I've only been to Venus once. Only a short time there. You're from the Venus Free State, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"I saw many—" He was almost saying, "I saw many pretty girls there, but none quite like you." He amended, "I saw many races in the one city. A strangely mixed nation never to have strife. Tell me about it."

He heard simultaneously the captain and Santley talking in low tones of Set Grof, the Martian.

"An inventor?" the captain was saying. "What is his invention? A secret?"

"I fancy so," said Santley. "I understand it has the promise of a great fortune. He does not seem to want or need capital—"

"You know him, then?"

Santley shrugged. "I met him once. Just briefly. But a brilliant man, so I understand."

"I never heard of him," the captain said, "until my owners introduced me yesterday, making arrangements for the handling of the model of his invention which he has with him.

Again Santley shrugged. "One may have too much publicity," he smiled. "Like myself."

Presently Valdora turned from Alan.

"You will excuse me, father?"

"Why, yes—of course, Val. Are you ill?"

"No. No, of course not."

Alan rose to help her leave her seat. She smiled.

"I'm sorry."

Santley said, "But you haven't finished."

"I'm not very hungry. I'll be on the deck. The Moon is growing very beautiful."

Alan's gaze followed her slim figure as she left the salon. She was only some five feet in height, but the long, clinging gray dress made her seem taller.

"I hope she isn't ill," the captain said.

"I don't think so. She's like that. Impulsive."

But the banker, also, gazed after her.

ALAN completed his meal almost in silence, vaguely listening to the captain trying to discuss Interplanetary finance with Santley. The famous banker, in his teletypes, had always been pictured as a crisp dynamic personality; a dominant, fiery genius. He was that, undoubtedly. But having lunch with him now, upon the relaxation of this flight, he seemed a very average intelligent gentleman. A benign old fellow; his gray eyes twinkled at Captain Grant's earnest exposition of how the banks of the Martian Union might be run more to the public advantage. And he said gently:

"I have not much influence with the Martians, captain. But if ever I have the chance to take advantage of your good suggestions—"

Alan hardly heeded it. He finished his meal somewhat hastily, and went up the single narrow incline into the superstructure public room, and thence to the narrow side deck. Through the bull's-eye glassite dome portes the black void of space blazed with stars. The Moon hung forward and just below the deck level—a huge full disk; already, even to the naked eye, the configurations of its rilled craters, plains and tumbled mountains were visible. The moonlight was a brilliant but soft sheen along the deck, where a few passengers not well enough to go below were stretched in chairs.

In one of them Alan saw Valdora with a thin satin-lined skin-robe tucked around her. It was chilly on the deck; Dr. Eders was a believer in cool, fresh air for pressure-stricken passengers.

A vacant chair was beside Valdora. Alan hesitated. Then it seemed that she signaled him. He approached and sat down beside her.

"You're not busy, Mr. Aldáne?"

"No. Not for an hour."

"I was looking at the Moon—glorious, seeing it expand—all its loveliness growing."

"You've never been there?" he asked.

A man passenger passed them. A young Earthman from London City—quaintly garbed with black trousers, a black jacket too small, and a black dome-hat, cocked jauntily at an angle. He had been down in the dining salon a moment ago, but now he seemed taking his after-lunch walk. A young fellow, small and thin with a face queerly pinched and sharp-featured. He went past, whistling a tune to himself.

Valdora said, "No, I've never been to your Moon. Why?" But her gaze was following the passing man.

"Moonlight, on Earth and out here, is gloriously romantic. But the reality of the Moon—" Alan laughed. "You wouldn't like it. Cold and bleak. Desolate—"

"Who is that fellow?" she said suddenly.

The man with the pinched face had turned the forward corner of the superstructure.

"Oh—why, his name is Wiley Apple."

"Yes, I know that."

"How do you know it?" he demanded, surprised. "Not a friend of yours, is he?"

"I studied the passenger list," Valdora smiled. "It has an identifying face-type with every name."

Alan grinned. "Of course. I forgot—I mean, I didn't think you'd be so interested in the passengers."

It seemed that she lowered her voice, but still she spoke with a banter. "But I am. Passengers—and officers."

No girl of Venus could help flirting. She gave him a sidewise glance from under half-lowered lashes; and though he knew how lightly a Venus girl would give such a glance and expect it lightly to be taken, it made his heart jump.

But again, instantly she was serious. "I mean, who is he? His public record?"

"Is mostly private," Alan smiled. "He used to be a gold-leaf gambler on the Earth stratosphere routes. He was challenged by our owners when he booked for this passage, but he swears he has reformed. Says he has a legitimate business chance in Ferrok-Shahn. Perhaps he has."

"Here he comes again," she warned.

Apple slouched past. He stared at the girl, and as, briefly, he met her gaze, he touched the peak of his cap

with a gesture friendly but deferential.

Valdora laughed. "I like his looks, don't you? Interesting—a gold-leaf gambler."

"Well—" Alan began, but stopped. Had he already gotten to where he was annoyed with any man who even spoke to Valdora? He said hastily:

"By the gods of the airways, you must think I'm a queer fellow, blackening characters—"

"Nonsense." Her slim white hand touched his arm. It seemed to him as though the touch carried a tingling current. He met her eyes—and suddenly all his emotions were changed. There was no flirtation in her eyes now; what he saw unmistakably was fear.

He gasped, "Why—"

She had made some decision. She said in a swift undertone, "I came up, hoping you'd follow me."

"You're afraid!" he gasped. "Of what?"

"Please—not so loud. Could an eavesdropping ray be on us now?"

"Yes, it could, I suppose. But—" He bent toward her. "Afraid of Wiley Apple?"

"No, of course not. I never saw or heard of him before. I—I want to talk to you—some other time, not now. Don't look so anxious! I'm not afraid—puzzled—I want some advice."

But now he could see that she was horribly afraid. Terrified. He murmured, "If you think an eavesdropper—"

"Not now, anyway." She added, suddenly more loudly, "So the Moon is really bleak as all that? Well, it does not look it."

The Martian, Set Grof, with Dusty Frane, had just come from the superstructure doorway; and behind them came Valdora's father and the captain. The group gathered around Valdora, and from the confusion of introductions, Alan escaped to his control turret, where the mathematics of the course for this voyage awaited him.

But he was in no mood for them now. What could be frightening this ward of the great banker? Something that she could not tell Santley but would come to Alan instead? Then he remembered that Santley had only recently adopted her. She hardly knew her foster-father. Was it something perhaps out of her past, which she did not want to tell Santley?

Alan tried to think back. Was it Wiley Apple? He hardly thought so. Her tone had been hearty and sincere when she denied that. This huge Martian, Set Grof? Was it he? In the dining salón, when Santley and the captain had discussed Grof, Alan recalled now that Valdora had immediately listened.

The afternoon dragged away. The evening meal came and passed. Alan's duties forced him to have his supper in the control turret. He saw from the turret Valdora and her father walking the deck; and it seemed that at the girl's instigation Wiley Apple was called to join them.

ALAN'S chance came about nine o'clock, of Earth's fly-off time, which still was the ship's routine. Valdora appeared walking alone on the forward deck triangle, and stood at one of the side-portes gazing down at the Moon.

She turned and saw Alan up in the control turret. She was hardly thirty feet from him. He answered her vague gesture, and in a moment was down the ladder and beside her, towering above her, tall and handsome and effi-

cient looking in his silver and gold braided uniform.

She murmured, "I hoped you'd come."

"Of course I'd come! I've been waiting for the chance ever since this afternoon. I saw you talking with Wiley Apple—"

She gave a low rippling laugh. "I like him. I talked with him ten minutes alone. Do you know, honestly, he insists that the minute he saw me he was star-crossed with love. A most earnest little altoh.* But I shouldn't make fun of him. Really I like him very much. He is so quaint."

Again she laughed. "Maybe he is like Venus people. In my country, one glance is enough for love." From under veiling lashes she gazed at him sidewise. She murmured, "For a Venus girl, one glance—like this—often is enough."

This girl of Venus, so naturally flirting that she could not help teasing him. And that Alan could not laugh with a light heart annoyed him. He said, "Is this what you had to tell me?"

The white radiance of the big Moon-disk was on her face. A lacy scarf draped her black hair like an old-fashioned mantilla of the Spanish Province. She spoke half into the scarf:

"I want to make sure there is no eavesdropping ray—"

"None," he murmured. "I have a detector here." He held the small thorite disk in his hand. It was cool and vibrationless, undisturbed by any hostile rays. "What is it?" he added. "Speak softly—into your scarf and toward the window."

"About my father," she said. "Something is wrong with him. I mean, he's different somehow. Worried—harassed, maybe—I don't know how to describe him. I'm frightened."

"For him?"

"Yes, I guess, for him. And myself. I don't know. But I can feel that there's some menace—something I don't understand, but ought to. You see, I don't really know him very well. If this is something worrying him—"

"Why don't you ask him?"

She turned and stared blankly. "Why do I not? That I don't know. Since his wife died, he has been so different with me. He doesn't know that I realize it."

"Different? Unkind?"

"No. He's very sweet. Gentle—loving, as he always was. But there's something very wrong with him."

Alan said gently, "It doesn't seem to make much sense. You Venus girls are all supposed to be psychic. Is that all you—"

She gripped him. "You think it's not important! My intuition—I guess that's all it is." Her voice turned grim. "Mrs. Santley died—just a few days ago. I seem to feel that it wasn't a natural death."

Alan caught his breath. "You mean murder?"

She said, "Yes, murder. That Martian, Set Grof—"

"You knew him before this voyage?"

"No, I never saw him before. He and father are in the public cabin now. Wiley Apple is showing them the tricks of gold-leaf gambling. But that man Grof—to me—radiates menace. And father doesn't act normally with him. I can't describe it. Something queer. You wouldn't notice it. But I do."

*A word of the Venus Free State, meaning honorable suitor.

Alan said, " You're trying to tell me that maybe Mrs. Santley was murdered. And that maybe this Martian has some power over your father?"

" Yes," she murmured. " That's it, I guess. Some power—making him—" She checked herself. Then again she was gripping Alan. " I'm trying to be practical. What I thought you might want to do is send a secret helio to the New York police. Ask for an autopsy on the body of Mrs. Santley. And report at once. You know the law. Any person of authority can demand that, in the name of public justice. I can demand it. I do! You can send it in my name."

" Well—" Alan began. Then he stiffened. The thorite disk in his hand was warming! Tingling his palm! An eavesdropping ray!

" Some one listening! Stand still!" He whirled from her. This moonlit black-shadowed triangle of deck forward of the superstructure seemed empty. There was only the lookout-duty man in the peak of the bow and Second Officer Blaine at his dials by the open window of the control turret. Beside the little ladder down from the turret an open door oval led into the superstructure. Alan ran through it —into a dim narrow corridor with cabin doorways on each side. At its other end a tall figure was moving back into the central public salon. The figure of Set Grof! Alan could not mistake him.

And from a smaller cross corridor another figure suddenly darted from a cabin doorway and bumped squarely into Alan.

" Gawd o' the Universe! 'Ello, Mr. Aldáne—you give me a fright. I'm gettin' a box o' tricks. The Royal Money-pot wants me to teach 'im gold-leaf gamblin'."

Wiley Apple. Was he the eavesdropper? Or was it the Martian, Grof?

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST DEATH.

THE *Stardust* was a vessel of forty-two long-tons, unloaded, by gross equipped weight in her rack at Earth's sea-level, with gravity plates in neutral. She was built largely of alumite. In length, from tip to stern, one hundred and forty feet. The hull was cigar-shaped, flat on top for a single deck. The cabin superstructure, nine feet high and seventy feet long, occupied the center space of the hull-top. It left a thirty-five foot triangle of deck space forward and stern; and narrow crescent side decks some ten feet wide.

The whole of this was covered from bow to stern with a dome of glassite —like the hull, a double-shelled wall through the cores of which the Erentz pressure-equalizing current circulated. Within the superstructure was a central public salon, with side-doors opening directly to the side deck. There was a room-cubby corridor, from the salon, rear and stern, to the deck triangles.

Upon the superstructure roof, the little control turret stood at the forward end; and in the middle, thirty feet away along the roof, was the helio turret, with its tiny catwalk balcony a few steps above the roof top; and near by, on each side, ladders leading down to the side decks. And overhead, a maze of guy-wires and struts supporting the dome, which at this, its central, highest point was some fifteen feet above the top of the helio turret.

In the circular small room of the helio turret now, Alan sat with Dusty

Frane. The turret had a doorway and open window portes. A single-hooded light was on Dusty's table, his files of messages, and his sender key. Outside was the dark spread of the superstructure roof, the lights of the forward control turret where Second Officer Blaine sat on duty with Captain Grant. And beyond the dome the black firmament of space was visible. The blazing reddish point of Mars was level in front of the *Stardust's* bow. The huge Moon-disk hung lower, forward and to one side; and almost level behind the stern was the gigantic darkish disk of Earth, with a narrow crescent limb illumined where the hidden sunlight struck upon its edge.

BY the *Stardust's* time it was now nine-thirty in the evening. Alan, leaving Wiley Apple in the corridor, had hastened back to Valdora and sent the girl into the public salon to join her father and watch Wiley Apple with his tricks of gold-leaf gambling. Then Alan had come here to the turret; and Dusty had sent the message to the New York police. The helio mirror in the central peak of the dome had flashed its spitting actinic lights in the dot-dash code; and Dusty, with his electro-telescope, had caught the answer from the New York station.

Dusty sat now, with Alan tensely watching him, while he switched off the current, so that the tiny multiple series of light-points, prism-magnifiers and direction-mirrors ranged here around the helio-turret ceiling all went dark.

"Correct," Dusty said.

"What did they answer?" Alan demanded.

"Do it, of course. A rush exhumation—a rush complete autopsy."

"How long did they say it would take?"

"Two and a half hours or so. If I don't get their signal I can call them at midnight. Damned curious with questions, but I answered—'have no information.'" Dusty was writing out the message for his files. He stared at Alan with his quizzical grin. "I hope she'll sign this."

"Of course she will."

"Because if she doesn't, I'm in for more trouble than a blind tower traffic guider on air-race day."

"She will," Alan repeated. "Two hours and a half to wait for the answer."

Dusty said, "Look here—that eavesdropper, let's try and figure it. Where did you say you spotted the Martian?"

Alan had seen Grof near the salon end of the little corridor. From the forward deck triangle to the salon entrance that corridor was a scant twenty-five feet long.

Dusty said, "He could have been at the front end, working his eavesdropper from there. When he saw you leave Valdora he ran back."

It was perfectly possible. Also, as Alan pointed out, Grof's big sleeping cabin was there at the salon end of that corridor; he had been in front of its door when Alan saw him. Perhaps he was merely leaving his cabin.

Dusty had a passenger-location list on the table now under the light. He said, "Correct on that. Grof is in A-10."

Santley was in A-1; and Valdora, A-2. They were the *Stardust's* largest, most luxurious rooms—just sternward of the central salon, with a foot-wide lattice grillework at the ceiling, opening to the salon. One was on either side of the stern section of cordidor,

with corridor doors. And each room, half the width of the superstructure at its widest point, had a side-deck window.

Dusty said, "Where you bumped into Apple—he claimed he was just coming from his room. Well, maybe he was."

Apple's cubby, A-13, was there in the narrow cross corridor, near the forward end of the superstructure.

They discussed it, but there seemed no choice. It could have been Apple or Grof; both, or neither.

"If I were you," Dusty said, "I'd tell Captain Grant all this. It is illegal without a permit to possess an eavesdropping projector. We'd search the ship and the passengers—"

"Pretty drastic," Alan commented. Especially with the prominence of these passengers. In truth, Alan was somewhat perturbed already that he had sent the helio order. All this—psychic premonitions of an emotional Venus girl? But why would an eavesdropper attack him and Valdora so promptly, the moment they were alone together discussing the thing?

As though reading Alan's thoughts, Dusty said, abruptly, "Say, how much of your talk did that eavesdropper hear?"

Valdora's insistence that the helio be sent. That was the last thing she had said. If the eavesdropper had heard anything, he heard that.

"When we get the answer," Dusty said, and stopped abruptly, with a hand on Alan's arm. Another eavesdropper, listening to them now? But it was not that. Alan's detector lay on the table; its needle was vibrationless. And then Dusty added, in a swift undertone, "Some one coming up."

A tiny tube over the table had lighted. Some one had stepped on the lower rung of the deck ladder. A moment later the huge head and shoulders of Set Grof appeared as he climbed the ladder. He crossed the half width of the superstructure roof and stood at the catwalk steps. His head was almost level with Alan and Dusty seated inside the turret.

"Mr. Frane?"

"Correct," Dusty said. Alan saw that Dusty had hastily shifted the draft of Valdora's message out of sight. Dusty added, "What can I do for you, Set Grof? No message for you—I deliver them at once."

The Martian displayed a square of paper in his hand. "A message for sending." He mounted to the catwalk balcony. "I may come in?"

HE came in without waiting for Dusty's answer. He had to stoop at the little door oval. His bulk crowded the room as he sat awkwardly hunched in a small chair. Alan shifted back to make space. The Martian faced Dusty at the table; his profile was to Alan. The moonlight and starlight from the turret door edged his face with a silver sheen—the massive protruding jaw, the broad flat nose and high forehead with the mass of gray-black hair bound by a Martian hair-strap.

Grof was saying with a smile, "Not too much space in here for me."

"Plenty for me," Dusty said. "I'm a little fellow. Let's see your message."

"I thought it maybe you sent none during this hour. Then I saw your helio mirror lighting. You have contact with New York? You just sent a message?"

"Sure," Dusty said. Alan shifted in his chair, with an instinct to flash Dusty a warning glance across the

shadowed turret; but it was unnecessary. "Ship's position," Dusty added. "Our owners like to make a lot of talk for the newscasters on how Captain Grant gets the *Stardust* away like a comet. Twelve hours out. Atmosphere, stratosphere, into the shadow and on our course. Acceleration damn near from the beginning per centum 142. Look at the Moon off there. We'll be abreast of it another six hours—only about seventy-five thousand miles off. If Interplanetary Starcraft can match a record like that, you cast me the news, Set Grof."

Dusty rattled it with enthusiastic glibness; and whether the Martian believed it or not, he smiled and nodded. "A very good record for those in haste. And I am that."

He handed Dusty his message. "The charge can be against my passage?"

"Sure. Correct." Dusty scanned the paper. "This isn't Ilton."*

"No. Must it be?"

"That. Or an officially recognized Earth-language. This is the Earth-Mars run."

Grof made a gesture of deprecation. "My personal code. The captain would permit me, of course. But I do not insist." He took the paper. He wrote his message in English, scribbling it on his uptilted knees. He read it aloud, in a voice self-conscious. It was addressed to a Martian woman in New York. It read:

"And still I love you."

"Correct," Dusty grinned.

"Still, I am not too old for love," Grof smiled; "but one has an instinct to write it in code."

The watching Alan saw very clearly that Grof's huge, long legs were hunched awkwardly with feet on the lower rung of his small chair. The floor was in shadow, save for a little reflected light which disclosed under Dusty's table a shelf of hello Zed-magnifying tubes and prisms—the first series of magnifiers of the impulse current from the helio sender key to the main light electrodes around the ceiling. As Grof leaned forward to hand Dusty the paper, the Martian's legs slid out. His feet struck the narrow shelf under the table. There was a spluttering hiss; the splintering pop of tiny vacuums; a brief spurt of electric flame and a puff of rising acrid smoke.

"Oh—by the Universe—" Grof drew in his legs hastily and stood up. "I am so sorry. Have I injured something?"

Dusty had leaped up. He bent and briefly examined the blackened litter of the shelf. He and Alan exchanged glances, while Grof continued contrite lugubrious apologies.

"I am so big for your little turret—I should not have come in. I did not see under that table where my clumsy feet should have kept away. The damage—the charge will be against me, naturally." He paused.

Dusty only said, "Correct. An accident, of course."

Grof waited through an awkward silence. Then he said, "Much damage?"

"Oh, not so much," Dusty said smilingly. "I wouldn't think the captain will make any assessment."

"I do not mean that," Grof said earnestly. "I pay, of course. I mean your helio. Inconvenience to you—to the ship."

Again Alan wanted to warn Dusty; and again it was unnecessary.

"I can't send your message," Dusty

*Ilton: the official language of the Martian Union.

said, "if that's what you mean. My sender is smashed."

"And your receiver? If a message should come for me?"

"Couldn't get it. That circuit controls my electro-telescope."

"I am so sorry. But the ship has other telescopes—"

"For visible light-rays. Observation instruments. This is the only one converting the invisible actinics of the helio. We're out of communication."

"Wretched stupidity of mine! I shall apologize to the captain. Will it be a permanent stoppage? For all the voyage?"

"Maybe not. Maybe not. I'll do my best with repairs."

The contrite Martian left the turret. From the roof outside, he said, "If you are able to send my message you will inform me?"

"Correct," Dusty agreed. He and Alan stood watching Grof leave. When his head had disappeared down the superstructure ladder, Alan murmured:

"Careful what we say! That cursed eavesdropping ray—"

THEY stood eying their detector needle, but it did not stir. The eavesdropper must have realized by the promptness of his previous discovery, that Alan had a detector. For perhaps a minute or two, Alan and Dusty watched the needle in expectant silence.

"That wasn't an accident," Dusty whispered at last.

"Of course it wasn't. Can you make repairs?"

"Sure," Dusty grinned. "New vacuums and socket seats. Those coils and lead-wires, and a few fuses. I've got all replacements below in the supply room. An hour or so."

"Go right at it. We want to get that report from the police at midnight."

"We'll get it. And that's what Grof doesn't want us to get. And what you better do now is take your detector and watch it while you have a nice quiet little conference with the captain. I'm damned if we should carry the responsibility—"

He stopped, stricken. From under them down in the superstructure came a muffled scream. An instant of silence.

Alan dashed from the turret, scrambled down the ladder with Dusty after him. They bumped into Dr. Eders on the side deck.

"What by the devil—" Alan gasped.

Eders said, "Don't know. Somebody hurt—"

The little central salon was in a commotion. But Alan's wild fear lifted. Valdora was here, unharmed. She and her father were in an excited group. People were running in the corridors; cubby doors were opening.

"In there," some one shouted. "A forward room."

It was A-12—the room just forward of Grof's. The Martian came running down the corridor from the forward deck door. He was calling, "What is the trouble? I heard a scream."

A-12 was an unoccupied room. Its door was unlocked. On its floor they found the body of Wiley Apple with a knife blade buried in his chest.

CHAPTER III

THE HELIO FROM EARTH.

"BUT I don't see what action I can take," Captain Grant said.

"By the gods, if I had even the faintest proof of who dares use

an eavesdropping ray on my ship—or who stabbed that gold-leafer—I'd iron him up in two minutes. But I haven't. Not yet."

An hour had passed since the stabbing. The *Stardust* was quiet again. Its passengers had been assured by the officers that Apple had met with an accident—or made an attempt at suicide. The gold-leaf gambler was not dead. In Dr. Eder's office Apple lay unconscious. He would die; no question of that; but the physician thought that he might momentarily recover consciousness.

The passengers now had most of them retired to their cubbies; the *Stardust's* crew—those not on duty—gathered in their bow hull-room, and whispered fearfully that a murderer was on board. The ship had been searched. There was no stowaway; no one unaccounted. The knife buried in Apple's back gave no clue.

In the captain's room—a projecting cubby at a forward corner of the superstructure, on the deck level, Alan sat with him, and Second Officer Blaine.

Alan said, "Set Grof, of course—but as you say, how can you prove it?"

The captain added, "I've no authority to search his personal effects without some sort of proof. With an ordinary traveler I'd take the chance. But this fellow—if it didn't happen to yield me some incriminating evidence—he'd have the Interplanetary law backing him—I'd lose my commission—our owners might have a rotten damage suit—"

"Especially if Santley backed him," Blaine said. A stolid, practical fellow, this Blaine. He added, "We've taken enough chance sending that helio. All this—seems to me mostly an emotional girl's fancies."

"All what?" Alan demanded. "An emotional girl's fancy didn't run a knife into Wiley Apple. Or eavesdrop me. Or wreck our helio." He lowered his voice with the detector in his hand. "Even now I'm afraid to speak. You don't know where that Martian is now, do you?"

"Damn me, but I do!" Captain Grant exclaimed. "He's retired to his cubby, where he ought to be. The girl is in her room, and Santley in his. And Steward Franks is patrolling the corridor—with a flash-gun. And two of the deck-duty men are on the side decks watching the windows. What you say, Alan, is true enough." The captain's voice sank to a murmur. "This Martian may have some power over Santley. That's what got the girl excited. And, if so, any move of accusation I make against this Martian would bring Santley's wrath on me. Believe me, I don't want that."

Alan said, "Grof was afraid we'd send that helio. He came to try to stop us getting the answer—or sending any more. Whatever his game, Apple must have gotten information of it. Blackmail—or maybe that little fellow was going to tell us."

So much of it seemed clear to Alan. Apple had left the salon. Grof, coming down from the helio room—entering by the forward end of the corridor—had caught Apple prowling by Grof's room. Apple had hoped perhaps to get in and examine Grof's mysterious mechanism. And Grof had stabbed him and shoved him into the vacant adjacent room.

Alan's imagination ran wild. That mysterious mechanism? Some strange diabolic thing, giving power over the world's richest banker? Making Santley its slave? Dominating Santley's will? Was it something like that? Had

it, perhaps, made Santley kill his own wife?

ALAN shifted uneasily in his chair, with a glance to the door porte and moonlit forward deck triangle outside. Who could say what that mysterious invention might be? Or what wild necromancy it might now be wielding? These walls—was its lethal ray capable of passing through them? The Martian was in his cabin cubby with his box—and futilely the steward, Franks, was patrolling the corridor, with his puny flash-gun! What good was that?

Then Alan had a far more disturbing thought than all the others. Apple had been killed because he was a menace to Grof. Valdora was a menace, and Grof knew it. Valdora! She was now alone in her room, no more than twenty feet across the width of the salon from the Martian.

Alan jumped to his feet.

Grant said, " By the Constellations, what is the matter with you?"

" That girl—I'm not going to leave her in her room."

" Sit down," Blaine said. " If Apple will speak before he dies, we'll have something tangible."

" Or that police helio," said the captain. " I wish they'd give me some orders I could follow."

" How can they?" Alan demanded. " They don't know what's going on here."

" We don't either," Blaine observed.

" I'll land at the Moon, and let the Governor take us over," the captain said suddenly. " By the gods, I will, if this keeps up. A murderer on my ship and I can't find him!" He reached for his audiphone and rang Dusty in the helio turret. " When can I get a message through to Earth?"

Dusty said, " In a few minutes."

" Get our owners," the captain added. " To the hell with the police. I want orders to turn back to New York or drop at the Moon. I don't give a damn which." The captain slammed up the audiphone.

" And in the meantime," Alan said, " I'll see if I can keep that girl from being murdered."

He started for the door, but the ringing of the audiphone checked him. It was Dr. Eders, calling Alan.

Alan said, " What is it?"

" He's dying, but he spoke. I pulled him up to consciousness. He asked for you. Better hurry."

Alan ran out, along the moonlit deck triangle and into the corridor.

The patrolling steward passed him. " All correct, sir."

TWO men and a woman—Earth passengers—and a Martian man were gathered in a corner of the salon, talking in low tones. From within the little salon Alan saw the lattice grille over the forward room of Grof. There was an interior light. The grilles on the other side showed that Santley's room had a light—but Valdora's was dark. She had retired.

Alan hesitated; then hurried on past. In Dr. Eders's room, near the stern end of the corridor, the dying Wiley Apple lay on a white operating slab, with Dr. Eders bending over him.

" You, Alan—hurry, he's trying to talk."

The bloodless lips of the little gold-leaf gambler were moving. The glazing eyes stared at Alan. The man, save for Dr. Eders's desperate expedients, would long since have been dead.

" 'Ello, Mr. Aldáne. You—watch out—she's—in danger."

" She? Who?"

"Valdora—in danger—you—"

There was no more. The light was gone from the staring eyes. The gold-leafer was dead.

Valdora in danger! It intensified a million fold Alan's fears. "Eders! Come on!"

Alan whispered to the physician as they went back along the corridor. At Valdora's door they paused. Alan was breathless. Was he already too late! What a blind fool to take such chances!

And as he stood there with Dr. Eders, faintly tapping at the door, the thought again came to Alan—that mechanism in the Martian's room just across the salon—would its diabolic rays strike now at him and Eders?

He knocked louder. Then, with a rush of relief, he heard her voice.

"Yes? You, father?"

Alan put his mouth to the door speaking grid.

"It's Alan Aldáne. Dr. Eders is here to see you."

She opened the door a few inches; she stood in the corridor glow a vision of loveliness in her long clinging night robe and her dark hair tumbling over her shoulders.

Alan said softly, "We're sorry you are ill. Delayed pressure-sickness—that's all it is. Harmless—" His warning glance checked her protest. He reached and gripped her arm, drawing her toward him.

Eders was saying, more loudly, "Nothing to worry about, my dear. But you'll need treatment—carefully and at once."

And into her ear Alan was swiftly murmuring, "Too dangerous for you here! Understand? Taking you with us—captain's room. Get a dressing robe—all you'll need."

Comprehension swept her face. She barely nodded. She said aloud, "Doctor, what sort of treatment? I feel so queer—but please don't worry father with it."

They all heard Santley's door opening, directly across the corridor. The banker stood in its oval; fully dressed, save his jacket, and with a dressing robe over his trousers and ruffled shirt. A book scroll was in his hand. He wore his reading glasses, and he shoved them up to his forehead.

"Valdora ill?"

The doctor explained; and then he added, in a lower tone, "It could be serious, Mr. Santley, but I wouldn't let her know it. Delayed pressure-sickness—generally an indication of organic weakness."

At Santley's exclamation of concern, the doctor added, "I don't mean dangerous. Hush, don't frighten her. I'll take her to my office. Fluoroscopic examination. I'll report to you."

They got her away in a moment or two. The obviously concerned banker went back to his room. Alan and the doctor, with the girl between them, went sternward down the corridor. But the did not stop at Eders's office. A stern ladder here led to the superstructure roof. They mounted it; went forward again along the roof. Alan saw Dusty in the helio turret, absorbed at his electro-telescope. An incoming message!

THEY did not stop. From the control turret the third officer on duty gazed at their moonlit figures curiously. The Moon, still forward and to one side of the bow, and visually below the deck level, had expanded to a huge silver disk, mottled with mountains, its light here on the control turret a bright silver glare.

They descended the forward ladder. In another moment they were in the captain's cubby, with Grant and Second Officer Blaine.

"What did he say?" the captain demanded. "Did he die?"

But no one had time to answer. Dusty came tumbling down the ladder and burst into the room. He had his message; had ignored the audiphone in his rush to get here with the news.

"Here you are, captain. From the New York Police, Chief Night Duty Man. And countersigned with an addenda from our owners. Shoot your eye-sparks on this."

The captain took the pyroprint copy. He read aloud, into the tense silence:

> Body Mrs. Santley shows neuremic arsenate poisoning. Her personal physician arrested, committed suicide before confession or details could be forced. Suggest you arrest passenger Wiley Apple, formerly associate of British criminal named George Peters. And search ship for possible stowaway. Peters wanted in London City—reward dead or alive ten decimars.* Advise promptly.

And the addenda from the *Stardust* owners:

> *Land immediately on the Moon—Archimedes Mountain rack. Guard carefully that no harm comes to Santley and daughter.*

In the silence the captain added, "Egad, they think we're a police file. Who's the criminal Peters?"

But no one in the room had ever heard of him. Wiley Apple was dead. He couldn't very well be arrested. The ship had been searched. There was no stowaway. Peters could not be on board. Or could he? The realization of where he might be leaped seemingly to all of them at once.

*Platinum standard, equaling ten thousand gold dollars.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MARTIAN'S OBLONG BOX.

"BUT first," exclaimed the captain, "I do nothing until I've obeyed orders. We swing to the Moon right now. You, Alan, within two hours I want you to compute the elements of our necessary retardation. Would you say retard per centum twenty, beginning at once?"

"That's enough for safety, yes, sir," Alan said. "You want all possible haste?"

"Yes, I do."

They were still in the captain's cabin, and only five minutes had passed since Dusty brought the helio message. Valdora sat now in a corner, with Alan and Dr. Eders standing beside her. She had not spoken; she sat pallid, tense, staring wide-eyed at the grim group of men.

Then once, as she listened to their low, swift argument, she seized Alan's arm. "I think now that my father knows that his wife was murdered. This Grof—whatever power he has over father—"

Santley, reduced to a condition devoid of will? Santley, perhaps acting irrationally, against all his own normal desires, and yet preserving outwardly an aspect benign and normal as his old self, so that only Valdora had the instinct to know that something was wrong with him? Wild conjectures. What power could it be? Hypnotism? Earth-old legends were full of such a thing, yet except to a very slight degree—the normal dominance any strong will may exert upon a weaker personality—modern science

had developed nothing of the kind. Or was it some Martian drug?

"Nonsense!" Dr. Eders exclaimed. "Santley is not drugged—I'll gamble all my gold leaf on that."

Dusty put in, "Well, we ought to be guarding him now. Leaving him alone in there—"

Conceivably Santley could be antagonistic. A sudden, hostile, murderous move from him—"

But it was the Unknown. They all felt it. The menace of coping with something diabolical—beyond the realms of science. Something of some weird necromancy that might strike death to all of them, all in a second. It was hysteria. Alan felt it; and tried to tell himself that it was idiotic.

Dusty was taking down hand weapons from the captain's wall-rack. Old-fashioned explosive bullet projectors, flash guns, heat projectors; and the newest model curved-ray flash gun.

"All for one Martian who may not even be armed," Blaine observed.

The captain exclaimed, "Egad, you're right enough. You leave him to me. Alan, you and Dusty will search his box right while he stands watching, if I have to hold him up with a gun against his chest. We'll see what that damned invention of his is like. I'm master here. You, Eders—you'll stay here with the girl. I'll send a couple of deck men in to guard Santley. But, first, by the gods, we'll obey owners' orders and get on our course for the Moon."

He rang the duty officer in the control turret. "Swing to the Moon at once! Retardation immediately per centum twenty. Mr. Aldáne will compute subsequent retarding. We land at the Archimedes Rack."

The third officer repeated. He offered a question.

"Damme!" roared the captain. "Do as you're told."

The duty man disconnected. In the silence of the cabin, the faint hiss of the gravity plate shifters in the hull was audible. A minute or two, as the fifty or more electronized plates shifted to new combinations. Outside the captain's oval doorway, the forward deck triangle was visible; it was empty except in the bow-peak where the forward lookout man sat perched with his small telescope watching for stray meteorites—derelicts of the skyways. The triangle deck was a pattern of white starlight and moonlight, barred with the inky shadows from the overhead and side dome-struts.

THE pattern of light and shade began shifting. The firmament all had presently a slow but visible movement. Silent swing of the little *Stardust*. The great round disk of the Moon came slowly up to the deck level. Passed it. Stopped; and like the weight of a Titan pendulum, swung back, and moved forward so that presently it was poised motionless, directly in advance of the bow-peak and level with the deck.

Gigantic satellite now. To one acquainted with the physiography of the Moon, many of its Earthward landmarks now were recognizable. Sunlight glared upon the Apennine Heights; the small, scraggling dome-villages of the mining settlements on the Mare Imbrium were pin-point dots. Sunlight caught the glassite spread-covers of the radium mines on the great mountain crater of Archimedes and showed them as tiny light-points. And up near the South Pole, giant Tycho, with its radiating open rills, stood like a grim dark maw.

The white glare of the Moon's re-

flected sunlight painted the forward deck triangle; in the captain's cabin it edged the tense figures of the men with silver.

"Got it!" Eders murmured. "That boy's swift and accurate."

Dusty had handed out the weapons. The men were all armed now. "Come on," said the captain, "we'll see what this damned Martian has to say for himself."

The buzzing of the audiphone made them all stiffen. The captain jumped to it.

"Connection! Captain Grant speaking."

It was the banker, calling from his sleeping cabin. His microphone voice in the audiphone was audible to all.

"Captain, our course is altered?"

"Damme, it is, sir. I've just had orders from my owners to put in at the Moon."

"But why?" the banker demanded. "That is unreasonable, Captain Grant. A delay? I took this vessel because of your guaranteed schedule. My engagements in Ferrok—Shahn—"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Santley. Perhaps not so long a delay—"

"I insist we do nothing of the kind," Santley said. "Will you take your former course?"

"I will not," Grant retorted flatly. "Mr. Santley—"

"Then I will helio your owners a protest. Send your helio man here."

Alan, standing beside the captain, suddenly gripped him and murmured suggestions. Grant nodded. He said into the audiphone, "I'll come and talk it over with you, Mr. Santley. Awkward for me, naturally. I don't know what reason—a brief stop only at Archimedes perhaps. The Governor of the Moon may have some official passengers—important—"

"You say you're coming here at once?"

"Yes. If you insist, I'll helio for further advice—we can discuss it—"

He disconnected. And at once he rang Grof's cabin.

"Set Grof? Captain Grant. I've been ordered to put in at the Moon. Course already changed. You noticed it?"

"I did," said the Martian. "I have no liking for it. Any delay—"

"Mr. Santley has protested," the captain said. "You and he—my only influential passengers. I do not want to involve my owners in any damage suit. But I have to obey orders, Set Grof."

"I am threatening nothing," Grof said ironically. "But I have no liking for delay. I would not want to be your owners—if you cause Mr. Santley financial loss."

"I'm going to his cabin now to discuss it," Grant said. "I suggest you come join us. Will you?"

Grof would. But he seemed not particularly interested.

The captain disconnected.

Alan murmured, "Easier this way. Get him out of his cabin."

Eders said, "He'll master-lock his door."

"What do we care?" Dusty retorted. "You keep him busy in Santley's room, captain. Give us ten minutes. By the Lord, Alan and I will melt in an' get that box open—"

GRANT and Third Officer Blaine went together. They met the steward, Franks, in the corridor; whispered to him. The three of them stopped at Grof's door. In a moment the Martian came out, fully dressed. Alan and Dusty, on the deck at the corridor doorway, saw Grof

stoop and casually lock his door. The master-lock was private to the passenger. No one else on board could open it. The Martian made no comment. The captain, Blaine, and the steward seemed not to notice.

Alan and Dusty saw the group move across the dim central salon which now at midnight of the ship's routine was unoccupied. They paused and knocked at Santley's door. Then it opened.

Santley admitted them, and closed it upon them.

"Now," murmured Alan.

With weapons hooked to their belts, he and Dusty moved noiselessly along the dim corridor. Grof's door panel was in the corridor a few feet from the salon entrance. They stood before it, eying Santley's door across the salon.

"If it should open," Alan whispered.

"It won't. Grant will keep them busy."

"If it should, you stand in front of me—hide what I'm doing. Give me your heat-ray. It spreads better."

With widened, spreading ray, Alan bent and applied the electronic torch. The heavy torgite casing of the master-lock glowed red, then luminous blue-green.

Dusty whispered, "No noise! The damned grillework in this room and Santley's—only twenty feet across that salon—"

"Correct! Getting it—give me that insulator cup—quick! Grab an end of it!"

The torgite metal was molten now. It began flowing, dripping. Alan and Dusty held the flaps of the cup to catch the metal-drip so that it would not fall, splash and hiss on the floor grid. A moment; then the fused lock fell outward and into the cup. There was only a faint thump, and the heat and acrid fumes rising chokingly into Alan's face.

"Got it! Put it down anywhere! Here, take your cylinder. The door's loose—"

Under Alan's shoving shoulder the heavy metal door panel yielded and moved inward. There was a rasping click as the broken lock parted from the metal casement. Alan and Dusty stood tense. But the sound evidently had not carried into Santley's room. The vessel's interior was vibrationless, but always filled with the blended electrical murmurs of its pressure-equalizers and air-distributors. Over the murmur now the voices in Santley's room were dimly audible.

"All correct," Dusty whispered. "Shove again. In we go."

THE thick door panel swung smoothly, and now silently inward. The dim interior of Grof's cabin was disclosed. In the low dome-ceiling the indirect Morrell tube-lighting shed a soft blue-white sheen downward. The single window giving to the side deck had its heavy metal shutters closed and master-locked. There was Grof's draped bedstead; a table; and chairs. An oval doorway led into a tiny bath-recess.

The second of the cabin's lower bedsteads was folded back. On the floor there, lay the black metal box of the Martian's invention.

Alan whispered, "Close that door."

They swiftly searched the room; gazed under the bedstead; into the robe-cubby where Grof's garments were hanging; and into the bathroom. No one here.

Together, with pounding hearts, they knelt at the box. It was some six and a half feet long, three feet wide, and

equally as deep. Handles were along its sides; a handle at one end, but none at the other. The casing seemed of burnished torgite. Upon the top face the row of little turrets bulged up.

"How you suppose we get the infernal thing open?" Dusty whispered.

Then Alan's small hand-light disclosed a transverse ridge across the top—perhaps a third of the way from one end.

"A hinge," he murmured. "Feel it? Here—run your fingers along here."

It seemed the ridged-line of an inner hinge, which would swing a third of the top upward. Alan's fingers fumbled for some hidden lever or button. There seemed none.

"Got to hurry," Dusty was murmuring. "Let's apply heat. I can melt through—a narrow line across the hinge. Won't take more than a—" He stopped. He added, "God of the Stars, Alan—listen!"

And Alan heard it now. From inside this coffin-like thing a faint humming was audible! The mechanism inside was working! Had they overlooked the sound at first? Or had their fumbling fingers touched off some fuse? Fuse! Was this some diabolical bomb? Would it explode now and blow the ship into fragments?

Dusty was gasping something like that. Did they dare apply a heat-torch? Did they d a r e to open the accursed thing at all?

With his ear applied to the cool torgite of the top, Alan heard the inner sounds plainly. A faint electrical humming—and a blended murmur of mechanical movement.

Alan whispered, "I don't know what—" He had straightened; and still stooping, he gripped the end handle to steady himself. The handle fell off and thumped on the floor.

"Gods!" Dusty gasped. "Too much noise!"

They both leaped erect, listening. Above them was the foot-wide lattice grillework opening to the salon. But there was no alarm.

"Correct," Dusty added. "But don't break anything else. Look here—we're taking too long. Let's melt into it—take a chance."

But Alan stood puzzled. The broken handle lay on the floor. But it did not seem broken. Its two knobbed ends had pulled out of the box casing. Why was there a handle at one end and none at the other?

ALAN looked for the holes out of which he had pulled the handle. He could not see them. But his groping fingers felt the ridges of the disks which from inside now filled the holes. He pressed them; they yielded a little as though held by spring tension.

He murmured to Dusty, "This handle—like a key—"

He shoved the handle in place. Nothing happened. Perhaps the box should stand on end? How heavy was it? Alan gripped the handle and lifted. The box did not move, but the handle bent upward.

And a lid flew open. Alan and Dusty stared, gasping. The head, face and chest of a man were revealed—a man lying on his back. Familiar but pallid face. Santley! Not a dead man. This man was alive; his eyes were open, staring upward with astonishment at Alan and Dusty. His hands were clamped to his sides. The interior mechanisms showed as tiny air renewers and circulators. The sound from them had penetrated the box casing; but the inner side of the now lifted lid showed where, when it was closed, an air-cup-breather would come down and

clamp the prisoner's face, its absorbers silencing any outcry he might make.

Santley! But not the man who now was talking with the captain in the room across the salon. This was his duplicate, in every outward aspect the same man, save that this one was weak and harassed; astonished at seeing, not his captor Grof, but two of the ship's young officers. Astonishment; then comprehension and a rush of hope.

He gasped weakly, "Who are you? Come to—s a v e me? That—Martian—" His gaze went fearfully to the room door.

They bent over him, cautioning him against noise. Unloosening the clamps on his arms and legs. The thing, within a minute of their swift whispered exchanges, was all clear now. This was the real banker. The other was his former professionally trained pseudo. Like all rich and prominent men, Santley had needed an understudy, a man so resembling himself, physically and with trained aped mannerisms, that for routine public appearances, necessary but unimportant public and social functions, the pseudo could appear and the flattered public be no wiser.

Some years ago Peters had applied for the position. With altered hair-cut, dieting, and the cultivation of voice-manner, he had presented himself as the banker's duplicate. Santley had trained and tested him; had given him the position; and for several years Peters filled it secretly and well. An intelligent, well-educated fellow, of discretion and diplomacy so that never once did he make a mis-action of which Santley might disapprove. Then Santley caught him in an act of theft. And it seemed, a plot for larger dishonesty. Peters was discharged. He went to London, changing his aspect so that no longer did he particularly resemble the banker. And evidently, from the recent police helio, he had continued his criminal activities.

And now, Peters's latest and undoubtedly most ambitious criminal venture! With this Martian, Set Grof, to help him, again Peters had assumed—illicitly this time—the rôle of Santley. The banker had never employed another pseudo. Peters, from all those years in Santley's employ, was well equipped to impersonate him!

A WEEK ago Peters and Grof had abducted the banker; and Peters had taken his place for this previously announced Martian trip. With Santley a prisoner, forced to master-sign whatever documents they thrust upon him, within a year, without arousing public suspicion, they would have possessed themselves of the bulk of the banker's fortune. Then Santley would have "died," been buried with all pomp and ceremony, and no one ever the wiser.

But they realized they could not fool Mrs. Santley, who knew her husband so well. And so they bribed her physician to help them murder her. Valdora had only recently joined the family. Her death, simultaneously with Mrs. Santley, would have been too suspicious. Peters was convinced that he could fool her—and having her travel with him seemed an asset of verisimilitude to his masquerade.

Strange, daring plot! And probably, save for the premonitions of the Venus girl, it would have succeeded.

"Lift him!" Dusty was saying. "Get him out!"

Alan was stooping. "Are you too weak to stand? Easy—don't twist—we'll get you out, onto the bed there."

They had him head and shoulders out of the coffin-like box. But they

miscalculated his strength. He suddenly slumped, and slid between Dusty's arms backward upon the box-top. His weight caught the upstanding open lid, bent it backward and its hinge broke with a crack. In the silence it was loud as the shot of an explosive bullet-projector.

And the confused banker cried aloud, a startled exclamation.

"Quiet!" Alan cautioned.

But it was too late. Across the salon, in the other room, the crack had startled them all into listening. And Peters and Grof heard and recognized their prisoner's voice. Knew that they were discovered.

Alan and Dusty had no more than time to lay Santley hastily on the rug of the floor-grid when the outer silence was broken by a wild commotion. A man's oath; a grim command from Captain Grant; the sound of a scuffle; hiss of a flash gun; another flash; and a bullet-shot. A scream. The thud of some one falling. It was all in the other cabin; then outside in the salon corridor in time to see the door of Santley's cabin burst open and the wild figure of the pseudo Peters plunge out. He turned sternward in the other corridor, running with his dressing-gown tails flying. Alan's weapon leveled, but he lowered it as Captain Grant and Blaine burst out and blocked his range. Blaine fired after the fugitives, but his bolt sizzled against the corridor side. Peters vanished to the Earth-lit stern deck triangle.

The whole interior of the *Stardust* was in commotion now. Cabin doors were opening along the corridor; passengers called frightened questions; the duty men were running and shouting on the side decks.

In the banker's cabin room Grof lay dead, drilled by a flash from the captain. The steward, Franks, lay groaning, wounded, on the floor.

Grant shouted, "He's sternward. Cut him off, one each side. Watch out."

THE desperate, murderous Peters, with no chance now, quite evidently was determined to sell his life as dearly as possible. Two hissing bolts sounded from the stern. The captain roared orders to the passengers to retreat to the safety of their rooms. The corridors and salon were full of acrid choking smoke. Up the narrow central staircurve from below off-duty men of the crew came running.

In the salon Alan had run to one side deck, and Dusty to the other. A man passenger crouching on the deck shouted at Alan, "He went above. Up the stern ladder—saw him running."

Alan leaped for the side ladder. The figure of Peters ducked behind the helio turret. A bullet from there came whistling past Alan's head and flattened against the glassite dome-wall. Then Peters ran again, wildly sending flash-bolts around him.

Alan had ducked. Then he jumped to the superstructure roof, ran for the shelter of the helio turret; and from its catwalk fired toward where Peters was lunging for the control turret. Only the third officer was in it. He fired from its rear window; but an instant before, one of Peters's aimless bolts caught him.

He slumped to the window-ledge, his gold-braided figure dangling half in and half out. And through the turret door oval Peters plunged in. Alan had time now to adjust his curve-ray gun. He aimed its crescent bolt out toward the dome side. The curve might have carried it into the control turret side window; but instead, it sizzled harmlessly on the turret wall.

There was a sudden lull, with only Captain Grant's voice from down on the side deck, roaring, "Under cover, everybody! Don't want anybody else killed! Keep off!"

And from the control turret Peters's wild laugh. "Come on an' get me! You can't get me! Come on, you damned star-grabbers—you can't stop me—we're all together—"

From the helio turret Alan could not see Peters's crouching figure. Then he was suddenly aware that outside the dome the blazing firmament was swaying; swinging; a pendulum swing, lengthening, until all within a minute, in the midst of the stricken silence of the *Stardust*, the heavens rolled and lurched; the giant Moon-disk swung up and over, and down again. Peters had pulled recklessly at all the vessel's controls. Again his laugh sounded, "Come an' get me! All together!"

Alan had leaped to the helio catwalk; he clung; the swaying firmament was dizzying. At the peak of the bow he saw Dusty and the lookout-duty man; Dusty saying something; the duty man nodding and plunging down the hooded incline into the hull rooms.

A flash from Peters drove Alan back into the helio room. The firmament was momentarily swinging faster as the *Stardust* rolled. They were falling free now, falling for the Moon.

Then suddenly all the weight of Alan's body was gone! He had made a sudden movement and it flung him like a balloon, bounding up to the helio turret ceiling. And the blow of his shoulder knocked him down again.

Dusty's idea! The lookout-duty man had dashed to the hull local-gravity-room. He had cut the gravity from the superstructure roof, thus involving the helio and control turrets.

But Peters wrenched away. They were in mid-air, inside the turret. Whirling, weightless, so that neither could aim the weapons they were clutching. Then Peters's outflung hand caught the front window casement. He pulled himself through and kicked against the turret outer wall. His body sailed upward and out beyond the forward end of the superstructure roof. The gravity of the front deck caught him. Like a plummet, Peters fell head downward. His skull crashed on the metal grid of the deck. He lay dead.

In the turret, Alan for half an hour worked at the control levers until at last he had the *Stardust* steadied; and her course again set for Mars.

THE END

Remember the Maine

By HERBERT L. McNARY

A Down East boxer tries for an unexpected comeback in riotous Havana

These Cubans were yelling for blood

THE last place, but perhaps the most appropriate, I would expect to encounter the "Portland Fancy" was where the Maine Memorial penciled its shadow across Havana's teeming Malecon. The combination of Al Parker's clever footwork and the location of his home, somewhere near Portland, Maine, had suggested the name of the Portland Fancy as a natural; but I had been the first newspaper man to coin the phrase, and I felt a pardonable pride in its popular adoption.

That had been in the days when Al Parker had been a serious threat in both the middleweight and welterweight classes. His misfortune in being between the two classes had caused his undoing. Billy Record had forced Parker to make the welter limit, and had

come in overweight himself; and the cruel beating which Parker had received in that bout had washed up his ring career. By the way, Record, who is the present middleweight title holder, was here in Havana for a much ballyhooed bout with the Spanish champion.

My paper, the *Sentinel*, had sent me down to cover the Bruins. To the great delight of myself and my fellow scribes, they had elected to do their spring training in picturesque Havana. I had stolen away from Almendares Park, this Sunday afternoon, to watch the Carnival's noisy, colorful, joyous procession serpentine its way through serried ranks of equally noisy, colorful and joyous *señors*, *señoras* and *señoritas*, all against the beautiful background of the sun-polished blue Caribbean. I was standing knee-deep in confetti, shoulder-deep in Cubans, and ear-deep in Spanish lingo, not hearing a word of English, when—

"Hello, Mr. Conway! Do you remember me—Al Parker? You used to call me the Portland Fancy."

"Oh, sure! I remember you."

I said it as though he had been in my thoughts all the time. Only a few years had passed since he had been newspaper copy, but there is no oblivion as sudden and as complete as that provided by the sporting world. He looked heavier than when he was in the leather-slapping industry, and his tropical tan indicated years in this climate. He had escaped with no facial souvenirs of the ring game, but the seedy appearance of his clothes forewarned me of a touch. Even down here, I couldn't escape the derelicts.

Oh well, I owed something to the Portland Fancy, and if you can't help your own in a foreign country . . .

"What are you doing down here?" I asked banally.

I slipped my hand into my pocket, and a Chinese peanut vendor sidled over.

"I come down on a boat, and I sort of stayed here. I had a job at the racetrack a year ago. Sometimes I acted as guide. I know the lingo pretty well now. I used to pick up some change as a boxin' instructor—"

"All in the past tense.—Need some dough?"

"Thanks. I got a friend helpin' me out—a friend from home."

THE stream of carnival cars bogged down in the confetti, momentarily. A car crammed with playful velvet-eyed *señoritas* garbed as pirates halted before us. I perked up, supposing I was the object of their attention and the target for their confetti. After all, considering the way we were dressed— But it was Al Parker who had to duck, and it was he who grinned back at them good-naturedly. They chirped a shrill garble of bird-like Spanish, and Parker answered them. Then the procession moved on.

"Know them?"

"No. You could live here all your life and never get a look from that class, except at carnival time."

I didn't feel complimented, therefore, that he and not I had been the object of attention.

Parker became serious again. The gray eyes had a homesick look in them as they stared over the blue waters, in the general direction of where the Maine had gone down.

"I suppose you know that Billy Record is in Havana now?" I said.

The gray eyes flickered.

"That's what I wanted to see you about, Mr. Conway. I thought you might fix it up with him to give me a job as sparring partner."

That was the fight game for you! Billy Record was champion largely through the boost he got in beating Al Parker; and now, in gay Havana, that same Parker was practically panhandling the man whose title he might have worn—begging for ham and egg money. Or was it *arroz con pollo?*

"I haven't a good opinion of Record, and he knows it. However, he'll probably need sparring partners, from what these Cuban sport writers tell me about Martinez."

"Don't fool yourself! It's a set-up for Record. I knew all about Martinez before he went to the States for a build-up. These Cubans are all set to bet their shirts on Martinez, and it'll be a clean-up for Record."

"One of those things?"

"Not exactly. Only Martinez hasn't got a chance. Record is as sure of him as he is of the first dollar he ever made. But he'll need to make some kind of a training show, or have the bout look tough. I ought to be worth something to him as a sparring partner."

I gave Parker my promise to do what I could for him, although I detested being a party to anything that would in any way aid Record in his mercenary plans.

The last auto in the carnival procession passed soon after, and I waded away through drifts of confetti in the general direction of the Prado.

A carnival night was before me. Nevertheless I made it a point to drop in at the Plaza and look for Record. Instead, I got his manager, Jakey Hymans. The owlish-eyed, flashily dressed Hymans was making the most of his opportunity to smoke panatelas, duty free.

He listened to my story.

"You'll have to see Record," he informed me curtly.

"You're his manager."

"Yeah?—When it comes to spendin' dough for expenses, he don't need a manager. What he wants is a pickpocket."

"Any idea where I can find him?"

"Yeah.—I got a swell idea. Try the Moulin Rouge. He's dippy on a dame up there. He'll never learn!"

I left, with the notion that Billy and his manager had been having words.

THE Moulin Rouge is a night club located over a garage; but at this time it had about the best floor show in Havana. I arrived about ten o'clock, which is early for Havana, where life begins after midnight. I asked the *mozo* who took my order if Billy Record had shown up, and was informed that he usually put in his appearance about this time.

A few minutes later, a girl drifted over to my table. These night clubs have their hostesses who are willing to sit down with a lone American and help him spend his money. And it didn't mean anything that this girl happened to have blue eyes and amber hair instead of the velvet eyes and dark tresses of the usual *señorita.*

"The waiter tells me you're looking for Billy Record," she began. That kind of opened my eyes.

"American?"

"Yes," she answered. "Floor show. I'm not much, but hoofers can't be choosers. It would be just my luck that Record should come down here."

She sat down, refusing a drink and even a cigarette, which again caused me to revamp my impression of her. The hair seemed natural; the skin was soft, the eyes weren't hard.

"You're the *Sentinel* man here, with the baseball team, aren't you?"

"Yes.—Sam Conway."

"Dolores Dana is mine, and it's a natural." She looked at me expectantly, and then her lips parted in a slow smile. "It didn't register. And that shows how quickly newspaper people forget. I wish it was the same back home."

"Dolores Dana?—It seems to me—"

"I'm the actress who became involved with Record, about a year ago."

I remembered then. The usual scandal that makes the front pages for a few days and then fades, leaving the impression that a settlement has been made out of court.

"The papers never got my side of the story," she said. "Record hounded me, and because I wouldn't have anything to do with him, he set his wife on me. Usually, a little publicity like that doesn't hurt a show girl; but this was too raw. Record was leaving his wife and two kids starving, and the papers made out that I was the reason. He was lavishing his money on me, according to them.—Record lavishing—what a laugh! That's the true story; and if you ever get a weak moment, I wish you'd print it. Because a lot of my people back home in Maine read the *Sentinel*, and it might stop Record from trying to queer me down here."

She started to go, but I laid a hand on her wrist.

"That sob-sister stuff is out of my line. But there may be a tie-in. I met some one else from Maine who has some association with Record. Ever hear of Al Parker?"

She studied me. "Sure. I know him. I've helped him a bit."

"So you're the friend?"

"Yes.—But forget my story, if it means dragging in Al. He's had enough tough cracks." A line puckered her brow. "I ran into him, down here, and I've been thinking about him a lot. Maybe you can help me to understand him. He wants to go home to Maine; wants to buy a farm and all that. But the only way he hopes to do it is by winning on the Cuban lottery. We expected Al to go places. He was alert, bright, ambitious. And now—well, you've seen him."

"The fight has been burnt out of him."

I explained to her his misfortune of being between classes, but I thought it best to omit that it was the cruel Record bout that had left Parker a blown-out fuse.

"But hasn't he had chance to recuperate?"

I shook my head. "They never come back—practically never."

"Excuse me," she said quickly. "I have to get ready for the show."

PUZZLED at her quick departure, I turned my head and saw Record emerging from the elevator. With the stiffness of armor plate, a tuxedo encased his bulging muscles. His black-shantied eyes darted from table to table as he sought homage. A few tourists pointed him out.

He stopped short as he saw Dolores leaving, and he traced her back to my table. He approached, scowling.

"Just the man I want to see," I declared, beating him to the punch. "I've got a swell publicity break for you. Al Parker, the guy you fought once, is in Havana. You can sign him on as a sparring partner?"

"Yeah?" he almost snarled. "She asked yuh t' make that proposition."

"I ran into Parker before I ever knew she existed. Hymans sent me here, when I went to the Plaza for you. Parker and Miss Dana just happen to come from Maine, that's all."

"Yeah. You'd think that jerk state was the only place in America, as far as these Cubans are concerned."

"It has its historical significance. Remember the Maine?"

"The only Maine I'm interested in is main bouts and main dinin' rooms.—What does Parker want to be a sparrin' partner for?"

"For the money. He isn't flush."

"What am I supposed to be—a Santy Claus for ev'ry rum-dum palooka what ever pulled on a glove?"

I didn't answer his question, and he apparently sought no answer. Those piggish eyes, gleaming every little while, were switchboard lights indicating flickering ideas. He seemed to be weighing the prospect of getting Parker in the ring with him against the necessity of having to pay him and thus help him. Meanness conquered. Or perhaps he recalled that Parker had been clever, and might not be so easy to beat up in training, even at this late date.

"Nothin' doin'," he said. "I ain't shellin' out no dough to any friend of Dolores."

I didn't argue with him. I couldn't relish Al Parker submitting his burnt-out shell to a vengeful slugger for blood money. Whatever else might be said about Record, there was no denying his ability to hurt. The fact that he wasn't in the pink would mean nothing. Billy Record was one of those few exceptions of the game who apparently can violate all the rules of conditioning without penalty.

Some fellow scribes dropped in, and our party outlasted Record's. Dolores Dana called me aside as I was leaving.

"What did he say?" she asked, her blue eyes anxious.

"No go. Record won't give him a job."

"Oh, it's because of me. And Al needs the money badly."

"He'd earn every cent of it, with Record," I said. "I think I have a better proposition. I stand in with a Cuban sports writer. Maybe we can get Al a job with Martinez."

"Oh, if you only could. Even if it was only enough to get Al home, before he goes to pieces altogether here."

RAOUL CORTEZ of *El Mundo* was the Cuban sports writer I had in mind. I sold him the idea that having a former opponent of Record's as sparring partner was good publicity for Martinez, and Raoul put it over. At twenty-five bucks a week. Pin money—but you can make it go a long way in Havana, if you know the back street *fondas* as Al Parker did.

Having got Al the job, I pigeonholed the incident. The *Sentinel* had sent me down to cover the Bruins, but I had a cable from the home office telling me to report the Record-Martinez bout when it came off. It was billed as a title scrap. Then Raoul buttonholed me in the Inglaterra one evening.

"Thees Al Parker, he was much fighter in the States?"

"He looked good for awhile. One of those bright lights that burn out quickly. In between classes."

"He is real middleweight now?"

"Yeah. He's put on a little flesh.—Have a cocktail?"

"*Gracias.*—I have watch thees Parker. He is much good, eef he let heemself go, I think."

"I must take a peek at him.—I'll have a *daiquiri.* What's yours, Raoul?"

After Raoul had commented several times on Parker with mingled wonderment and admiration, I passed up the ball park one afternoon and dropped

around to the arena on Monserrate, where Martinez worked out. In a board-fenced wooden structure reminiscent of cycledromes back home, I crowded in with a group of noisy Cubans. If these fans could become so excited at a mere training session, I wondered what the championship affair would be like. I hadn't realized that the Cubans had taken the approaching title go so seriously; and realizing the Cuban's penchant for betting, I felt like an accessory before the fact in letting Record pull off this sure thing without opening my trap. Still, who would have listened to me? I had dropped a few hints to Raoul, but he excitedly insisted that Martinez would win. Martinez was as fast as lightning, Martinez had piled up a string of knockouts, Martinez this and Martinez that.—Okay, I was seeing for myself to-day.

As I took my seat, Martinez was walloping a big Negro around the ring, to the delectation of the effervescent Cuban spectators. The round was too one-sided for me to form an opinion. I saw in the Spaniard a lithe, swarthy scrapper with long arms and limbs. He had a bounding, kangaroo style, but he didn't strike me as a solid hitter.

The round ended, and the Negro climbed out. Martinez remained in the ring, chatting with friends outside the ropes.

He removed his helmet, and then put it on again. The sun was hot and the seats were blistering.

Parker came through the ropes, and immediately I sensed a buzz of interest and anticipation run through the crowd. Parker's appearance made me catch my breath in surprise. Stripped of his seedy clothes, he revealed hard flesh, well browned.

Martinez looked at Parker and said something in Spanish to those fans near his corner. He got a laugh, and I saw Parker's jaw harden. Before I could gather a translation of Martinez's gibe, the action began. It was action, too. I needed no knowledge of Spanish to tell me that no love was lost between Martinez and Parker. Perhaps because Parker was a compatriot of Record's, Martinez wanted to show him up before the excitable Cuban fans.

He bounded across the ring in a slashing attack, but Parker weaved in and out of the flying gloves with the agility of a Griffo. The Portland Fancy had lost little of his cleverness, if any.

The fight was only a few days away, and I wondered at the chances Martinez took. The gloves which the men wore were lighter than the usual training pillows. Martinez's manager wasn't showing much judgment in letting the bout get hot.

Baby, it sizzled! Even under that scorching sun it had the fans frying. Martinez lashed out like a threshing machine, and in the absence of a real referee slapped, backhanded, gouged and committed fouls with impunity. Galled by his inability to break through Parker's defense, the Latin seemed to be trying to inflame Parker into a slugging match.

But the boy from Maine knew better. He never was much of a hitter, I recalled.

THE round ended after the longest three minutes I ever sat through; minutes crammed with action, too. Somebody's clock was dippy, for the men barely sat down in their corners before a bell sounded, and out came the bounding Spaniard again. Once more, he lashed out with both fists, but found his punches picked out

of the air. The Cubans began to ride their pride.

All the time, Martinez had been keeping up a running fire of chatter. Insults, I was sure. And now suddenly Parker stepped back. He said something to Martinez. Martinez said something back. All round me Cubans contributed conversation. I'd have given a sawbuck to get a translation.

Abruptly, in the midst of the word battle, Martinez swung from the heel! The glove smacked Parker on the chin, and the boy from Maine took a nose dive!

Parker lay on the canvas, shaking a Down East fog out of his optics. Dancing about him, Martinez continued his insults. Parker leaped up from the floor. Gone was the defensive posture. His head slipped forward, his body assumed a crouch. He advanced on Martinez with left partly extended and right drawn back; and the murderous look in his eye seemed to hypnotize the Latin.

Parker sprang. His rush carried Martinez to the ropes. Rights and lefts rattled off the Spaniard, and the Cuban fans went wild. Parker stepped back, and the reeling Latin came off the ropes. I saw Parker let go, and his right fist smacked flush to the button!

Martinez crashed like a felled ox. Perhaps the ring covering was thin. I never thought to investigate that angle until it was too late; but I knew the moment the Spaniard hit the floor that this was no ordinary knockout.

Some one had reached the manager in a neighboring *bodega*. Wild-eyed, he pulled his rounded tummy through the ropes and stood alternating slapping his hands to his forehead and raising his hands to heaven. The arena had turned into a madhouse, and I thought it would be a good idea to get Parker out of there before international complications set in.

I reached him and hustled him toward the exit without bothering about clothes or even pausing to remove his gloves.

"They're yellin' he's dead," exclaimed Parker, his eyes wide with bewilderment. "I didn't kill him, did I?"

"No. But let's get out of here before there *is* a murder."

We had to push our way through a crowd of shouting, gesticulating Cubans; and maybe it was just as well that I didn't know what they were saying. Out on Monserrate I hailed a *fortinga* and hurled Parker into it a step ahead of the trailing Cubans. Maybe they weren't exactly pursuing us, but I didn't pause to clear up that point. I gave the driver the name of my temporary hotel.

"And now tell me what happened?" I demanded of Parker.

"I lost my head. He's been insultin' me ever since he hired me—but twenty-five bucks is twenty-five bucks. To-day he kept calling me '*pina!*' That's pineapple. I couldn't see the connection. Then he said something about pine soap and pine tree, and I got it. He was kiddin' me about Maine. That's one thing I won't stand for. I told him, so—"

"Yeah, I saw the argument."

"He plugs me. Then he tells me he sunk me like the Spaniards sunk the Maine. I guess I lost my head."

"And broke his."

I called the turn. After I got Al home to his quarters, I beat it back to the arena and got the dope officially from a doctor. Then I lit out for the telegraph office with a scoop.

MARTINEZ JAW BROKEN BY BOY FROM MAINE IN TRAINING GRUDGE FIGHT STOP AL PARKER SPOILS RECORD-MARTINEZ TITLE GO IN HAVANA.

That was the flash I sent to the *Sentinel*—and when I went looking for Parker he had vanished. He'd left no forwarding address—not even a clue.

I'M not a detective, especially in a foreign city where I can't spill the lingo. I was just lucky, that's all. The only reason I hunted up Dolores Dana was to see if she had any news of Parker. All Havana was looking for him now, and I was honestly afraid that the kid would get in trouble. Here was a big build-up for a title show pushed off Morro Castle to the sharks.

Well, after twisting around those narrow streets until I had lost all sense of direction, my *fortinga* pulled up in front of what proved to be a boarding house, or its equivalent. As I climbed the four flights, I had a creepy feeling that someone might slip out of a door and tap me on the dome. One door partly opened to my knock, and then swung wide.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Conway."

Dolores Dana stepped aside.

"All right, Al, it's only Mr. Conway," she said.

"You here?" I gasped as Al Parker came out of a curtained bedroom.

"I'm not staying here," he said, with a look at Dolores. "I'm not going to get her into trouble."

"You're breaking Martinez's jaw was an accident," I said.

He laughed.

"Yeah? When Record's gang get through with the story, they'll have me framed. They'll say I wore brass knuckles."

"And Al hasn't any standing here," insisted Dolores. "They'll railroad him to a Cuban jail. You've got to help him."

"Me? How?"

"If you'll back me up through your paper," said Al, "they can't frame me. You saw me take my gloves off. You can prove I didn't have brass knuckles. That's what she means."

"No, it isn't," said Dolores, those Caribbean-blue eyes wide with resolution. "You don't know Record as well as I do. There's only one way to stop him. You've hit him in the pocket book. Give him his money."

"Give him his money?" gasped Al. "How can I?"

"By taking Martinez's place."

Well, that knocked me and Al for a double kayo. Al and I tried to explain that his victory over Martinez was a fluke; and I tried to show her that Al was a washed-out pug while Record was a champion and would murder Al in a bout, even if he would listen to the proposition. But we couldn't shake her. After all, what do girls know about fighting?

Finally, I agreed to go to Record with the proposition.

Record nearly hit the ceiling when I got him and Hymans in their hotel room and made the suggestion—and in Havana they have high ceilings. Nothing short of the garotte for Parker would satisfy Record. But Hymans puffed on his panatela.

"Maybe it's an idea. I ain't sayin' it is, y' understand.—But maybe."

Hymans knew how to argue with Record. Figures with dollar signs in front of them—red ink and black ink.

"All right." Record's eyes gleamed like a snake's. "But I ain't sayin' how long I'll carry him."

THEY don't conduct bull fights in Havana, but probably the appeal is still in the Latin blood, and cock mains are still popular. I was trying to fathom the psychology of the interest in this new lineup of Record versus

Parker. At home, the bout would never have gotten past a commission, and it would have been panned in advance by every scribe, including myself.—A bout between a title holder and a washed-up scrapper!

But the bulls don't last so long in the arena, and neither do the cocks, judging from the mains I saw; so although it was generally accepted that the coming bout would be one-sided and would not go more than a round or two, that didn't kill the advance sale at all. Martinez was to be avenged for the dastardly assault that had been perpetrated by Al Parker. My friend Raoul told me it was very hard to convince the public that Parker had not worn brass knuckles or had not used the old dodge of soaking taped fists in plaster of Paris.

Two days before the bout, Dolores Dana sent for me.

"I want Al to beat Record," she said.

"I know you do," I said a bit harshly, "and for that reason I advise you not to go to the bout. I'm going to tell Al not to take a beating. The last time he fought Record he refused to quit, and it nearly killed him. This time—well, we can leave out the 'nearly.'"

"But Al is in better physical shape now than when he fought Record before. Al told me he was under weight—"

"On the outside, he looks fine," I said. "I saw him flatten Martinez, and in his best days Al never had a sock like that—*but* it's the insides that count. Every time Record lays a glove on him, Al will suffer a psychological reaction, in addition to the blow, a memory of that other fight."

"But maybe that can be cured—"

"Please!—The fight game is my business, just as the show game is yours. Be a good friend to Al, and tell him to take the count before he gets killed. He'll make enough to go back to Maine, with something left over. That's a better break than he expected."

On one of the occasions when I had encountered Dolores, Raoul Cortez had been with me. I had made introductions, of course, but it surprised me later in the afternoon to drop into Sloppy Joe's and find Raoul and Dolores on a pair of stools. I joined them, and their conversation stopped, to continue again in intermittent Spanish.

I kicked myself for not knowing the lingo, and wondered how Dolores had picked up a working knowledge so quickly; but I soon forgot the incident—only to think of it later.

THE morning of the scheduled bout, I went around to call on Al Parker. I felt like a surviving friend, visiting a condemned man in his death cell just before the execution. Parker felt about it that way, too, and had from the moment the match had been made. The worst of it was, I hadn't been able to convince him that under the circumstances there was nothing wrong in his folding up early. No one would be cheated, for everyone expected that to happen. But Parker had the real fighter's sense of ethics, or instinct, or plain stupidity, in desiring to carry on and stay on his feet until the last gong. Now, in the proximity of the death hour, I hoped to be convincing.

But instead of the washed-out, foredoomed, disheartened Al Parker, I found a wild man. Parker had had a *café con leche* sent up along with his morning paper; but the *café con leche* had grown cold, and Al was pacing the floor of his room. He turned on me.

"Did you see this, Mr. Conway?—Here, read this!" He thrust a copy of *El Mundo* at me, opened at the sporting page.

"Read it?" I said angrily. "How the hell can I? It's Spanish."

He grabbed the paper away from me and started to read it; but he was so mad that he choked over the translation. The writer of the article had had an interview with Record, and in the interview he had elicited Billy's opinions about the sinking of the Maine. Well, what Record had said about the sinking of the Maine, and of the Spanish War in general, was enough to break off diplomatic relations. I couldn't believe that even Record—

"Let's see that paper," I said suddenly.

I took it. The article was printed under the name of Raoul Cortez.

My mind suddenly went back to the previous afternoon in Sloppy Joe's—Dolores and Raoul together. It was a shame. Dolores meant all right; but there wasn't a chance now for me to convince Parker to fold up in the second or third round.

I've seen too many punch-drunk derelicts in my life; boys who stood in there taking it, covered with gore, grinning through bloodied lips while the fans howled their appreciation for courage.—Courage? Thank God for the referees with courage enough to stop such spectacles.

Maybe I could reach the referee to-night—

A GOOD crowd of tourists and Cubans filled the Fronton that night. They had come to see an exhibition and not a fight; and the Cubans seemed satisfied to have an opportunity to wager on how many rounds the fight would go. The preliminaries provided further opportunity for betting. And do those Cubans bet! And are they noisy about it!

Every one seemed in a gala mood, except yours truly. I hadn't been able to reach the referee.

Al Parker came into the ring first. And what a booing and hissing he received. Wasn't he the man who had foully and deliberately broken the jaw of the Latin champion? The fans told him that, and I didn't need to know Spanish to understand their wild cries. Parker sat with head bowed.

Record came into the ring, and received a great tribute. The avenger! The man who would right the dastardly wrong done to Martinez!—What an injustice. This same Record, hands clasped above his head, had only meant to mulct these gullible Cubans.

Hymans made a point of examining Parker's taped hands minutely, and this act provoked another wild demonstration. An excited Cuban beside me, discovering that I was an *Americano*, tried to explain in shattered English, accompanied by gestures, how Parker had worn brass knuckles when he had flattened Martinez.—Yeah? And I had taken the gloves off Parker myself.—But what was the use?

Martinez made an appearance in civilians, jaw bandaged. And do the Cubans love a martyr! The weights were announced as Parker, one hundred and fifty-eight, and Record at one fifty-nine and a half. Fairly even on the surface, but—well, maybe Record would forget himself and provide a quick and merciful ending.

Record came out on the bell, as if to satisfy my wishes. But I forgot Record. Instead of going on the defensive, Parker met the champion with a charge of his own, and beat Record to the punch. Both hands shooting like pis-

tons, he drove the surprised Record to the ropes. And when Record rallied, Parker stood toe to toe with him.

Well, it couldn't last long. This was Record's game. But at least the boy from Maine was going down fighting.

What a round! A foolish, nonsensical, impossible round—and the audience received it in comparative silence. Vengeance was not being wreaked.

The round ended. In Record's corner, Hymans blubbered wildly, and windmilled his arms. Parker, stretched out on his stool, eased his diaphragm with deep breaths.

The bell!

Record came out with unusual caution, and the fans rode him. He kept in a shell, and Parker used up precious strength trying to blast away Record's powerful forearms. I could see Record's game. He was relying on superior strength, making Parker extend himself. Starting with the third, Record began to cut Parker to bits. No humane knockout here. Mauling, pushing, getting away with all kinds of illegal fighting, back-handing, elbowing, butting Parker's forehead to open gashes.

Al, not depending on the referee, did a fair job at protecting himself; but I could see that he was tiring.

In the sixth round, however, he seemed no worse than he had been in the third, and the champion was something of a jig-saw puzzle himself.

In the seventh, Record's smashes to the jaw had Parker hanging on, and some stiff-shirt tourists near me started to go, advertising their ability to foretell the end. But they sat down again when Parker turned the tide with a barrage of lefts and rights. He had Record covering up, on the bell, and Parker received his first real cheer as he went to his corner.

This was no one-sided slaughter, after all. It was a *fight!*

THE cheers got under Record's skin. He came out in the eighth to finish what should have ended long ago, according to all logic. Teeth bared in a wolfish snarl, he swept into Parker with both hands flying. Short, wicked punches ripped into the boy from Maine with pile-driver force. Parker danced away, weaved and blocked with both arms; but only a superman could have avoided that terrible barrage of leather-covered taped fists.

I saw Parker's knees buckle; saw his head roll from a wicked smash, high on the jaw; saw a left bury wrist-deep in his solar plexus and cause his eyes to pop as he doubled. I saw a wicked right uppercut straighten him up, another left sink into his midriff, and a right smash over the heart turn him green. Parker grabbed and held on.

Record wrestled him free, while the fans howled for the knockout. The champion set himself. He stepped forward. A rattlesnake left snapped out and threw him off balance. I saw Parker's right fist fly. It was the same blow that had cracked Martinez's jaw! Bleeding, wobbling, welted, from perspiration-drenched white tights to blood-flecked chin, the kid from Maine found a wallop.

The champion staggered under the blow. Al followed up with another right smash to the button. Record's knees caved. Another smash, and he toppled into the ropes, eyes glazing. The roar of the crowd, heralding a knockout for the champion, vanished abruptly and then swelled again in the startling pæan that greets the successor of a champion who is being dethroned —for it suddenly occurred to me that

Parker's weight had been announced as one fifty-eight!

Record's hands dropped, and the swaying Parker measured him and brought over another right. The champion slid to the canvas! Parker fell over him, pulled himself up on the ropes, and stumbled to a neutral corner. For several seconds, the stunned referee forgot to count. The frenzied Hymans was trying to climb into the ring, but a policeman pulled him back. Finally the referee started his count.

At eight, Record shook the fog out of his eyes and climbed to his feet. It had been a long count, and by rights Parker was champion. But the bout went on.

Curling up in his shell, Record faced Parker, turtled his head behind his gloves. Parker, himself almost out on his feet, lowered his guard for a moment, and in that moment Record swung desperately.

A clubbing blow caught Parker on the side of the head, and he sprawled on the canvas. He came up almost instantly, and ran into another right. Luck was against him. He toppled into a corner, fell under the ropes, banged his head on a post, lay still!

Out! I was sure of it. Robbed of a title, and of one of the most sensational upsets in ring history. The referee took up the count perfunctorily.

The referee had reached seven. Parker lifted a gloved hand and grasped a strand of the rope. At nine, with a final effort he lifted to his feet and crawled through the ropes.

Record leaped for him like a wildcat, but Parker slid aside, and Record crashed into the ropes. Snarling, he whirled and threw a haymaker at Parker. The kid from Maine wobbled inside the blow, and clinched. Record hurled him into the ropes.

Parker hung on the ropes, out on his feet, hands hanging like lead weights at his sides, everything gone but that fighting instinct.

Record measured him. A lethal fist swished through the air. Parker's head wobbled aside from the blow. I couldn't keep track of how many times Parker evaded the punches.

Once again Record set himself, and let go.

This time, Parker ducked under the blow. He came up with a left uppercut that snapped Record's jaw back. Parker, strength flooding his veins again, let go a right-hand punch which landed and stung. Record reeled.

Parker was on top of him. Right and left cracked off Record's jaw. Another crashing right-hand smash reeled him into the ropes. Record pitched forward, completely out—a champion dethroned!

SUDDENLY I saw a flash of white go past me. Dolores Dana ran to the ring outside the corner where Al Parker lay prostrate.

"Al," I could hear her sob. "Al! I'm calling you. Al—remember the Maine. Al—remember the *Maine!*"

I saw Parker stir. But just then one of those military looking Havana policemen forced Dolores away.

THE Bruins were playing the Ramblers, with the two teams tied for first place. You can imagine the crowd that wanted to get into the Sunday double-header—and I am asked for two passes. But then, you've got to make exceptions for a middleweight champion and his wife, when they have come all the way down from Maine.

THE END

East River

By BORDEN CHASE and EDWARD DOHERTY

Jumbo drove to Mulroy's head, making him stagger

Rugged men of courage battle the elements—and each other—below the river-bed

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

THE courageous men working in the hazardous construction of under-river tunnels, are called "sand hogs," and meet with many dangers while working on the East River (New York) project. Among these men is the massive "Heading Boss," Jumbo, and his friend, handsome Shocker Jack Duggan, "Iron Boss." Both are in love with the young dancer and singer, Lee Murray, an out-of-town girl who gets her first job at Amy's Hog Hole, a meeting place of the sand hogs. Lee and Amy—since they are both attracted to Shocker—are closely interested in the tunnel activities. Hardly a day passes that they do not go to the water front to watch the "boil," which is the indication on the river surface of the progress of the work below.

One evening Shocker and Jumbo take Lee and Amy to the Everglades for dining and dancing. While there, Jumbo has an attack of the itch caused by the tunneling, and Shocker knocks out a fighter named Kid Hanley, for ridiculing Jumbo. Later, at Lee's room, Shocker tries to make love to her — a little prematurely. Lee is in tears and disillusioned. Amy tells Lee to stay away from Shocker, both for her own good, and because Amy is jealous.

A fire breaks out in the tunnel, and the river is allowed to come in by lowering the

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pressure. For a time it looks as if it means death to the entire gang. Steam scalds the men, and the heading face is nearly caved in. Shocker tries to direct the men, but Jumbo reminds him that he is the heading boss. Shocker hits Jumbo in mutiny with a pick-handle, and the sand hogs become panic stricken. The difficulty in the tunnel is straightened out, and the majority of the men are saved.

Shortly after, Jumbo and Shocker have a fight in the tunnel because of Shocker's "mutiny." Both are very much battered—thoughts of Lee spurring them on to fight ferociously. After the fight is over, they come up to find Lee going off in a taxi with Mulroy, one of the sand hogs.

CHAPTER X.

MULROY'S FIGHT.

AFTER weeks of rock-dust and powder-reek, drilling and blasting, the east end of the tunnel drove out of basalt into blue clay. A new spirit enlived the men below the river's bed, a relief from tension. To the tunnel men the blue clay, heaved out of the ocean's floor by primordial forces and pocketed in a fold of rock by glaciers, was blessed stuff, a cause for celebration.

It was of a self-sustaining consistency. It did not flow. It did not collapse. Shovels, coated with powdered cement, dug it out in great chunks. There was a minimum of planking needed. The blue wall stood up almost alone. The tunnel advanced with a maximum of speed, and without danger—without a danger that any one could see.

In the harsh difficulties of rock, the men had lost time, had dropped behind in the race to the center of the river. Now was the opportunity given to even the score—for the Manhattan section, after making great strides through the sand, was now encountering gravel and bowlders, a glacial deposit of pebbly, stony débris—slow, dangerous stuff, with no coherence, no self-support. Air pressure dried it, made it a mass of dry round stones—a wall of marbles. Every inch had to be breasted.

"Well!" Jumbo rumbled, raising his full glass. "At last we got a break. The other side's gettin' the dirty end of the stick now."

"Meaning Mulroy?" Shocker asked, intentionally misunderstanding.

"Don't worry about Mulroy," Jumbo answered, draining the glass.

They were seated at a table in the Hog Hole, waiting for their second shift — three hours now in low pressure—and watching Lee's little tap shoes beating music on the floor.

"I'm not worried about Mulroy," Shocker said. "He's not going to be a sand hog much longer, you know."

Jumbo emptied the bottle into his glass. "Not after I get through with him, he ain't."

"Don't be a fool. I mean he's sold his play. He got five hundred dollars for it. Advance royalties. He showed me the check. And he'll get a lot more, after it's produced."

Jumbo shoved his hat back off his forehead, tumbling the lock of hair across his eye. "That skinny dude?"

"They begin rehearsals in July — and open sometime in September. He'll have plenty of money to marry on—and no trouble with the wife about working in filthy tunnels where men get killed every day."

Jumbo snorted. "You think she'd marry him?"

His indignant face broke into a smile, a beatific, beaming look. "I suppose she'd marry you," Shocker said. Jumbo didn't appear to hear.

"Look at her," he said. "Ain't she

sweet? Ain't she like a—like a—" He gave up.

"Bah," Shocker said. "She's like all the rest of them. You haven't forgotten I saw you, have you?" He sharpened his voice to a queer falsetto. "Stop tickling me, Jumbo!" And in his natural voice he resumed. "You haven't forgotten, you clown?"

Jumbo's forelock seemed to rise in protest.

"Hell, Shocker," Jumbo said, beseeching his friend's understanding, "you got me wrong. I was wiping the dishes, and she was washing them. And the sun was on her neck, shining through the window. It was—well, it was funny. I got to laughing. And the first thing I know, damn if I wasn't kissing her neck. And then—"

Shocker shoved back in his chair. Jumbo explaining? Jumbo apologizing? "You're getting old, you fathead," he said in a sudden burst of anger, unexplainable even to himself.

"Old?"

Jumbo started from his chair, his hackles rising. "Too damn old for any use. Go back to your apron, you fool. That's all you're fit for."

Only Amy's quick descent on the table, bottle in hand, prevented bloodshed. Amy was cool of mien, but her words blistered both of them.

"Aw, Amy," Jumbo said. "We were just fooling. Shocker was just trying to get my goat. Calling me old."

Shocker said nothing. He spied Lee coming toward the table. He got up hastily and went to the bar, and talked and drank with Limey. He was sorry he had called Jumbo an old man. It is a crime and a disgrace to be old, in the tunnel. A sand hog is as good as he ever was, until he's crippled or killed.

"But he is old," he thought. "Too damn old for her. No wonder she laughed at him. He was so ridiculous she didn't know what else to do but laugh." Again he felt cheap and mean, and hateful to himself.

A RING of iron had been erected. The iron-men, singing, grouped themselves in pairs on the working platform, and began to tighten the bolts, two men to a wrench, swinging back and forth in a steady rhythm.

Mulroy released the jacks that pressed against the segments of the ring, and stepped across to the platform. "Keep your eye on the shield, will you, Shocker?" he asked. "I'm going to duck up the tunnel and sneak a smoke."

"All right with me, playwright. But watch yourself."

Smoking is strictly forbidden in the tunnel, and the municipal engineers are rigid in the enforcement of the rule—which makes the sand hogs eager to break it whenever possible.

Shocker watched him a moment, then growled at one of his men.

"What's the matter there, Deacon? You don't seem to be getting much beef on that wrench."

Bamboo, Deacon's partner, laughed shrilly. "I'll tell you what's de matte' wit' dat boy," he said. "He was up all night, rehearsin' dat choir o' his. He's wukking so ha'd fo' de Lawd, th'aine no stren'th in him when he hits de tunnel."

"Nev' mind about that choi'," Deacon answered. "They's a good choi'. On'y thing is, the o'gan ain't doing so well. Few of the bottom notes is out of orde'. So, kin I get that bull voice of you's to fill in the weak spots, choi' an' o'gan both goin' to praise the Lawd like they ought."

The Negroes laughed in unison, swinging on the wrench, never losing the rhythm of it, keeping the pace of the others.

"Maybe you could get Jumbo," Shocker said. "Then you wouldn't need the organ at all."

"Cut the gabbing and lean on them wrenches," Jumbo called. "Where's Mulroy?"

"He just went up-tunnel to grab a smoke. It's all right. I don't need him."

"You don't, eh? Well, I do."

OVER the dull roar of the incoming air, the laughter and the singing of the Negroes reached Mulroy, an aristocratic figure leaning against the curved iron wall of the tunnel, dreaming as he enjoyed a few puffs from the fast-burning cigarette.

The chanting and the laughing of those husky, happy, gleaming, half-naked, red-leaded iron-men, was in his play. It sounded a little too shrill here, too mechanical. On the stage the voices would be natural, rich, booming gloriously, keeping the audience spellbound.

He fingered the ten-inch Stillson—the instrument-of-all-work in his profession, which he wore thrust in his belt, handle downward, like a short rapier.

He saw Jumbo coming toward him through the wreaths of fog, and carefully put out his cigarette. Jumbo, too, was in the play — a giant striding through the fog.

"Looking for me?" he asked.

"I told you, as I told the rest of the gang, to stay away from that girl," Jumbo shouted.

Mulroy smiled. "You can't give me orders about her," he said.

With swift dexterity he whipped the Stillson into action, drawing it by the head, flipping it around in a whirling toss, and catching it by the handle.

Jumbo started a ponderous overhand swing. The wrench whirled and flashed, came straight forward in a thrust and swooped.

Mulroy, like a clever swordsman, had picked the point to attack. He aimed for the bridge of the nose, seeking to blind the giant and end the fight with the first blow. Jumbo's arm, however, swinging toward the side of Mulroy's head, brought his body out of line—and the wrench landed high, cutting a gash on the side of Jumbo's forehead. Jumbo staggered, but did not fall. He roared with pain and rage, and rushed impetuously, swinging both fists.

The long floor of the tunnel, intersected by the straight lines of tracks, and the cylindrical tunnel wall with its massive iron rings arching overhead, made a setting the poetic soul of Mulroy fully appreciated. The wraiths of fog, the bloody face of the giant, and the chanting of the Negroes in the background, gave added drama to the strange duel. He must write it into the play.

There wasn't much time to think of drama, however, for Jumbo came on again and again, charging like a wounded lion, filling the vault with strident bellows. Mulroy fought silently, stepping back, eluding, evading, alert to attack.

"Not a lion," he thought. "Not with that out-jutting lock of hair. Not a lion, a unicorn."

He jabbed, swung, fended off, slashed, kept trying for the bridge of the nose. No other spot would suit his artist's soul. Relentlessly he sought an opening, the polished steel flickering, gleaming, flashing, making little circles

of light in the fog. Once he almost tore off Jumbo's left ear. Once the hammerhead fell on the left cheek, under the eye. Once it crashed on the side of the massive jaw. Frequently it fell on a forearm or a shoulder.

JUMBO succeeded, after great effort, in driving his sledge hammer fists through the sword-play. He rocked Mulroy's head. Mulroy staggered, gave ground. Jumbo roared with triumph and rage and hurled himself on the shield-driver. And then, Mulroy, though out of position, flashed the rapier-wrench with an inspired deftness and precision, shooting the lightning to the bridge of Jumbo's nose. Jumbo stopped dead. He was silent. He was dazed. He threw up his arms. He swayed on his feet. He might have fallen in defeat, had not Mulroy laughed. But Mulroy's laugh enraged the big man. It cleared his head. He leaped again, and now his arms found flesh. He bore the little man to the floor and smashed downward—once.

"Enough?" he asked.

There was no answer. Jumbo could not see. But he felt the body beneath him relax. He got up, jerking Mulroy with him. He felt his way down the tunnel to a valve in the water line. He opened the tap, and drenched himself, and his victim. Mulroy, roused by the shock of water, gasped, stirred, struggled to his feet. Jumbo held out his hand. Mulroy took it.

Side by side the two walked back to the heading, Jumbo stumbling keeping his hand on the iron walls.

"Did I blind you?" Mulroy asked.

"Did you? You hit me with a house, kid."

Mulroy laughed and squared his narrow shoulders.

"But you hit me with a ten-story building," he said. "And I can still feel the floors falling."

"You had it coming to you."

"Maybe. But I'm going to marry that girl, Jumbo—if I can."

CHAPTER XI.

JUMBO IS TRICKED.

"YOU shouldn't have done it," Shocker insisted, doctoring Jumbo's face. "What'll Lee think of you—picking on a runt half your size? And what'll she think of him—standing up to you like a man and chipping pieces off your ivory skull?"

Jumbo tried to be heroic. "I'm looking after her," he said. "Me. Jumbo. And anybody who makes a pass at her—I'll smash him."

"You pathetic sap!" Shocker said. "That girl can look after herself. You think you can have her?"

Jumbo groaned. "Aw, Shocker," he said. "It ain't that. I ain't trying to make the kid. But—but—"

"Just being a father to her, are you? Or is it a mother you think you are? Tell me."

Jumbo groaned again, under Shocker's manipulation.

"I'm crazy about her," he said.

"What about Amy?" Shocker demanded.

"Amy? Leave her out of this. This ain't got anything to do with Amy."

"Oh, no? Not until she finds it out. And then what?"

Jumbo shoved his tormentor away. "You turned sissy on me?" he roared. "What the hell is it to you? You want her, don't you? That's it, isn't it?"

Shocker had a brilliant idea. A brilliant idea that made him smile. "I

guess that's all over," he said with mock resignation. "The kid's too good for me. I was only trying to help you, Jumbo. That's all. If you want to make a hit with her, you don't put on an apron and bite her on the neck. And you don't wash dishes on her back. And you don't tickle her. You big lard-head!"

"Make a splurge over her if you think she's worth it. Give her candy, books, jewels, a bathtub full of daffodils. Blow her to a dinner. Take her out to a show. You got the weirdest ideas about courting a girl. A barbarian could teach you. No wonder she laughed at you. The next time, though, she may not think it's so damn funny to be picked off the floor and hugged against a sloppy apron and get tickled with a Sunday beard. She may run a needle into you—or a knife, like the girl in Mexico did."

He finished washing out Jumbo's wounds; and though he was gentle, the big man groaned again several times.

"You're a beautiful thing to be taking a girl to a show," Shocker said, slyly. "You're lucky you're not blind, and your nose isn't broken. Mulroy probably broke his wrench on you. But by to-morrow night you ought to look half-way decent. What show were you thinking of taking her to?"

"Show?" Jumbo asked. "Oh, yes. Show. What show do you think, Shocker?"

Shocker grinned maliciously. "If you want me to," he said, "just to show you how I feel about it, I'll get the tickets for you to-morrow. The best show in town."

"Thanks," Jumbo said. "You ain't such a bad guy. But if you're kidding me, I'll give you worse than I give Mulroy."

"But not as much as Mulroy gave you, lard-head. I'm your pal. You wait and see."

JUMBO'S eyes hadn't quite healed, but he could see through them. He was standing at the bar in the Hog Hole, talking to a group of sand hogs. Amy listened for a while, then walked to the far end of the bar and began to study pictures of Samoa. Mulroy, sitting at a table, in front of a bottle of whisky, was reading "Idylls of the King."

Shocker Duggan stepped into the room, and walked toward the bar. "You got the tickets?" Jumbo asked in what he thought was a whisper.

"The best in the house," Shocker answered. "Two in the fifth row, center."

"What kind of tickets?" Amy asked, slipping her pictures under the bar.

Shocker pretended great embarrassment, and contrived to look guilty of heinous conspiracy.

"Why — why," he said lamely, "Jumbo and I were going to the theater to-night. I ducked out of the tunnel early, and got the tickets."

"Show me," Amy said, coming forward and thrusting out her hand. Shocker fumbled in his pocket, and produced the envelope.

"Hum," Amy said.

"I—I never thought, Amy," Shocker said with a deep contrition, "or I'd have got one for you, too. But say—but say, Amy—you go anyway. I'll see it some other time."

Jumbo's eyes darted withering fire at Shocker Duggan; and if he could he would cheerfully have murdered his pal then and there.

"Yeah, Amy," he managed to say, after several false starts, "yeah. You and me, huh? Since Shocker—don't

mind. I'll go over to the hog house and change my clothes."

"Fine," Amy said, thrusting the envelope into Jumbo's hands. "That's very nice of you, Shocker. Hurry, Jumbo. We haven't much time."

He grabbed Shocker by the lapel of his coat. "It was very nice of you, Shocker," he said. "Very white of you. Come on and help me dress."

On the way across the street, in the hog house, and until he stepped into the showers, Jumbo called Shocker every name he could think of. Slowly and thoroughly he cursed him, and every member of the Duggan tribe. He cursed in the language and the patois of every country he had ever visited. Shocker protested, every once in a while.

"But, Jumbo—when Amy looked at me that way— But, Jumbo—when I saw Amy's face— But, Jumbo—if you hadn't talked so loud—"

He looked quite the injured and misunderstood friend until Jumbo vanished into the running water.

"Now that you've got all that off your chest," he said, "it may make you feel a little better to know you owe me twelve dollars and fifty cents. Eleven dollars for the tickets, and a dollar fifty for the taxi ride."

"It does make me feel better," Jumbo roared, "because you're out that much. Because you got to take it out of my hide, if you want it. My pal!"

A smile flitted across the face of the iron boss as he reached into the pocket of Jumbo's jacket, hanging in the locker, and removed the envelope. He emptied it of the theater tickets, and refilled it with the cardboard covers of two match books, sealed the flap, and put it back.

He had a vision of Jumbo presenting those worthless bits of paper to the ticket taker—of the ticket taker's reaction. Maybe Jumbo would make trouble, and they'd call a cop! That would be worth seeing. He saw himself and Lee, discreetly sheltered by a door, watching and laughing. He saw Jumbo buying tickets from a sidewalk speculator, and screaming about the price.

"All right," he said sorrowfully. "You're smarter than I thought, Jumbo. But mine will be a matchless revenge. You wait."

CHAPTER XII.

THE STAGGERS.

AMY was ready when Shocker returned to the Hog Hole, dressed in green, jade beads about her neck, six green-gold bracelets on her left forearm. He seated himself across the table from her, and openly admired her.

"You're beautiful, sweetheart," he said airily. "I wish I were taking you out."

"Shut up," Amy said. "Don't call me sweetheart. I ain't sweet. And I got no heart. You ain't kidding me. What's back of all this? About them tickets I mean. Everything kosher? Somehow, when Shocker Duggan gives away theater tickets—"

Shocker managed to look deeply hurt. "Sorry you feel like that, Amy," he said. "I took a chance on the bends to get those tickets. I beat it out of the tunnel quick—without staying in the decompression chamber more than five minutes. I gave them to you, didn't I?"

Amy's eyes were still suspicious. "So you fixed it up for me and Jumbo. What are *you* going to do? Take Lee to the circus?"

"Lee?" he asked, as though the name were unfamiliar. "I've hardly spoken to her for weeks. But—I don't know. Why? You think she'd be lonesome without you? Or some of the hogs might act up?"

"You needn't pretend with me, Shocker. I didn't come in on a load of pumpkins yesterday. Nor yet last week. You let that kid alone."

"Thanks, Amy," Shocker said, rising. Something in his face alarmed her. "Sit down," she said.

It was hard to make up her mind. The situation was bad enough as it was. If she threw them together it might be worse. But if she tried to keep them apart—it would be disastrous.

"You won't keep her out late?" she demanded.

"No. Of course not, Amy. We go on the early shift to-morrow, you know. Eight o'clock. I got to get some sleep."

Amy snorted. "That's news. Shocker Duggan's got to get some sleep. Now I'll tell one. Wait here. I'll ask her if she wants to go out with you. She's still sore at you—on account of that bum play of yours!"

"What bum play?"

"Her and Jumbo," Amy said, rising. "Sure Jumbo kissed her. I don't blame him. And maybe it won't be the last time either. He's crazy about her. But not like you. The kid might be his daughter, the way he feels. And you bawl her out! And who, by the way, are you to bawl anybody out for sneaking a kiss? I'd like to know."

She flung herself across the room. Lee had just come out of her bath, and was powdering her body when Amy entered. Amy's eyes softened a little.

"You look like a baby," she said. "And you smell like one, too. New, kind of. You know what I mean? I won't need you to-night, kid. There ain't never many hogs here the night before pay day. And anyhow the orchestra's here. Shocker wants to take you somewhere."

LEE wrapped an old blue kimono of Amy's about her, and sat at the mirror, rubbing cold cream into her face. She made no comments.

"He's waiting. Don't stay out too late." Amy's voice hardened. "And remember what I said."

She studied the girl with merciless scrutiny. "You heard me?"

"Yes," Lee said. "I heard you." She began to wipe off the cream. "You know I love him," she said, "and yet—and yet— Why are you doing this, Amy?"

Her voice was calm, low, almost impersonal. "Skip it," Amy said. "Put on your best dress. Have a good time. And look out for the cars."

"And if he makes love to me?"

Her face was clean. She stood up, facing the older woman, challenging her with her eyes. "If he does," Amy declared, "I'll give you hell. And him, too."

"You forgot your earrings," Lee said.

Amy's hands went to her lobes.

"Thanks," she said. "I'd look like a fool without no earrings on."

She took a pair from her jewel box—a little cedar chest that had once held two pounds of bonbons—and fastened them in place. She left the room without another word.

"O. K.," she reported to Shocker. "But you watch your step."

Jumbo heaved himself into view, striding importantly through the tables. "All set?" Amy greeted him. "Got everything? You haven't left the tickets in your other clothes?"

"Aw, Amy," he protested. "I ain't like that. Sure I got the tickets."

He pulled the little envelope from his waistcoat pocket. "Want me to open it and show you?" he demanded. Shocker knew a moment of panic.

"No," Amy said. "We'll be late as it is—the time it took you to dress. Come on."

Shocker paced up and down before the bar, waiting for Lee. He frowned, thinking of things he meant to say to her—after the show. There must be a definite understanding between them—an agreement of some sort—a working agreement that would knit them together, or keep them forever apart.

"Hello," a voice said. He whirled around. She was smiling a little. He searched her eyes, looking for some evidence of resentment, spite, or, it might even be, disgust. He did not find it.

She was wearing the gray dress again, and a soft gray fedora that was mannish, maybe, yet so delightfully feminine he wanted to pat it—exactly the hat for her.

"Hello, Lee," he said. "I got two tickets for the best show in town. You'll love it. But let's get out of here before we lose any more time. We've got to beat Jumbo and Amy to the theater."

HOLDING her hand he sped her to the front door, and down the steps to a waiting taxi. "Broadway and Forty-second Street," he said. "And lash the horses, Mister."

The cab leaped, whirled around the corner, and threw Lee violently against her escort. She held onto his arm, her gray purse falling from her lap.

"God!" he said. "Are you hurt?"

She smiled at him. "No. Are you?"

He took her hand and held it. "After the show," he thought. "Not now!" He let her hand drop.

"I've got things to say to you, South Wind," he said. "But they'll keep."

"They've kept for weeks, Shocker," Lee said simply. "But you needn't say them. I know. It was my fault. I let you kiss me. You don't have to apologize to me—ever."

"Wait," Shocker pleaded. "You don't—" he moved away from her, and opened the window wide. "You—" His voice was distressed, alarming. "I'm afraid I'm going to be sick. I left the tunnel too soon. I guess I got—the staggers." Suddenly he slumped in his seat.

"Shocker!" Lee cried. She leaned over and took his head in her lap, straightening his body as much as she could, trying to make him comfortable despite his cramped position. "Shocker, what's wrong?"

There was a dazed, glassy expression in his eyes. "Staggers," he said. "You—better get me out of here—quick. I'm going to be very sick."

Lee tapped on the glass back of the chauffeur's head. "Stop!" she cried. "Stop!" The cab jerked to a stand. The driver calmly shoved the glass panel open. "Drive back to the corner where you picked us up," Lee said. "He's sick—dying."

"Shall I help him back on the seat, Ma'am?"

"No. There isn't time."

"Right, Ma'am," the driver said. But he had his own ideas. He opened the door, and, lifting the limp Shocker off the floor, sat him on the seat.

"Rest his head in my lap," Lee said. "And—Oh, hurry! Please hurry!"

The chauffeur jumped back into his place, looked about him, thrust out a hand, made a quick turn, and sped for the medical lock. He'd carried cases

of the staggers and the bends before.

Lee's hands caressed Shocker's head, his smooth cheeks, his hard square jaw, the tender half-moons beneath his eyes, stroked the shiny tuft of hair that was like a plume.

"I don't hate you, darling," she said, bending low above him. "I couldn't hate you. Did you think I hated you? I love you, Shocker. And you wouldn't look at me. And you wouldn't speak to me. I hurt you. I couldn't help that."

He made no answer. She didn't care. She didn't know that he could hear and understand. She kissed his forehead, and fingered the lobes of his ears.

"I'm going to be—very sick," Shocker murmured. "I'll spoil your —your new dress."

"Spoil it, darling," she said. "What do I care!"

He wrenched himself away from her, with a great effort. He thrust his head through the window. Convulsion seized him. He rested a moment, then fell back onto the seat. She pulled his head into her lap again, and held it there until the cab stopped in front of the doctor's office.

CHAPTER XIII.

LEE'S VIGIL.

DOCTOR HARLEY KNOTT had seen too many men rushed into the lock to be surprised when the chauffeur broke into his sanctum and demanded help. He smiled when he recognized his friend Shocker Duggan.

"You take his feet," he directed the chauffeur. "I'll hold him under the arms. Careful. He's heavier than he looks."

He nodded cheerfully to Lee, and, with the best fellowship in the world he backed through the door, across the room, and over to the lock, asking amusing questions about the Hog Hole, Amy, Jumbo, and the patient in his arms.

He kicked open the lock door, pulled Shocker inside as the chauffeur lowered his end of the burden, made him comfortable, and reached for the air valve. His pleasantries were cut short only by the closing of the ponderous lock door. Lee heard the air roar into the chamber, and looked through the bull's-eye to see the doctor bending over Shocker. The chauffeur stood at her side, almost elbowing her out of his way.

"I wouldn't be one of them sand hogs for a million bucks," he admitted. "What'll I do, Lady—get it from the company? Or do you want to pay me now?" Lee paid him, feeling it a privilege.

She took down the telephone and buzzed. She had heard about the medical lock from Amy.

"It's the staggers, Miss Murray," he said pleasantly. "He's got them pretty bad, but we'll bring him around. He picked up a little when he felt the air, and—maybe you can see him—he's trying to sit up now. I'll walk him up and down as soon as it's practical."

"You're sure he'll be all right? You're sure, Doctor."

The doctor laughed. "He'll be able to fight Jumbo again to-morrow if he wants to. Why don't you pull up a chair and watch? Sometimes these cases are intensely interesting."

Lee placed a chair close to the lock; and sat quietly, waiting, hands folded over the handbag in her lap. Only once in a while did she look through the glass.

After a long time she phoned again. "Is he better, Doctor?"

"Oh, decidedly. You can talk to him yourself if you wish."

Lee waited in an agony of suspense until she heard a faint voice, Shocker's. Thrills of happiness shot through her, dimming her eyes.

"Hello, Lee," he said. "Did I spoil your dress?"

"No, Shocker. No. Are you better?"

"I'm fine—but I'll be here for hours. I'm sorry to bust up your evening like this. The doctor'll see you to the Hog Hole, and Jumbo can take you home when he gets back from the show."

"Is there anything I can do?"

"Only one thing. Come with me to the show to-morrow night."

"Of course I will, Shocker. Of course I will."

"Goodnight, Lee."

"Goodnight, Shocker."

She replaced the phone and sat as before, very quietly, hands folded. But the expression on her face had changed.

THE doctor came out of the chamber presently, in a swirling fog of his own creation, appearing before Lee like Mephistopheles in a cloud of smoke. He was very tall, and very slender, and he had very bushy hair, and a very sharp nose, and very long red wrists, and a very warm smile.

He volunteered, gallantly and volubly, to escort Lee across the street, and extended a crooked elbow to her.

But Lee remained in her chair.

"I can't leave him now," she said. "Mayn't I just sit here? And wait? I won't disturb you. I'll be very quiet. If any one else comes in, I'll sit over there—out of your way."

"But, my dear child, it may be all night."

"I don't care how long it is. I—I must stay. I'd go crazy, away from him, knowing he's there, suffering, dying, for all I know."

"Dying? You can't kill *him* with the staggers. Really, there's no need to worry about him. I assure you. And that chair's uncomfortable, I should say."

"Thank you," she said simply. "You're very kind."

Doctor Knott gave it up.

"She seems to be breathing him in through her whole body," he mused. "Just as he's breathing in the air. And it's making her stronger and brighter. She grows lovelier every minute."

Again it seemed to him she was a child warming her hands at a fire, and building little castles of dreams. No, that wasn't quite right, he decided. She was the fire, throwing off warmth and radiance. She was a flame burning on an altar of devotion. She was love.

"I should be here," Lee was thinking. "I belong here. I'm not stealing these hours from Amy. I'm not stealing anything. I have a right to be here. I love him. He's mine. Amy can't have him. I'll not let her take him from me. Nobody can take him from me.

"Shocker! I held his head in my lap. All the way I held his head. My hands were on his face. He was so ill! So deathly ill! If he had died— But this is like death—waiting here. Like death? No. He's only sleeping. I'm watching while he sleeps, and rests, and dreams. What does he dream of? What does he think of? Does he feel hot and cold all over when he sees me—as I feel when I see him, or hear his footstep or his voice? No. I'm just another girl to him. A girl he thinks too soft!"

At midnight Doctor Knott phoned for sandwiches and coffee. He asked

Lee if she would do him the very great honor to share his dinner. But Lee shook her head. She could not eat, she said.

A waiter entered in less than half an hour, bringing a "ham-on-rye," a thick wedge of apple pie, and a quart tin of sugared "Boston" coffee. He set the tray on the desk.

"You'll take some hot coffee, won't you?" the doctor asked. Lee shook her head.

The doctor ate, washing down the indigestibles with lukewarm coffee. He tried to read a magazine. He glanced into the lock. He stared out the window. At two o'clock, unable to think of anything else, he mixed a sedative in a glass of water, and made Lee drink it. She fell asleep in a few minutes. Her purse fell from her lap, but she did not waken.

DOCTOR KNOTT took the glass gently from her hand and placed it carelessly on the edge of his desk. He walked into his private room. The door squeaked as he opened it. He looked around quickly — but Lee was still asleep. He put clean sheets on the bed, shook out the pillows, smoothed them, patted them, put one on another. Then he gathered Lee into his arms and carried her to the bed. He took off her shoes and her hat. He stood for a moment examining the shoes. They were so small, so dainty! He placed them side by side on the dresser. He grinned at the hat, swung it around on his finger, and placed it next the shoes.

He covered the girl with sheet and spread, opened the window a trifle, adjusted the shade, threw the bathroom door open, and walked softly out. He left the door half open—knowing it would squeak if he closed it. Her pocketbook and a handkerchief lay on the floor near her chair. He put them on his desk.

It was light when Lee awoke—about seven o'clock, she thought. She sat bolt upright. What was that? Something had fallen with a fearful clatter and rolled across the floor. And now a man was laughing—Shocker.

She jumped out of bed, and started to rush through the door, until she noted her shoeless feet. She stood, wondering what to do.

"It was my fault, Doc," Shocker was saying. "I reached out to get that purse—and your lousy can of coffee jumped up and bit me. You think it woke her?"

"Not a chance."

Shocker was holding the purse in his hands. "She wouldn't go, you say?"

"Wouldn't budge."

"Well, I've got to go to work, Doc. We're on an early shift now. Much obliged for the air."

"Shall I wake her?"

"No. Let her sleep until she wakes. I'll take this in to her."

Lee went quickly back to bed, and pulled the covers over her. She lay on her side, facing the door, one arm thrown over her face, so she might peek at him undetected. She made herself breathe softly, easily, though her heart was beating fast.

Shocker tiptoed in. He put the purse near her shoes. But the handkerchief he thrust into his breast pocket. He touched her shoes and her hat. He turned to look at her, his face a study in shifting contrasts, tender and grim.

Lee watched him through her fingers. His face was beautiful, she thought, beautiful and strong. She wanted to jump up and throw her arms around him. But she didn't. She pretended to move in her sleep. She drew

her arm up, sleepily, touching his cheek and his brush of hair, by accident, and raised her mouth as though she were kissing some one in her dreams. Shocker kissed her on the mouth, quickly, gently, electrically. She quivered, and he looked alarmed. She lay still.

"Good-by," he whispered.

He walked out quickly; but Lee did not jump up and run after him. She stood at the door, listening.

"Doc," Shocker said. "You're a swell guy. What size hat do you wear?"

"Seven and one-quarter. Why?"

"I'm going to buy you the best hat in New York. I know a hat clerk that lives in my building. I'll rout him out of bed right now, and have him deliver it this morning."

"Thanks. But there's no need to hurry. I'll be seeing you again."

"No." Shocker hesitated. "Nobody'll see me around here again, for a long, long time."

"You're—running away?"

Lee bit her wrist to keep from screaming, and waited for Shocker's answer. "Running away? Call it that if you like. They're building a tunnel in Antwerp. I'm going there on the first boat crossing the drink. Tell her, when she wakes up. Tell her my aunt died over there. Tell her anything you want to, Doc. So long."

After a little time Lee closed the door, got back into bed, turned her face to the wall, and sought relief in tears.

CHAPTER XIV.

"MORE AIR! THERE'S A BLOW!"

JUMBO greeted Shocker with a shout of fury and a string of curses when they met on the gantry. He twisted his left hand in the neck of Shocker's shirt, and menaced him with the right.

"I got a mind to shove this down your throat, you petty-larceny, blood-suckin' mosquito," he roared. "You're just as straight as macaroni on a plate, you are; as on-the-level as a deep sea diver."

Shocker reached up and pulled the big man's hat over his eyes. "Take your hands off me, you racial blunder," he retorted. "What's biting you?"

Jumbo let go his grip, and pushed his hat back into place. He stood glowering.

"You stole them tickets from me, and I come near lickin' the guy at the theatre because he wouldn't take them match stubs. That's what you done. I had to heave sixteen iron men at a sidewalk spec to get in to see the show. *If* I don't get that dough back, I'm goin' to drive a tunnel through you big around as my fist, and as long as my arm."

Shocker laughed in pure enjoyment. "Why Jumbo!" he said then, in an aggrieved tone. "I gave you those tickets. I paid twelve fifty for them. You owe me that. You're not trying to cheat me out of it are you? You wouldn't do that!"

They were still arguing when they reached the heading.

The tunnel drove on against the wall of blue, closer and closer to disaster. The men worked furiously.

Mulroy spun the erector as though it were a toy. Jumbo was everywhere, cursing, bellowing, advising, suggesting, commanding, stopping now and then to perpetrate rough jokes. Shocker drove his gang as he always did—but for the first time, found no pleasure in the job.

"I shouldn't have come down this morning," he thought. "I should have

waited until the bank opened, and gone to the boat."

But he knew he couldn't have done that. He had to see Jumbo again, and Amy, too. He'd have one drink at the Hog Hole after he came up. Then he'd go.

He had packed all his belongings. They were at the hog house. His passport was in one of his grips. He was ready.

He couldn't say good-by to Jumbo and Amy. He'd just walk out on them —as he had walked out on Lee. He'd send them a post card from London or Paris saying, "Antwerp next stop." That was nasty—but all he could do.

Lee would marry Mulroy, he supposed.

He looked at Mulroy. Not a bad looking fellow. Lee might even get to love him.

"Keep your eye on these singing wonders of mine, will you, Mulroy?" he asked. "I'm dead for a little sleep —and I'm going up-tunnel and pick me out a bale of hay."

"What'll I tell Jumbo?"

"Tell him hello and good-by and I'll meet him some day in Paris, maybe, or Antwerp, or Sing Sing. Tell him to buy you a new wrench to replace the one you broke over his head. Tell him not to wake me up."

He walked up-tunnel slowly. Jumbo's voice lost itself in the foggy cylinder behind him. The chanting of the Negroes died down, ceased. Shocker knew he would miss those voices. He felt quite sorry for himself.

JUMBO stepped into the center pocket of the shield, thrust back his hat, spat, and swore. The upper third of the face was bare of any support.

"Hi, there, you miners," he roared. "Watch your step in here. You got too many boards out of that face. The first thing you know you'll have the river in your laps."

"The fice don't need boards, Jumbo," English answered. "The bloody stuff stands hup like a blue 'unk o' cheese."

"That makes two hunks of cheese, you Cockney clown. Get some boards in there! This clay can't last forever. You might hit gravel any minute, like them monkeys in the west end. Snap into it, you faking ditch-diggin' son of a ditch-digger. Are you tryin' to save yourself some sweat?"

He turned to superintend the work of the muckers in extending the wooden floor and lengthening the tracks so the muck-cars could roll nearer the piles of clay. Four muck-cars, the first half-filled, stood near by, ill-defined in the mist.

"What are you doing?" he roared. "Makin' mud pies? Come on, Come on."

No sooner had Jumbo turned his back than English, disregarding orders, began to dig deeply with his shovel.

"'E's barmy, 'e is," he confided to his helper. "More boards on this fice! The wery hidea!"

He winked at his helper and once more attacked the wall — breaking through the shell of clay into quicksand.

The quicksand poured through the hole like a gush of water under pressure. Jumbo's quick ear caught the sound of it.

"I told you, English," he stormed, "I told you. Quick. Plug up that hole."

He caught up a bag of hay and thrust it into the breach. The upper part of the face collapsed. The stream of quicksand became a torrent, a deluge. The air roared out, through the sand,

through the river. A tempest seethed in the heading.

AMY rose early that morning, made coffee, read the paper, and called Lee's apartment. The ringing signal annoyed her. She jiggled the hook.

"They do not an-swer," the operator said.

Amy hung up with a feeling of anxiety. She tried to tell herself Lee was sleeping so soundly she didn't hear the phone. But she didn't believe that.

She attended to her hair, lashes, nails, and lips. She rolled on the floor several times, for the benefit of her hips. She spread the white of an egg over her face to tighten the wrinkles. Some one had told her that was Sarah Bernhardt's secret. She dressed. She phoned again.

"Keep ringing them, Operator," she said angrily. "There's somebody there—if you're ringing the right number."

"They do not an-swer," the operator said again.

Amy hung up, put on her wrist watch, wound it, and started out. "If the kid comes in," she told Limey, "I'll be down by the river, watching the boils."

It was nearly eight thirty when she arrived at Lee's apartment building. She walked up four flights of stairs, grimly. She knocked on the door of Lee's apartment.

"She's not to home," a voice called up through the stair well.

"Not home? She's got to be home," Amy shouted down. "What do you mean, she ain't home?"

The woman below started up the steps. Amy remembered her. And, when she came up, a trifle breathless, she remembered Amy. "Oh, you're the lady who rented the flat for her. Well, I'm sorry to say it, I am. But it's the truth. She's not to home. She didn't come in all night."

"Let me in to her apartment," Amy demanded. "You got a key, ain't you? Open up."

The landlady obeyed, reluctantly. Amy stepped into the room. The landlady followed. "You can see for yourself, her bed ain't been slep' in."

Amy looked into the bathroom, into the tiny kitchenette. The flat was empty. She stopped by the dresser a moment, to stare at a picture of herself, handsomely framed. She picked it up.

"Can you tie that?" she asked. "She must of bought that frame with her first week's pay." She put it down, angrily.

Shocker's flat was but two blocks away, yet Amy was fatigued before she reached it. She talked to the janitor, Shocker was gone, he said—gone and left no forwarding address. He went with all his suitcases a little before eight o'clock. His flat was vacant.

Amy walked slowly to the river. Anger and jealousy choked her. Self-pity weakened her.

It was a bright day, a beautiful day. The river had never looked so peaceful, nor so majestic. It was like burnished copper in places, like green gold, like wrinkled sheets of amber. It throbbed with the throb of engines. It pulsed with the movement of tugs and scows and great rusty steamers, and gray steel battleships that gave off glints in the sunlight. But all Amy saw was the face of a girl, and the face of a man she had trusted.

THE boil nearest her broke into sudden convulsions. Amy's hands went to her heart. The water turned brown. It swelled. It

leaped high, higher, climbing, swelling, shooting into the sky. It spewed out bales and bags of hay, planks, broken bits of wood—the body of a man, battered out of shape, pounded to jelly!

Amy's knees weakened. She fell. She lay as though she were stunned. The faces of Lee and Shocker were blotted out of her mind.

Another man appeared in the geyser. He seemed to be climbing it, a half naked man clinging to something, wriggling his legs. She watched him fall, diving into the water, coming up, swimming toward a tug. She could not see his face. But it wasn't Jumbo. Jumbo couldn't swim.

Something floated near, black and shapeless. Amy saw it was a hat, a man's hat. There was only one hat like that in the world—Jumbo's.

The gage tender at the top of the shaft leaped out of his chair. The finger of the gage was moving steadily around, dropping, dropping. He snatched up the phone.

"More air," he shouted. "There's a blow. More air."

At the same time, Bill Ryan, sitting in the man-lock in the bulkhead near the bottom of the shaft, saw the tunnel suddenly cloud. He glanced at the gage. It was falling rapidly. He yelled in crazy futile excitement—"A blow! A blow!"

Limey opened the door of the Hog Hole to a frenzied knocking—

Rap, rap, rap, rap, rap—bang, bang, bang!

"A rattle han' three," he said.

No sand hog hears that signal calmly. "Exhaust the air," it means. "Hurry. This is an emergency. Open the door." Tunnel men never joke with the "rattle and three," and use it only when the need is great.

An iron-man, all whites of eye, pushed his way in. "A blow!" he cried. "Jumbo's in a blow!" The Hog Hole was emptied in a minute.

Doctor Knott was asleep at his desk when a messenger boy delivered the hat. Doctor Knott lifted it reverently from the paste board box. It was a gray fedora, a masculine counterpart of Lee's. It was easy to see what had influenced Shocker's choice. It was soft and smooth and light. And it must have cost twenty dollars or more, the doctor thought.

He felt it, smoothed it, tried it on, looked into the wall mirror. He gave the brim a jaunty angle. He strutted up and down, beaming.

The telephone rang. He picked up the receiver lazily.

"A blow," a shrill voice cackled. "One man dead. At least one, doctor. Maybe a dozen or more. Get everything ready. Call in emergency doctors. Stand by."

Doctor Knott hung up the phone. He took off the hat, and placed it gently on the hatrack near the operating table. He waved it a solemn good-by, a gesture that would have touched Lee had she seen and understood. He took up the phone again, staring at the clock.

CHAPTER XV.

TRAPPED.

WHAT the men in the tunnel remembered most vividly was the wind. It blew like the concentration of all storms on sea or land. The fog of decompression made it white. It billowed in swirls of gleaming mist. It veiled the brilliant lighting of the heading, brought a diffused and irridescent glow, a milky, opalescent, ghostly illumination.

"Oh, Lawd God help us," Preacher Jones intoned.

"Ast Him fo' a pair o' gills an' a fish tail," Frenchy suggested. "Boy, we can use 'em."

As they looked at each other their hats left them and sailed away on the wind. The pressure inside the hats shot them up when the outside pressure fell.

"When yo' hat leaves yo', run," Preacher Jones cried.

The iron-gang ran. The muckers, bareheaded, too, followed on their heels. They ran with frantic speed, but though their legs moved and their arms swung, and they felt the strain of effort, they seemed to be losing ground. They felt like men on a treadmill, running fast and never getting anywhere. The wind took away their breaths, blew off their shirts, whipped them, beat against them, pushed them. They bent themselves against it, and hid their faces to keep from being smothered. They vanished in the fog.

The miners held their posts. Their's was the fault. Their's must be the punishment, the task of filling the breach, if they could, of dying if they failed. Six men there were, three miners and three helpers. They stayed with Jumbo, in the wind-blasted pockets of the shield where the quicksand poured in and the white storm rioted. The helpers won the coveted position of miner that day, though one enjoyed the honor but a few tragic moments.

Sand engulfed the seven men, blinded them, filled their nostrils, their ears. The wind ripped their shirts to rags, tore them off, tore at their trousers and their boots. They worked with mad courage, throwing everything that came into their hands, bags, bales, planks, tools, chunks of clay, everything in the pockets of what clothes remained to them silver and bills, handkerchiefs, plugs of tobacco, books with the names of women written in them, keys, a pair of dice, a mouth organ, a greasy pack of cards, a flask not yet half empty—the wet rags the wind had not torn off.

English went into the breach head first, horribly leaping and flying. It was his body Amy saw come out of the river and fall back into it. Casey, his helper, followed—a pockmarked young County Downer.

The wind sucked him up and wedged him somewhere in the mysteries of the river bed, and left him there forever.

Dick Creadon, working by the side of the little Irishman, evoked the wonder of the world when he went up through twenty feet of muck and eighty feet of water, and swam to the nearest tug. He was caught by the wind while hurling a bag of hay. He kept frantic hold on the bag, and followed it upward. The bag broke the way for him through sand and slime and ooze and earth and river.

Evers, an emaciated miner, burned out by years of labor in the air, and years of living on raw eggs in a glass of whisky, worked courageously at Jumbo's elbow until the wind forced him through the hole on Creadon's heels.

Jumbo, braced against the side of the pocket, grabbed him by one ankle and held, and pulled. "Blast your soul," he cried, "come back here. What do you think you're trying to do, you old fossil? Leave me alone with the work?"

He could jest in the white wind of doom. And the old fossil could grin, when he came back out of his grave. And he could work on.

"Get out," Jumbo cried, shoving him away. "Run, Spindle-shanks. You're too damn old to die."

English was gone, Creadon was gone. Casey was gone. Evers was running. Jumbo turned on the other two, and bade them hurry to the locks. He stayed alone, as a heading boss should, braced in the opalescent pocket, flinging into the maw everything now he could reach—even iron bolts and Mulroy's Stillson wrench.

Water spattered him, cool and stinging. With the air rushing out at the top of the collapsing face, the river was coming in.

TERROR twisted Jumbo around and shot him out of the pocket. Before he realized it he was on the platform, battling the white tempest that sought to tear him asunder. He ran with great strides, fell splashing to the tunnel floor, and banged his head against a flange. He didn't feel the blow. He knew only that the tunnel was filling. His terror increased.

He staggered up, and floundered on, fighting the wind, confused by the fog. the water rising around him. He stopped suddenly. Was he going in the right direction? Was he headed toward the safety of the locks—or back toward the heading?

The wind was in his face, but that meant nothing to him at the moment. He remembered the tracks. He'd follow them. But which way? He lurched against the locomotive at the head of a string of cars. He felt it, got his direction from it. He kept on, a giant wobbling ape, stooping every now and then to feel his way with his hands.

The force of the wind lessened, but the water was rising fast, and now it began to shove him along, to hurl him to pitch him to his knees and pick him up and carry him on. "Shocker!" he called. "Shocker!"

The only answer was the sound of roaring waters and the echo of his own voice caroming off the iron sides of the shell.

A few minutes after Bill Ryan, the lock tender, called "A blow! A blow!", running men came out of the mist, half-naked men, black and white, panting, terror-stricken, glistening wet, rags of fog streaming away from them, men daubed with blue clay, men spattered with red-lead, men half-covered with sand.

They fell in through the wide open door of the lock, and lay on the floor for a moment, saying no word, breathing hard, staring at each other with dumb eyes, their bare chests rising and falling, showing their ribs. Others came soon after them, slowing up as they neared the lock. A few fell prone. A few flopped on the wooden seats.

Ryan counted them. It was an easy task. More men arrived coming, one by one, some reeling, some falling and getting up again, one sobbing, another with his tongue out like a tired dog's.

"Let's go," a mucker shouted. "She's flooding, Bill. Close the door, and let's get through."

"We'll wait for the rest of them," Ryan said.

A tall figure loomed in the fog, zigzagging. He fainted as he reached the lock, and a Negro pulled him inside.

They listened for footsteps. They heard nothing but the dull boom of the air still rushing into the heading.

"For God's sake, let's get out of here," men cried.

"Are you going to drown us all?"

"Take us through! Take us through!"

"Jumbo's not here," Ryan said. "We'll wait for Jumbo."

The heading boss is always the last man to leave. He would be the last to arrive. Ryan counted the men again.

There were twenty-five. Twenty-five out of thirty. Where were the other five?

"He's dead," a voice cried. "Jumbo's dead. Must we wait for a dead man."

Bill Ryan picked up a wrench, and it was plain to every one that he'd brain the first man who touched the door.

The river came, splashing and foaming. A trickle ran into the lock. A mucker screamed and began to beat on the concrete floor with his bare hands. A wave doused him. He jumped up on a seat, and screamed.

Hands grasped the door. Bill took a limping step, brandishing the wrench, in his eyes a threat of death more certain than the river. The men fell back.

"Jumbo," Ryan yelled, staring into the fog and the wind and the rising water. "Hey, Jumbo!"

There was no answer. The old man shook his head. It would soon be too late to close the door. He dropped his wrench and nodded to the men.

AT first Shocker thought he was dreaming. It was so dark! But the coldness of the water convinced him he was awake. But where was he? In some terrible surf? No surf could be so violent. No sky could be so black.

The water was rushing him somewhere with bedlam fury. He couldn't escape from it. He was doomed. It was all about him, churning, roaring, stirred with a devil's spoon. It made him choke and sputter and gasp. It half-drowned him. It pitched him, tossed him, pounded him, twisted him, wrenched him. It crashed him against boards, and bales of hay. It jabbed him with whirling, spinning, crazy oaken beams. It frightened him.

But it was the darkness that made him feel terror. It hurt his eyeballs worse than the stinking salty water. He shut his eyes to keep it out. "I'm in some underground stream," he thought. "I'm being washed into the sea." He could not conceive how he had come here, what he had been doing before he woke.

The water flung him, smashed him against something solid. He screamed with the pain in his right shoulder. His arm hung useless at his side. With his left hand he reached out, blindly, wildly, clutching. At what? A rock? The ribs of a ship? It was iron. It was an iron flange.

The water pulled at him, beat at him, washed over him, strangled him, but it could not break his hold. "Jumbo!" he shouted. "Jumbo!" He could not hear his own voice.

The surge ceased after a time—when the water had reached the bulkhead that contained the locks. There was a backward eddy, a whirlpool that roared and hissed and screamed.

Boards, broken planks, bits of boxes, beams, bales of hay, and burlap sacks went spinning around him in a frenzied dizzy circle. He couldn't see them—but he could feel them. His legs were battered and thumped and numbed.

He raised his right arm, shrieking with agony. He made it grip the iron flange, above his left hand. He began to climb, slowly, painfully, ascending an arch toward the curved top of the tunnel.

The water climbed after him, climbed fast, much faster than he. It climbed up his legs, up his waist, over his chest. It reached his neck. "There's one chance in a million," he thought as he climbed.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.


MEN of DARING
A FLYING SOLDIER
by STOOKIE ALLEN
BORN AT EVANSTON, ILL., 1896, KERWOOD IS A DESCENDANT OF GENERAL "MAD ANTHONY" WAYNE. HAVING GRADUATED FROM WESTERN MILITARY ACADEMY, HE BECAME A SPECIAL STUDENT AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY AND UNIVERSITY OF GRENOBLE, FRANCE. IN 1916 HE SAW SERVICE IN THE FRENCH FOREIGN LEGION AND LATER TRANSFERRED TO THE LAFAYETTE ESCADRILLE.
COL. CHARLES WAYNE KERWOOD
TWICE WOUNDED IN AERIAL COMBAT, AND LATER SHOT DOWN IN FLAMES AND TAKEN PRISONER, HE MADE REPEATED EFFORTS TO ESCAPE, CREATING SO MUCH DISSENSION AMONGST GERMAN OFFICERS THAT THE LAST 6 WEEKS WERE SPENT IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT. AFTER THE ARMISTICE HE WAS THE FIRST RELEASED, AND WAS PRACTICALLY CHASED ACROSS THE BORDER INTO FRANCE!
IN 1919 HE DEMONSTRATED A NEW FIRE PROOF AIRPLANE FABRIC BY SOAKING THE PLANE IN GASOLINE, SETTING FIRE TO IT, THEN FLYING THE MASS, BEING ENCASED IN AN ASBESTOS SUIT.
AS COMMANDER OF THE ROYAL GREEK AIR SERVICE HE FOUGHT IN THE WAR AGAINST TURKEY IN 1921. THEN HE REPRESENTED THE GREEK GOVERNMENT IN VARIOUS DIPLOMATIC CAPACITIES.

Next Week: Frank Hamer, Manhunter

They screamed as they fought

The Murders on the Range

By PAUL ANNIXTER

O'Leary, the four-footed hurricane, didn't really want to turn renegade—it was just that he got in with bad company

THE fight was not of O'Leary's seeking. He had been moving down toward the lower pasture that morning as was his wont, with nothing but friendliness in his heart or eyes. At the little stream he had stopped to drink, and as he stood knee-deep in the current, the cool water dripping from his big jaws, a muffled bray of sheer well-being escaped him. And up on the hill across the stream Stawano, the big spotted gray stallion, had heard it and came prancing toward the sound.

O'Leary dimly sensed what was coming, but it never entered his thick jug head to flee. He felt no anger nor hatred for the oncoming stallion; certainly he was not nervous. Nerves had been left out of the recipe when the mule tribe was planned. He wanted only to drink his fill and wade into the stream to stand awhile in the cool water and let his gaunt fiddle-shaped head hang in the dull, phlegmatic bliss of his kind. But now he must wait and see what all this blowing and stamping was about. Raising his head he stared mildly across the stream, waiting a definite move from the raging beast on the opposite bank.

The old brown mule was one of a

powerful team that had been hauling heavy pipe and machinery out to the Pipestone Ranch from the distant railway siding for the past week. When his team-mate had gotten a leg fractured three days before, O'Leary had been turned loose to graze back of the ranch buildings till further needed. For three days, therefore, he had loafed insolently in the shade, lain in the dust and rolled, and gorged on the rich spring feeding of the prairie. No one on the ranch had paid any attention to the clumsy, slab-sided old tough. Outside of the bearing of heavy burdens and such brutish toil as would quickly kill off a horse, he had no sphere in the scene of things.

BUT he was noticed now with a vengeance. Alien though the sound was, there had been a distinctly masculine note in that chance bray of his, which Stawano the spotted stallion could not overlook. Leaving the seraglio with which he had been feeding, he came stamping and blowing down to the stream's edge, eyes rolling white with a threat of mortal combat.

He was a splendid brute, fourteen hands high, with a broad curving back, neck and shoulders arched and swollen with fat and muscle, yet there was a catlike spring and litheness to his movements due to the wonderful conformity of his muscles. His neigh had a chesty, pitiless note in it as he halted at the top of the bank to gaze; the lust to kill that his lordship might not be questioned. Hitherto he had been irresistible.

As he plunged arrogantly into the water a cluster of curious mares appeared and bunched on the bank above to watch. O'Leary raised his fiddle-face, jaws dripping, and seemed to grin—the leery, toothy sort of grin peculiar to mules. It was this that had given him his name on the ranch. "Cussed if he don't look just like O'Leary," said Chuck McAndrews one day, and it was true. O'Leary had been a dull-witted herder, all muscle and no brains, who'd been the butt of the bunk house. Every time the boys had wanted anything done they'd call O'Leary, and O'Leary hadn't known any more than to do every one's odd jobs for them. The old mule with his grin of an Irish vandal was a deal like that himself—stupid, amiable, muscle-bound with his own power.

As the stallion came splashing across the stream, O'Leary showed up lean compared to him, but much of that difference was to his advantage. Where Stawano carried the padding of ease and good living, O'Leary was flat and slab-muscled, and those muscles had the ingrained fiber of a beast which toils ten hours a day and is hard to the very ligaments. Little of grace or beauty there, but every line spelled strength. No flaring or quivering of overstrung nerves. A blasé, almost insulting nonchalance was in the old mule's attitude; however, as the stallion drew close the long, tattered ears began to point backward and the lower lip hung down. A light had come into the whitish eyes that said that nothing, not even an elephant, would ever put O'Leary to flight.

Ten feet away the stallion stopped dead and neighed another imperious challenge. And O'Leary, drawing back his lips from a set of terrible, traplike teeth, answered with a hoarse bray, the belligerence of which could not be mistaken. The bluff and punctilio of the game over, the stallion came in suddenly with a clatter of hoofs on rock, a rearing, slashing charge that was

meant to polish off the old mule on the spot.

O'Leary was not found wanting. His great rangy body had slewed swiftly aside as Stawano reared and struck. The stallion's slashing hoofs glanced down his shoulder. In the same instant O'Leary's huge mouth, with its long white teeth, opened to its fullest extent and his long head shot sidewise and in at the stallion's throat.

Had that thrust reached home the battle would have ended right there. As it was, the stallion ducked his head.

O'Leary's big teeth closed upon his ear and ground it to a bleeding rag before Stawano, pivoting aside, let O'Leary have both his heels in the ribs with a force that would have ended the fight on the other score had O'Leary been a horse. With this preliminary, both fighters wheeled warily to face one another again, and as they did so the fury in the stallion's eyes was equalled by the fury in the eyes of the mule, and Stawano had no longer to press the battle. O'Leary was bringing it to him.

THE stallion was a seasoned fighter and a killer, but he grew cautious at once and a bit bewildered at the tactics of this enemy. Warily he circled and O'Leary circled with him and the battle that was to change the old mule's life and change the whole tenor of life on the ranch began in earnest.

The fighting of horses is a nerve-rending, fear-inspiring spectacle, utterly different from the battles of other beasts. Almost human it is, in its fiery emotion, wholly demoniacal in its obsession. Back and forth and round and round on the dry stream bank the great beasts whirled, bucked, pranced, and crow-hopped, stirring up clouds of alkali dust beneath them, while the sun blazed down on them and the stallion's watching harem milled and whickered above. They upreared like men to strike with bludgeoning hoofs; their long heads, with ears laid flat, thrust and struck like the heads of serpents, black lips drawn back in terrible white-toothed grins. And the sounds that arose were beyond description—whistlings, bawls, grunts and insensate screams.

In the first half minute it was evident that the fighters were well matched—horribly well matched. What the stallion had over O'Leary in actual bulk the latter made up for in toughness and stamina, and topped at close quarters with his terrible length the strength of jaws—jaws which snapped like a crocodile's, with a gape no horse could equal. In the next five minutes he gave a demonstration of what a grim and terrible fighting machine a mule can be. Each time the battlers came together he reared and thrust downward with clashing teeth, his objective the stallion's throat.

Instinctively he had reverted to mouth-fighting tactics.

O'Leary's sire had been a fierce old Spanish jack with a long record as a killer, and it was his blood that was uppermost in the old mule now. But Stawano was not to be caught. The sight of that cavernous mouth had made the stallion nervous. He changed his tactics, and instead of continuing to rear and strike he pivoted again and again to drum both hind hoofs with terrific force against the old mule's ribs.

Again and again it seemed that the stallion must surely win, with his superior weight. Avoiding the mule's clashing teeth by a matter of inches,

Stawano strove to ride O'Leary down from the side or rear and stamp and kick him to death.

But two could play at that kicking game. Ears flat to his skull, O'Leary swapped ends with a snap at the exact right moment and got in two terrific broadsides with both rear hoofs on the stallion's middle. Now the kick of any mule is heavy ordnance compared to that of a horse. It begins somewhere forward near the shoulders and unwinds with a complete swivel and follow-through motion, to say nothing of top-spin and English in the case of a good healthy specimen. O'Leary was healthy. Furthermore, his feet were iron-shod for draft work.

The stallion, in the act of rearing, went down with a rib-cracking thud and as he regained his feet, O'Leary climbed his hind quarters and got a jawhold on his withers. A horse would have let go in a moment in sheer emotional frenzy, but O'Leary, being a mule, hung on, despite a barrage of vicious kicks, sagacity gleaming every instant through the fire of his eyes. Finally the stallion bucked him off and fled round and round in a great circle, his glossy coat streaked with red.

O'Leary followed him in reverse gear, so to speak, kicking all the while, a diabolical trick mules have.

It was a chastened but brutalized stallion that plunged away into the mesquite a few minutes later with O'Leary at his heels at a lumbering gallop. Stawano was ripped and bloody and breathing heavily; he had three broken ribs and limped as he ran, and his fighting spirit was well nigh crushed. In the score or more fights in which he had been victorious he had never been so thoroughly chastised. O'Leary's jaws and chest were red, but the blood was not his own. He was still practically unscarred.

JUST before twilight, Chuck McAndrews came riding down stream from the ranch house. He was looking for O'Leary, who was needed for further menial toil next day. What he found was his best stallion standing under a tree with hanging head, red and hardly recognizable, with a half dozen frightened mares cutting nervous circles about him. Ripping out an oath, Chuck dismounted to examine the stallion and spell out the story of the gouged and trampled ground near by.

"There ain't a critter on my range tough enough to have done this job," he pronounced definitely. "Whatever animal done it is a plain man-eater and no mistake."

A tingle ran along McAndrews' spine at sight of the stallion's terrible wounds. None of them could have been the work of either a panther or wolves, he decided. They were the marks of a pair of powerful equine jaws. In one spot those jaws had closed over the stallion's entire shoulder, a spread no horse's mouth could compass. Nothing but a fighting jack had such tactics, Chuck knew, unless— The idea of O'Leary suddenly entered his head, but he couldn't credit the idea.

Then, as he stood looking about him, there came from the distant hills to the east a horse, discordant braying, for all the world like a burst of uncouth, jeering laughter. McAndrews ran up a slight rise of ground and half a mile away he saw O'Leary standing on a distant hill. As he looked, the old mule started away toward the east at a heavy lumbering trot and disappeared.

"Geezely Christmas!" muttered

Chuck wrathfully. "So it's you that's gone on a bender, is it? Don't worry, I'll have my twine on you inside of twenty-four hours. I'll truss you up like a bale of hay and whale the lights out of you with the stock whip for this."

O'Leary, however, had a new idea of his own on his employer and the labor problem. The singular is used advisedly, for O'Leary had had only two or three ideas in his life. Nature had endowed him with a one-way brain that went into action with the clumsy determination of an army tank, and the only way to derail his train of thought, once started, was to lay O'Leary out and stake him down. Like many a poor palooka dulled by toil and monotony, O'Leary had never dreamed what was in him until this afternoon, when the stallion had brought a battle to him. Through all his thirty-two years he had toiled unceasingly and never sown a wild oat.

But with his swift and signal routing of the stallion something had turned over suddenly in the brain of the old draft drudge, and riding the wave of that hot new impulse he had decided to throw off definitely the yoke of his servitude, and never do another stroke of work as long as he lived—particularly along the hauling line. Toward this end, therefore, he was heading at a gallop for the timbered Santa Rita foothills which bounded the Pipestone Ranch on the south and the east.

He arrived at a range fence about sundown, a straggling, barbed wire affair meant to keep the Pipestone stock from straying and getting bogged down in the bottomless tule marshes that ran along the foot of the scrub-timbered hills beyond. O'Leary skirted the barrier for a minute or two, then came to a stiff-legged stop beside the wires, sniffed, turned white-eyed, slewed round and let loose a broadside at a weather-weakened post. The post snapped short off and the one next to it leaned drunkenly under the shock. The wires sagged almost to the ground and O'Leary clambered over them and passed on into a new chapter of his life.

IT was a strange place, that back country of the Santa Ritas, scene of the last stand of the buffalo of the region; haunt of wolves and bobcats and sparse bands of pronghorn. A few bunches of wild horses and some fierce, lank, long-horned steers strayed from far distant parts and hopefully called "range cattle" make it their home.

Somehow O'Leary found safe passage through the tules, and darkness found him resting near a springhole in a brush-grown cañon.

The Dipper was pointing to midnight when three wary old lobo wolves scented the newcomer and O'Leary learned another lesson about himself and the wild life. Head hanging, jaw foolishly a-sag, O'Leary had lapsed into what passed with him for sleep, when the wolves swept silently down from the hills and surrounded him. For a space they circled, watching for a chance to hamstring, and O'Leary, still tangled in the arms of Morpheus, circled to face them, snoring through his broad mealy nose, tell-tale ears flat.

Then, with a clatter of hoofs, he was in among them. They scattered and dodged, trying to make play of him as they would with an old horse, but the mule was a whirlwind of hoofs, teeth and glaring eyes. He stretched out at a gallop, his fierce teeth snapping like traps at the flanks of one, while a

battering forehoof slashed simultaneously at another in the opposite direction. Those hoofs of his were surefooted on the hardest, smoothest rocks, for that was one of the gifts of his kind.

He overran one of the skulkers, cornered him in a cranny of rock; the great teeth snapped, and O'Leary shook and tore the life out of the killer, to the accompaniment of choking howls, thuds and the dull crack of bones. As the brute happened to be the moving spirit of the trio, the sight broke the morale of the other two, who slunk away.

For the second time that day the old mule lifted his head in a muffled bray of triumph.

Great transformations had taken place in him since morning, and were continuing apace. Even his mien was changed, the dull somnambulent look of the draft animal being supplanted by a villainous leer that brooked no trifling.

Everything he had done since his clash with Stawano had been strange as a dream. He hadn't dreamed he could best an arrogant brute like the stallion, nor kill a wolf, yet the manner of dealing with them had come to him instantly. Long buried instincts, dulled by a life in man's keeping, were beginning to function. All afternoon twitchings in his ears had been telling him things; his nose had taken control of his brain and the chill spare odors wafting down from the heights were opening for him an unlearned but open book.

The fierce untamable spirit of his sire was coming to life in him, and all at once he felt that with his iron hoofs, his strength and weight and that growing sagacity within him, he was more than a match for any beast in all that country, and he wanted only to prove it.

A WEEK had passed and Chuck McAndrews had been unable to make good his threat. The renegade O'Leary still ran loose. He had broken through the line fence and disappeared into the wasteland of the Santa Ritas and he had written his name in red across the countryside. McAndrews and two riders had gone forth the first day with nothing but their ropes. The second day they carried ropes and guns and tracking had been superfluous. Buzzards funneling heavily upward or downward on tattered wings led them on their way.

The first day they had come upon the body of a slain wolf, chewed and trampled almost beyond recognition. Later they had found the remains of a flea-bitten black-and-white wild stallion, an old-timer on the range, well known to the ranchers as the lord of a little band of woolly-haired broomtails that roamed the hills. His throat had been torn out by a single bite, and there were no other scars or teeth marks upon him such as would have been the case had he battled another stallion to the death. The thing seemed incredible, yet the evidence pointed directly to O'Leary.

"First I ever hear of a mule turnin' that vicious," said Jake Marden. "He'll be eatin' one of us next."

"Not me," said Slim Coe. "From now on I'm fannin' forty-fives instead of leather with that old battle-ax."

On the fourth day they found the broken, trampled body of a big wild cat that had disputed the ownership of a cañon with O'Leary, or a devil—it was hard to say which. And that night as they turned homeward they came upon three mares bogged down and

floundering in the tules. They bore the Pipestone brand, and the signs of the trail said they had been stampeded through the gap in the line fence. Mule tracks were plain in the vicinity. O'Leary, to all intents and purposes, was trying to collect himself a harem!

But the crowning touch came when the men rode home Saturday night. They met Bill Delaney, who owned the ranch on the western side of the Ritas, just leaving Chuck McAndrews's office. Delaney had reported that some animal from the Pipestone Ranch had broken through his line fence and killed one of his best stallions and he had come to collect damages.

That night at the ranch house, Chuck McAndrews had all the boys in on the linoleum and it was decidedly no place for women and children. "Get out your clothes-lines an' rockin' horses an' bring in that mule!" was the gist of a sulphurous harangue from the boss. "He's cost me near five hundred dollars already. I'll give a month's pay to any two of you waddies that bring him in. But don't hurt him none," he warned. "Be right gentle an' Molly-like with him, 'cause I aim to do the hurtin' personal."

So the punchers rode out to the Ritas in force next day, but it was three days more before their quest was ended. They trailed O'Leary daily by his big but narrow tracks, through rocky hills and tules, but a phenomenal luck seemed playing with the old reprobate. He kept constantly on the move; indeed, he seemed able to manifest simultaneously in two or three different localities miles apart, according to the signs of the trail. Twice they sighted him in the distance, but it was too near dark to effect a capture. The second time the riders swore he had been squiring a band of wild mares.

The boss broke out in another fit of cussing when he heard.

"A mule herdin' a bunch of mares! Expect me to believe that?" he snorted. "This thing's got me plumb cholera-morbussed."

The third day a heavy squall of rain blew up and played into the renegade's hands. But that afternoon two riders came upon O'Leary quite unexpectedly in a rocky cañon that had no egress at its head. The old mule was alone this day, and, queerly enough, showed little savagery or frenzy to escape. His untrained proletarian tendencies had evidently been his undoing. Though he had become nose-minded and sharp of senses, he had fed to capacity daily since his escape and all but foundered himself on water. His girth had increased a good seven inches.

"So them mares called your bluff, did they, you big bum!" snorted Slim Coe.

THE riders ran him to the cañon head, where he swerved to cut back, but two ropes sang; two hondos hissed. A twang of tautened lariats and the old mule went down with a thud. Five minutes later his four feet had been bunched and trussed and a stout new halter was on his head. The riders looked him over critically and examined his several wounds. 'Leary had learned much and seen much on his bender into the hills. Had he been able to impart some of his knowledge at that particular time this story might not have been written.

Three punchers hazed O'Leary homeward that evening. He fought some, but there was a rope attached to each side of his halter and one of the men rode behind with a whip. Chuck McAndrews gave a wild Indian yell when he saw the culprit coming. He

had O'Leary driven into a stout narrow corral boarded seven feet high. O'Leary went to work diligently to kick his way out of it, but McAndrews dissuaded him with a stock whip. Then the boss mounted the high fence, rolled up his sleeves and began dealing out O'Leary the whaling of his life, while the hands stood by, approving.

In the midst of these operations a rider was seen loping up to the ranch house in a cloud of dust. It was Joe Cannery, sage brush solon, from over San Dimas way, and he was wearing his best five-gallon hat. The boys cut loose with a whoop at sight of that, for every one knew that Joe rode forth with that particular headpiece but once a year—during local rodeo week, over which Joe presided as master of ceremonies. Cannery sat his mount for a minute or two while the hands explained the why and wherefore of the ruckus.

"So he's turned murderer, has he? Why not tunnel him with a bullet an' be done with the pest?" Cannery wanted to know when Chuck let up for a space.

"Quick killin' is too good for him," Chuck said wrathfully. "Got to work my bile out of him direct, after the way he's treated me. I tell you he ain't no ordinary mule; he's a cross between a tarantula and an ingrowed toe-nail!"

"Reg'lar battlin' fool, you say." Cannery stroked his chin. "I wonder now would he fight a grizzly bear?"

"The blamed old fool would fight a litter of devils."

"Seein' you're plumb set on makin' him die hard, I got a proposition to put to you," Cannery said. "The Mackay boys over beyond Saltus has trapped them a cattle-stealin' grizzly in the hills which they're bringin' him in to show him off at the rodeo next Monday. The boys have been talkin' of puttin' on a show for the folks by pittin' that grizzly against some other critter that'd give him a tough fight—a bull, maybe. It'd be a big drawin' card, which is what is needed this year—times bein' so stricken hard. If this old puddle-jumper of yours is the fighter you say he is he'd just answer the ticket. The association'd buy him off you an' give him the fight of his life—"

Enthusiasm swept the punchers as they saw the point. Chuck McAndrews descended from the fence. He was not cruel as outdoor men go, but the idea appealed to him. O'Leary had been found guilty of murder on the range, and hence he had condemned himself, for that was the inexorable rule of the cattle country. Besides, there was little enough amusement in that sparsely settled country, and men clutched avidly at anything to break the monotony.

A few minutes' talk settled the matter, and O'Leary, the old mule, was condemned, like a human murderer might have been, to a bloody death in the arena.

"You'll get your money outa the old cuss an' the satisfaction of seein' him bite the dust, too," said Cannery.

"I bet he'll choke the grizzly," said Jake Marden.

"Which I'll go along back an' spread the news," Cannery grinned. "You have him in town early Monday morning. We'll have the biggest turn-out in years. And that reminds me—how many of you waddies are out for peelin' honors this season?"

FOR the next three days O'Leary was treated with exaggerated care by Chuck McAndrews. The attention of the entire ranch became

focussed upon him. He was given a special stall in the great horse barn, where the most valuable of all the Pipestone stock were housed for safe keeping, and he was fed on hay and ground oats to build up his strength for the coming ordeal. Enthusiasm mounted in the punchers over the battle. Rodeo time was the event of the year; and this year it was to be marked by a tableau the like of which none had ever seen. Numbers of private bets had already been made, the odds running high in most cases in favor of the grizzly.

Sunday night came around and O'Leary, knowing nothing of the cruel fate in store, lay down in his stall for his last rest on the Pipestone Ranch, and in all probability his last in this world. The past few days had mollified the old mule and resigned him to his new lot. No further toil had been exacted from him and the rich feeding and long hours of sleep had dimmed the call of the wild that had flared up within him.

All the punchers had turned in early that night to be on the trail to San Dimas and the rodeo early next morning. In his stall, O'Leary also slept, waking now and then for another mouthful of hay, as was his habit. Gradually night and silence took over the ranch, the stillness broken only by the faint squeaking of the upper half of the barn door, left open for air, and the occasional thin squall of a coyote, the tocsin of the range country.

It must have been well on toward dawn, for the moon was low and the stars were paling, when sudden sounds awakened O'Leary. His head raised and his big ears went up. From the direction of the open prairie came the clicking of hoofs; then a frightened milling of horses in the corral without. The hoof beats changed to a pounding gallop; there was a splintering of wooden bars and a cry of agony, half bleat, half scream, that ended in a choking gurgle.

A snoring sound came from O'Leary as if in answer to that cry, for to his broad wet nostrils had come an acrid scent he knew. Through the welted darkness of the great barn frightened whinnies and stampings arose from the fifty odd colts and mares. The tumult without ceased abruptly with a final gurgling sound; then the night was shattered by a hoarse, discordant challenge—the broken bray of a Spanish jack. O'Leary reared upward in a mixture of panic and fury, and the rope attached to his headstall snapped short.

He was out lumbering up and down the broad space between the stalls when a nightmarish form took sudden shape in the square of gray above the closed half of the barn door—the marauding killer jack, ears laid flat to his skull, nostrils flaring, eyes showing white in the faint filter of moonlight. O'Leary, as it happened, knew the creature, a murderous runaway from far distant parts that had been running wild for two weeks in the untenanted Santa Rita hills. That fact was O'Leary's secret alone, no one on the Pipestone Ranch having had a suspicion of the brute's being in the vicinity. The old mule had contacted the jack one night pursuing a band of wild mares, and had had to put up a running fight for his life for over a mile. Only the adroit use of his battering, iron-shod hoofs had saved him from the sex-mad killer.

LIMNED in the faint moonshine, the jack stood for a moment, glaring into the swathing darkness of the barn. He might have turned away to

the corral again had not a low, chesty note come just then from Stawano, the big stallion, fastened in his box still at the far end of the barn. At the sound the jack reared snorting against the door, smashing it inward, and with a muffled bray, half scream, plunged into the dark interior. A frenzied young mare, broken loose from her fastenings, lashed out at the intruder with both heels as he passed, and there was another agonized scream in the darkness as the jack sank his great teeth in her neck.

Then he hurled himself against the heavy box stall within which Stawano was pitching and kicking the boards to splinters.

Frenzy swept O'Leary, backed quivering between the long feed rack and the wall. Instinct urged him to flee and escape from a death he knew too well, but as he bolted for the open door the killer wheeled upon him, and once more O'Leary found himself fighting for life against a creature he would never have attacked himself, but which was wantonly and brutally trying to kill him. And once more a stubborn fighting fury rose in him and he was not found wanting.

They will show you to-day on the Pipestone Ranch where a great upright timber nearly the size of a man's body was broken off under the impact of the fighters' bodies, and the deep cuts and gouges along the barn wall, made by raking, pounding hoofs. All stockmen will tell you that a horse is no match for a fighting jack, who is a murderer, pure and simple, whose tactics are those of a bulldog and whose great teeth once they have secured a killing grip, grind in and chew until its adversary is dead. Only one of the mule tribe, to whom mouth fighting is second nature, could have stood up more than a minute under that murderous assault. But O'Leary had already had a sample of his opponent's terrible teeth. His battle, therefore, was a desperate defensive of rapid-fire footwork, in which he brought to bear all the indomitable tenacity and endurance of the wild ass whose blood is the original fount of the mule tribe, and the fine strength and courage of the horse that was in him.

Back and forth the length of the barn, and over the body of the dead mare, the battle raged. The men who came running from the house thought that Stawano must be fighting another stallion. The tumult of the frenzied horses in the darkness added to the terrifying bedlam.

Then lanterns were brought and the men were thunderstruck at what they saw.

"A wild jack!" yelled Chuck McAndrews. "Get the rifles, men. There'll be a reg'lar shambles in there."

The guns were brought on the run, but their only need was in the interest of mercy. In that final minute of the fight, the jack had cornered O'Leary in a stall. Having already killed twice, the beast was mad with bloodlust. In the dim light of the lanterns no consecutive action could be seen by the clustered men in the doorway; only a whirling, pitching blur of rage and fury incarnate. Then they made out that the jack had climbed O'Leary's back, his jaws locked in the old mule's neck.

O'Leary's lips drew back from his big teeth and they heard him actually snarl as he cut loose broadside after broadside on the killer's legs and midriff, the impact of the kicks resounding like a wet drum. The jack brayed, then the bray turned to a scream as O'Leary bucked him loose. Then the murderer

was pitching and spinning in the center of the barn like a chicken with its head off.

When the boss had put a bullet through his jug head it was found that O'Leary's iron-shod hoofs had fractured his left hind leg and broken his massive lower jaw, and to this day the Pipestone punchers all claim that the old mule would have finished killing the jack himself in another minute, without the aid of a rifle. For O'Leary was still on his feet when the commotion was over, weak and spread-legged from the red draining of many wounds, but still threatening.

An hour later, his wounds washed in sheep dip in the growing dawn light, O'Leary lay at ease on the straw in his stall. Jake Marden and the boss had saddled up and gone forth on a little round of reconnoitering. They had followed the jack's back trail straight out to the Santa Rita hills.

"It's all plain now," said Chuck McAndrews, as they turned back from the tules. "That jack's broke loose from some ranch and he's been runnin' hog-wild in the hills for weeks, tryin' to round him up a harem. It's him that killed them stallions an' shagged our mares into the tules, and you dumb doorbells have been blamin' it on our mule. Which I'm glad to clear that point up, though, 'cause if a mule of mine ever went to killin' an' carryin' on thataway with respectable fillies, I'd turn my ranch into a golf links an' we'd all go herdin' the little white balls with out blessed pants cut off at the knee!"

"Boss, what about the rodeo?" Jake put in, in a still, small voice.

"No money's changed hands yet," said Chuck. "You boys can fork your Dollys in to town and tell Cannery that no head o' my stock goes into no pit with a grizzly to-day, an' if he don't like it tell him he can go in again' the b'ar himself. No, sir, that's been a mighty maul-treated mule of our'n, to date, but his luck's sure turned now. He's goin' to have the freedom of my place from now on, an' when he dies the coroner's goin' to have to report either old age or a bad case of gout."

THE END

Bears Still on the Gold Standard

ALTHOUGH nations may go off the gold standard, some of the bears inhabiting the wilds of Alaska seem inclined toward hoarding the precious metal.

A professor of the University of Michigan was examining some Yukon bear hides in search of animal parasites and among the fleas and larvæ of numerous ticks and lice he discovered the gleam of gold. Carefully combing out the hides, the professor "panned" the pay-dirt and was astonished at the gold dust revealed.

It is supposed the bears disporting in some hidden Alaskan stream might have rolled in the gold-bearing sands, their thick fur picking up the precious dust that the old sourdough prospectors have sought so diligently for many years.

J. Walter Briggs.

STRANGER *than* FICTION

By JOHN S. STUART

NIGERIAN GREETING

IN most civilized countries, men make a slight bow and tip their hats when they meet an acquaintance. In Nigeria, this mark of deference is shown in a different way. When a young man meets an elder, he takes off his shoes and sits on his heels, to show his veneration for the older man.

HOME-RUN MOSQUITOES

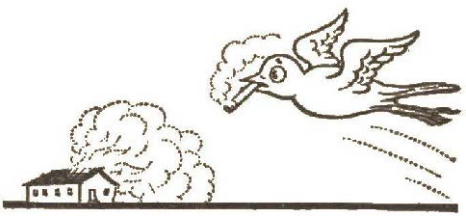
A BASEBALL game in Anaconda, Montana, was declared finished after the fifth inning recently. The mosquitoes were so numerous that neither players nor audience were anxious to stay. To add insult to injury, motorists found the road entirely covered with toads!

CLIMBERS!

IN 1313, the English were holding Holyrood Castle, in Edinburgh, and the Scots were anxious to recapture it. Legend tells us that Queen Margaret had painted on the wall of her chapel the picture of a man scaling the rock, below it the inscription "*Gardez vous, Francois!*" Whether they had in mind the idea of making the inscription come true or not, the Scots got hold of a man by the name of Francis, who had been a member of the garrison when the Scots previously held the castle, to lead them in scaling the rock. Then they took the castle. Francis, as it happened, had got his experience in climbing when he had broken bounds to go sweet-hearting with the village maidens!

FROM THE SOLID ROCK

ONE of the mysteries of Easter Island is the method used by the geniuses who carved the huge stone images on the island. The ancient inhabitants possessed no metal; their tools were but crude, weak implements of volcanic glass and rock. The statues were quarried from the compressed volcanic ash of Mount Rano Raraku. The features and upper outlines were roughed out, and the work was carried down in grooves or trenches beside the figure. Then the statue was carved out underneath, much as a boat rests on her keel, until finally the last ridge was shorn away and the statue propped up on stones. Then it was erected or transported elsewhere on the island.

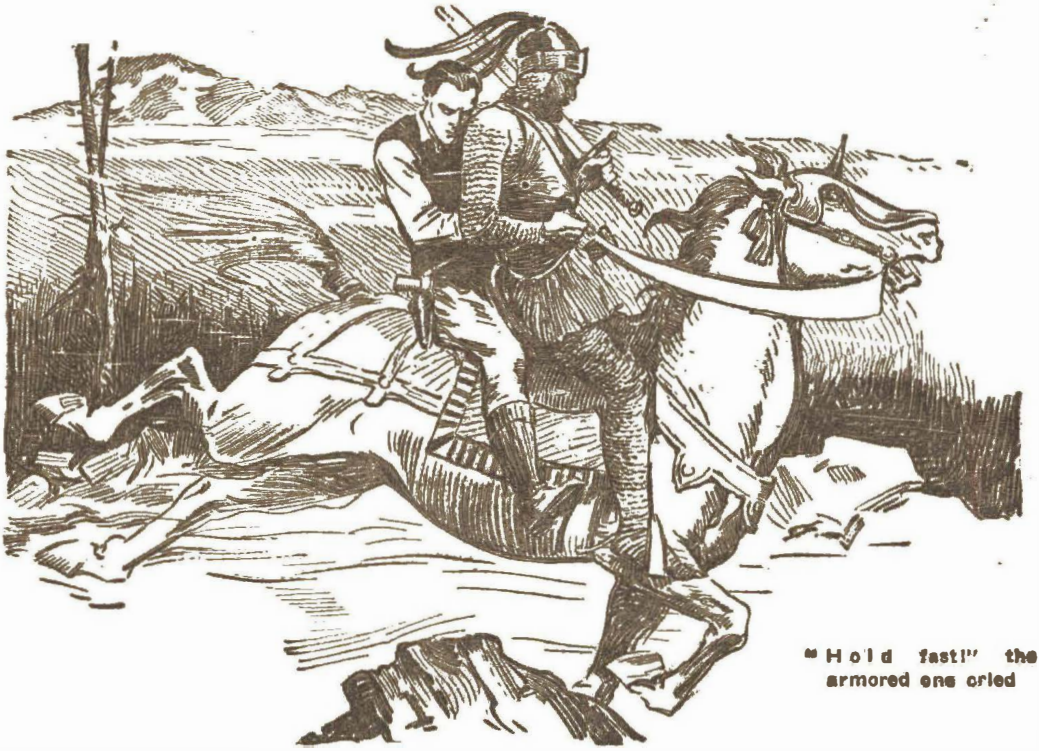


THE DANGEROUS SNIPE

FIRES have been traced recently to birds. The birds pick up smoldering cigarette butts from the street, and carry them off to their nests—in the eaves of buildings or warehouses—with dangerous and disastrous results.

THE KING SITS ON A STONE

THE Coronation Chair where the Kings of England sit to be crowned, has a huge stone immediately under the wooden seat. This Stone—or Scone—was used by the Scottish kings at Coronation, and was brought to England by Edward I in 1296. The Coronation Chair is in Westminster Abbey.



"Hold fast!" the armored one cried

Creep, Shadow!

By A. MERRITT

Modern science—and faith—face a showdown with the black arts

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

HAD Dr. Rene de Keradel, European brain specialist, and his beautiful daughter, the Demoiselle Dahut d'Ys de Keradel, mastered the secrets of the supernatural, of black magic? Alan Caranac, young New Yorker, was inclined to scoff at this notion at first, but in the struggle which ensued between himself and the de Keradels, he came to believe that they were masters of modern witchcraft.

Alan met them after his friend, Dick Ralston, committed suicide. The Demoiselle freely admitted that she had caused Ralston to take his own life by sending shadows to torment him. Her ability to control these shadows was clearly demonstrated to Alan when the Demoiselle inflicted a shadow on Alan's friend, Dr. Bill Bennett, who was also fighting the de Keradels. Alan was in love with Helen, Bill's sister.

Alan bargained with the Demoiselle. He agreed to pay a visit to the de Keradel estate on the shore of Rhode Island, provided she would recall the shadow that was tormenting Bill.

Before going, Alan perfected plans with McCann, an underworld character and friend of Dr. Lowell, one of Bill's associates, for McCann and his henchmen to watch the walled estate, and come to Alan's aid if he got into trouble.

At the de Keradel place, Alan saw and participated in weird sacrificial rituals. When he attempted to communicate with McCann, the Demoiselle tracked him down

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with shadow dogs and changed him into a shadow. Alan is telling the story.

CHAPTER XIX.

"CREEP, SHADOW!"

THERE was no feeling in my body, but my mind was awake and alert. It was as though I had no body. The icy venom from the fangs of the shadow hounds still numbed me, I thought. But it had cleared from my brain. I could see and I could hear.

All that I could see was a green twilight, as though I lay deep in some ocean abyss looking upward through immense spaces of motionless, crystal-clear green water. I floated deep within this motionless sea, yet I could hear, far above me, its waves whispering and singing.

I began to rise, floating up through the depths toward the whispering, singing waves. Their voices became clearer. They were singing a strange old song, a sea-song old before ever man was... singing it to the measured chime of tiny bells struck slowly far beneath the sea...to measured tap, tap, tap on drums of red royal coral deep beneath the sea...to chords struck softly on harps of sea-fans whose strings were mauve and violet and crocus yellow.

Up I floated, and up, until song and drum-beat, chimes and sighing harp chords blended into one—

The voice of Dahut.

She was close to me, and she was singing, but I could not see her. I could see nothing but the green twilight, and that was fast darkening. Sweet was her voice and pitiless, and wordless was her song except for its burden...

"Creep, Shadow! Thirst, Shadow! Hunger, Shadow! Creep, Shadow—creep!"

I strove to speak and could not; strove to move and could not. And still her song went on...only its burden plain.

"Creep, Shadow! Hunger, Shadow...feed only where and when I bid you! Thirst, Shadow...drink only where and when I bid you! Creep, Shadow...creep!"

Suddenly I felt my body. First as a tingling, then as a leaden weight, and then as a wrenching agony. I was out of my body. It lay upon a wide, low bed in a tapestried room filled with rosy light. The light did not penetrate the space in which *I* was, crouching at my body's feet. On my body's face were three crimson welts, the marks of Dahut's whip, and Dahut stood at my body's head, naked, two thick braids of her pale gold hair crossed between white breasts. I knew that my body was not dead, but Dahut was not looking at it. She was looking at me ...whatever I was... crouched at my body's feet...

"Creep, Shadow ... creep ... creep ...creep, Shadow...creep..."

The room, my body, and Dahut faded—in that precise order. I was creeping, creeping, through darkness. It was like creeping through a tunnel, for solidity was above and below and on each side of me; and at last, as though reaching a tunnel's end, the blackness before me began to gray. I crept out of the darkness.

I was at the edge of the standing stones, on the threshold of the monoliths.

The moon was low, and they stood black against it.

There was an eddy of wind, and like a leaf it blew me among the monoliths. I thought: *What am I to be*

blown like a leaf in the wind! I felt resentment, rage. I thought: *a shadow's rage!*

I WAS beside one of the standing stones. Dark as it was, a darker shadow leaned against it. It was the shadow of a man, although there was no man's body to cast it. It was the shadow of a man buried to the knees. There were other monoliths near, and against each of them leaned a man's shadow... buried to the knees. The shadow closest to me wavered, like the shadow cast by a wind-shaken candle flame. It bent to me and whispered:

"You have life! Live, Shadow... and save us!"

I whispered: "I am shadow... shadow like you...how can I save you?"

The shadow against the standing stone swayed and shook.

"You have life . . . kill . . . kill her . . . kill him."

The shadow on the stone behind me whispered: "Kill...her...first."

From all the monoliths rose a whisper: "Kill . . . kill . . . kill . . ."

There was a stronger eddy of the wind, and on it I was whirled like a leaf almost to the threshold of the Cairn. The whispering of the shadows fettered to the circling monoliths grew locust shrill, beating back the wind that was whirling me into the Cairn . . . shrilling a barrier between the Cairn and me . . . driving me back, out of the field of the monoliths.

The Cairn and the monoliths were gone. The moon was gone, and gone was the familiar earth. I was a shadow...in a land of shadows...

There were no stars, no moon, no sun. There was only a faintly luminous dusk which shrouded a world all wan and ashen and black. I stood alone, on a wide plain. There were no perspectives, and no horizons. Everywhere it was as though I looked upon vast screens.

Yet I knew there were depths and distances in this strange land. I was a shadow, vague and unsubstantial. Yet I could see and hear, feel and taste—I knew that because I clasped my hands and felt them, and in my mouth and throat was the bitter taste of ashes.

Ahead of me were shadow mountains, stacked against each other like gigantic slices of black jade; distinguishable from each other only by their varying darknesses.

It seemed that I could reach out a hand and touch them, yet I knew they were far and far away. My eyes—my sight—whatever it was that functioned as sight in this shadow that was I—sharpened. I was ankle deep in somber, shadowy grass starred by small flowers that should have been gay blue instead of mournful gray. And shadowy livid lilies that should have been golden and scarlet swayed in a wind I could not feel.

I heard above me a thin trilling, plaintively sweet. Shadowy birds were winging over me toward the distant mountains.

They passed . . . but the trilling lingered . . . shaped itself into words . . . into the voice of Dahut.

"Creep, Shadow! Hunger . . . Thirst!"

My way was toward the mountains; the shadowy birds had pointed it. I had a swift moment of rebellion. I thought: *I will not take it. This is illusion. Here I stay...*

The voice of Dahut, pitiless: *"Creep, Shadow! Learn whether it is not real!"*

I began to walk through the somber grass toward the black mountains.

THERE was a muted beat of hoofs behind me. I turned. A shadowy horse was driving down upon me, a great gray *destriere*. The shadow who rode it was armored; the shadow of a big man, wide of shoulder and thick of body; unvisored, but chain-mailed from neck to feet; in his belt a battle-ax, and across his shoulders a long two-edged sword. The *destriere* was close, yet the sound of its hoofs was faint, like distant thunder.

And I saw that far behind the armored man raced other shadowy horsemen, leaning forward over the necks of small steeds.

The armored man drew up his horse beside me; looked down at me with faint glint of brown eyes in shadowy face.

"A stranger! Now, by Our Lady, I leave no straggler in the path of the wolves I draw! Up, Shadow...up!"

He swung an arm and lifted me; threw me astride the *destriere* behind him.

"Hold fast!" he cried, and gave the gray horse the spur. Swiftly it raced, and swift.

Soon the slices of the black mountains were close.

A defile opened. At its mouth he stopped, and looked back, made gesture of derision, and laughed, "They cannot catch us now."

He muttered, "Still, I do not know why my horse should be so weary."

He stared at me from shadowy face. "I do know...you have too much of life, shadow. He who casts you is not...dead. Then what do you here?"

He twisted, and lifted me from the horse, and set me on the ground.

"See!" He pointed to my breast. There was a filament of glistening silver, fine as the finest cobweb, floating from it...stretching toward the ravine as though pointing the way I must take ...as though it came from my heart ...as though it were unwinding from my heart.

"You are not dead!" Shadowy pity was in his regard. "Therefore you must hunger; therefore you must thirst; until you feed and drink where the thread leads you. Half-Shadow—it was a witch who sent me here, Berenice de Azlais, of Languedoc. But my body has long been dust and I have long been content to feed on shadow fare. Long dust, I say, and so suppose ...but here one knows no time. My year was 1346 of Our Lord. What year was yours?"

"Nigh six centuries after," I said.

"So long...so long," he whispered. "Who sent you here?"

"Dahut of Ys."

"Queen of Shadows! Well, she has sent us many. I am sorry, Half-Shadow, but I can carry you no farther."

Suddenly he slapped his sides and shook with laughter. "Six hundred years, and still I have my lemans. Shadowy, 'tis true—but then so am I. And still I can fight. Berenice—to you my thanks. St. Francis...let Berenice hereafter toast less hotly in Hell, where without doubt she is."

He leaned and clapped me on the shoulder. "But kill your witch, Half-brother—if you can!"

HE rode into the ravine. I followed in his wake, walking. Soon he was out of sight. How long I walked I did not know. It was true that there was no time in this land. I passed out of the ravine.

The black jade mountains were palisades circling a garden filled with the pallid lilies. In its center was a deep black pool in which floated other lilies, black and silver and rusty-black. The pool was walled with jet.

It was there that I felt the first bite of the dreadful hunger, the first pang of the dreadful thirst.

Upon the wide jet wall lay seven girls, dull silver shadows...and exquisite. Naked shadows...one lay with chin cupped in misty hands, glint of deepest sapphire blue eyes in shadowy face . . . another sat, dipping slender feet in the black of the pool, and her hair was blacker than its waters, black spume of blacker waves, and as fine . . . and out of the black mist of her hair eyes green as emeralds but soft with promise glanced at me.

They arose, the seven, and drifted toward me.

One said, "He has too much of life."

Another said, "Too much—yet not enough."

A third said, "He must feed and drink, then come back, and we shall see."

The girl whose eyes were sapphire blue asked, "Who sent you here, Shadow?"

I said, "Dahut the White. Dahut of Ys."

They shrank from me

"Dahut sent you? Shadow, you are not for us. Shadow, pass on."

Creep, Shadow! . . .

I said, "I am weary. Let me rest here for a while."

The green-eyed girl said, "You have too much of life. If you had none you would not be weary. Only life grows weary."

The blue-eyed girl whispered, "And life is only weariness."

"Nevertheless, I would rest. Also I am hungry, and I thirst."

"Shadow with too much of life . . . there is nothing here that you can eat; nothing here that you can drink."

I pointed to the pool. "I drink of that."

They laughed. "Try, Shadow."

I dropped upon my belly and thrust my face toward the black water. The surface of the pool receded as I bent. It drew back from my lips...it was but the shadow of water . . . and I could not think.

Thirst, Shadow . . . drink only when and where I bid...

The voice of Dahut!

I said to the girls, "Let me rest."

They answered, "Rest."

I CROUCHED upon the rim of jet. The silver girls drew away from me, clustered, shadowy arms entwined, whispering. It was good to rest, although I felt no desire to sleep. I sat, hands clasping knees, head on breast. Loneliness fell upon me like a garment; loneliness rained upon me. The girl whose eyes were blue slipped to my side. She threw an arm around my shoulders, leaned against me:

"When you have fed, when you have drunk, come back to me."

I do not know how long I lay upon the rim of jet around the black pool. But when at last I arose the girls of tarnished silver were not there. The armored man had said there was no time in this land. I had liked the armored man. I wished that his horse had been strong enough to carry me wherever he had been going. My hunger had grown and so had my thirst. Again I dropped and tried to sip of the pool. The shadow waters were not for me.

Something was tugging at me, draw-

ing me on. It was the silver filament, and it was shining like a thread of living light. I walked out of the garden, following the thread.

The mountains were behind me. I was threading my way through a vast marsh. Spectral rushes bordered a perilous path, and in them lurked shadow shapes, unseen but hideous. They watched me as I went, and I knew that here I must go carefully lest a misstep give me to them.

A mist hung over the marsh, a gray and dead mist that darkened when the hidden things furtively raised themselves... or fled ahead to crouch beside the path and wait my coming. I felt their eyes upon me—cold, dead, malignant.

There was a ridge feathered with ghostly ferns behind which other shadowy shapes lurked, pushing and crowding against each other, following me as I threaded my way through the spectral rushes. And at every step more woeful became my loneliness, more torturing my hunger and my thirst.

I passed the marsh and came out upon a dim path that quickly widened into a broad highway which, wavering, stretched across an illimitable and cloudy plain. There were other shadow shapes upon this highway...shapes of men and women, old and young, shapes of children and of animals... but no shape inhuman or unearthly.

They were like shapes formed of heavy fog—of frozen fog. They flittered and loitered, ran or stood forlorn, singly, in groups, in companies. And as they went by, or overtook me, or I overtook them, I felt their gaze upon me.

They seemed of all times and of all races, these shadow folk. There was a lean Egyptian priest upon whose shoulder sat a shadowy cat that arched its back and spat soundlessly at me... three Roman legionnaires whose round, close-fitting helmets were darker stains upon their heads and who raised shadowy arms in the ancient salute as they strode past.

There were Greek warriors with helms from which shadow plumes streamed, and shadowy women in litters carried by shadow slaves...and once a company of little men went by on shaggy, silent ponies, spectral bows at backs, slant shadowy eyes glinting at me...and there was the shadow of a child that turned and trotted beside me for a space, reaching up its hands to the slender filament that was leading me...dragging me...where?

THE road went on and on. It became ever more thronged with the shadow people, and I saw that many more were going my way than against me. Then at my right, out upon the vaporous plain, a wan light began to glow...phosphorescent, funereal...like the glimmer of the corposants, the lights of the dead... among the monoliths.

It became a half-moon that rested upon the plain like a gigantic gateway. It sent a path of ashen light across the plain, and from the highroad into that path the shadow people began to stream. Not all—one that tarried paused beside me; gross of body; with plumed and conical hat and cloak that streamed and wavered in a wind I could not feel, as though by it his gross body were being whipped in tatters.

He whispered, "The Eater of Shadows eats from a full board."

I echoed thinly, "The Eater of Shadows?"

I felt his gaze upon me, intent. He tittered in a voice like the rustling of rotting, poisonous leaves:

"Heh-heh-heh...a virgin! New born into this delectable world! You know nothing of the Eater of Shadows? Heh-heh-heh...but he is our only form of Death in this world, and many who weary of it go to him. This you do not yet fully perceive, since he has not made himself manifest. They are fools," he whispered viciously. "They should learn, as I have learned, to take their food in the world from which they came. No shadow-food... no, no, no...good flesh and body and soul...*soul*, heh-heh-heh!"

A shadowy hand snatched at the shining filament, and recoiled, twisting as though seared...the gross shadow cringed and wreathed as though in agony. The rustling voice became a vile high whining, "You are going to your marriage feast...going to your marriage bed. You will have your own table...a fair table of flesh and blood and soul...of life. Take me with you, bridegroom; take me with you. I can teach you so much! And my price is only a few crumbs from your table... only the smallest share in your bride."

Something was gathering in the doorway of the half-moon; something forming upon its glimmering surface ...fathomless black shadows were grouping themselves into a gigantic, featureless face. No, it was not featureless, for there were two apertures like eyes through which the wan phosphorescence shone. And there was a shapeless mouth which gaped, while a writhing ribbon of the dead light streamed out of it like a tongue. The tongue licked among the shadows and drew them into the mouth, and the lips closed on them...then opened again, and again the tongue licked out...

"Oh, my hunger! Oh, my thirst and hunger! Take me with you, bridegroom . . . to your bride. There is so much I can teach you...for such a little price..."

I STRUCK at that gibbering shadow and fled from its dreadful whispering; fled with shadowy arms covering my eyes to shut out vision of that vague and dreadful face...

Hunger, Shadow . . . feed only where and when I bid. Thirst, Shadow... drink only where and when I bid!...

And now I knew. I knew where the silver filament was dragging me, and I tore at it with shadowy hands, but could not break it. I tried to run back, against it, and it swung me around, dragging me inexorably on.

I knew not what the evil, tittering shadow had known...that I was on my way to food and drink...to my marriage feast...to my bride—Helen!

It was on her body and blood and life my hunger was to be appeased, my thirst slaked.

Upon—Helen!

The shadow-land lightened. It became crystalline. Heavier, blacker shadows thrust themselves within it. These steadied, and the land of shadows vanished.

I was in an old room. Helen was there, and Bill and McCann, and a man I did not know; a lean and dark man with thin, ascetic face and snow-white hair. But wait...that *must* be Ricori...

How long had I been in shadow-land?

Their voices came to me as a low humming, their words as unintelligible drone. I did not care what they were talking about. My whole being was focused upon Helen.

I was starving for her, famishing for her...I must eat and drink of her...

I thought: *If I do...she must die!*

I thought: *Let her die...I must eat and drink...*

She raised her head, sharply. I knew that she was aware of me. She turned and looked straight at me. She saw me ...I knew that she saw me. Her face whitened... then grew pitiful. The amber-gold of her eyes darkened with a wrath in which was complete comprehension... then became tender. Her little rounded chin hardened; her red mouth with its touch of the archaic became inscrutable. She arose and said something to the others. I saw them rise, staring at her incredulously—then search the room with their eyes. Except Ricori, who looked straight at her, stern face softened. And now words shaped themselves from the low humming of their voices. Helen said:

"I fight Dahut. Give me an hour. I know what I am doing." A wave of color spread over her face. "Believe me, I know."

I saw Ricori bend and kiss her hand; he raised his head, and there was iron assurance in the look he gave her. "And *I* know—win, Madonna...or if you lose, be sure that you shall be avenged."

She walked from the room. The shadow that was I crept after her.

SHE walked upstairs and into another room. She turned on lights, hesitated, then locked the door behind her. She went to the windows and drew down the curtains. She held her arms out to me:

"Can you hear me, Alan? I can see you...faintly still, but more plainly than below. Can you hear me? Then come to me."

I quivered with desire for her...to eat and drink of her. But the voice of Dahut was in my ears, not to be disobeyed—

"Eat and drink...*when* I bid you."

I knew that the hunger must grow stronger, the thirst more consuming, before I could be loosed from that command. This so that only all the life of Helen could appease the hunger and slake the thirst. So that feeding, drinking...I killed her.

I whispered, "I hear you."

"I hear you, darling. Come to me."

"I cannot come to you—not yet. My thirst and hunger for you must grow greater...so that when I come to you —you die."

She dimmed the lights; raised her arms and loosed her hair so that it fell in shining red-gold ringlets almost to her waist. She asked:

"What keeps you from me? From me who loves you...from me whom you love?"

"Dahut...you know that."

"Beloved—I do not know that. It is not true. None can keep you from me if I truly love you and if you truly love me. Both are true...and I say to you, come to me, beloved...take me."

I made no answer; I could not. Nor could I go to her. And more ravenous grew the hunger, more maddening the thirst.

She said, "Alan, think only that. Think only that we love. That none can keep us from each other. Think only that. Do you understand me?"

I whispered, "Yes." And tried to think only that while the hunger and the thirst for her...for the life of her ...were two starved hounds straining at the leash.

She said, "Darling, can you see me? See me clearly?"

I whispered, "Yes."

She said, "Then look—and come to me."

I strained against the fetters that held me; strained against them as a

soul led up from Hell to the gates of Paradise would strain to break its bonds and enter.

" She has no power over you. None can keep us apart...come to me, beloved."

The fetters broke...I was in her arms...

Shadow that I was, I could feel her soft arms around me...feel the warmth of her breast pressing me closer, closer...feel her kisses on my shadowy lips. I ate and drank of her... of her life...and felt her life streaming through me...melting the icy venom of the shadow hounds...

Releasing me from the shadow bondage...

Releasing me from Dahut!

I STOOD beside the bed looking down on Helen. She lay, white and drained of life, half covered by her red-gold hair...and was she dead? Had Dahut conquered?

I bent shadowy head to her heart and listened and could hear no beat. Love and tenderness such as I had never known throbbed from me and covered her. And I thought, *this love must surely be stronger than death... must give back to her the life I have taken...*

And still I could not hear her heart...

Then despair followed the pulse of that love. And on its wake a hate colder than the venom of the shadow hounds.

Hate against Dahut.

Hate against the warlock who called himself her father.

Hate implacable, relentless, remorseless against both.

That hate grew. It merged with the life I had stolen from Helen. It lifted me. Upon its wings I was rushed away ...away from Helen...back through the shadow-land...

And awakened...shadow no more.

CHAPTER XX.

FATHER AGAINST DAUGHTER.

I LAY upon a wide low bed in a tapestried room where an ancient lamp burned with a dim rose light. It was Dahut's room from which she had sent me forth as shadow. My hands were crossed upon my breast, and something bound my wrists. I raised them and saw twined tight around them the witch-fetters — a twisted thread of pale-gold hair, the hair of Dahut. I broke them. My ankles were crossed and bound with the same fetters, and these I broke. I swung from the bed. Around me was a robe of the soft white cotton, a robe like that I had worn to the sacrifices. I tore it from me with loathing. There was a mirror over the dressing table—on my face were the three marks of Dahut's whip-branding, no longer crimson but livid.

How long had I been in the shadowy land? Long enough to allow Ricori to return—but how much longer? More important, what time had elapsed since —Helen? A clock showed close to eleven. But was this still the same night?

It might not be—shadow time and shadow space were alien. I had seemed to cover immense distances, and yet I had found Helen just outside de Keradel's gates. For I was sure that that old room had been in the house McCann had taken.

And clearly, this return of mine had not been expected by Dahut—at least not so soon. I reflected grimly that I always seemed to be a little ahead of

schedule so far as Dahut and her father were concerned. I reflected much more grimly that it had never advantaged me greatly. Nevertheless, it must mean that her dark wisdom had its limits—that there had been no shadowy spies to whisper to her my escape. . .that she believed me still under her sorceries; still obedient to her will; still held back by her command until my lust for Helen had grown strong enough to kill when loosed. . .

Might that not also mean her purpose had failed. . .that loosed too soon I had not killed. . .that Helen was—alive?

The thought was like strong wine. I walked to the door and saw that the heavy inside bars were down. How could they have been dropped, since only I was in the room? Of course. . . I was Dahut's prisoner, and she wanted no tampering with my body when she was not beside it. She had barred the door and made use of the secret opening into my room to come and go. Quite evidently she had considered the bars safe from my helpless hands. I lifted them cautiously, and tried the door.

It was unlocked. I opened it as cautiously, slowly, and stood peering out into the hall, listening.

It was then I first felt the unease, the trouble, the—*fear*, of the old house. It was filled with fear. And with wrath. It came to me not only from the shadowed hall, but from all of the house. And suddenly it seemed to be aware of me, and to focus itself upon me, frantically, as though it were trying to tell me why it was troubled and raging and afraid.

So sharp was the impression that I closed the door, let one of the bars fall, and stood with my back to it. The room was unhaunted, unafraid and shadowless, the faint rose light penetrating to every corner.

THE house invaded the room, striving to make coherent to me what it was that troubled it. It was as though the ghosts of all those who had lived and loved and died there were in revolt. . .appalled by something about to happen. . .something execrable, abhorrent. . .an evil something that had been conceived in the old house while its ghosts had watched, impotent to prevent. . .and now were appealing to me to abort.

The house trembled. It was a tremor that began far beneath it and throbbed up through every timber and stone. Instantly that which had feared and had appealed to me withdrew; sweeping down to the source of the trembling—or so it seemed to me. Again the house trembled. Trembled in actuality, for the door at my back quivered. The trembling increased and became a shuddering under which the solid old hand-hewn joists creaked and groaned. There followed a distant, rhythmic thudding.

It ceased, and the old house quivered, then seemed to settle, and again the joists cracked and groaned. Then a stunned silence. . .and again the ghosts of the old house were around me, outrage in their wrath, panic in their fear, crying, crying to me, to hear them, to understand them.

I could not understand them. I walked to the window, and crouched there, peering out. It was a dark night, sultry and oppressive. There was a flashing of lightning from far beneath the horizon and faint distant rumbling of thunder. I went quickly about the room looking for some weapon, but could find none. My intention was to get into my room, clothe myself and

then hunt down Dahut and de Keradel. Precisely what I was going to do after I found them I did not know—except to end their sorceries. All confusion as to whether these were sorceries or super-illusions was gone. They were evil realities belonging to a dark wisdom evilly used...none should be allowed to live to wield this evil power ...and they were swiftly mounting to some atrocious, dreadful climax which must be thwarted at any cost.

The ghosts of the old house were silent—I had gotten their message at last. They were silent, but they had lost none of their fear, and they were watching me. I went to the door. Some obscure impulse made me pick up the white robe and throw it around me. I stepped out into the hall. It was filled with shadows, but I gave them no heed. Why should I, who myself had been a shadow? As I passed, they clustered and crept behind me. And now I knew that the shadows too were afraid, like the old house—were cringing before some imminent and dreadful doom—like the ghosts were beseeching me to avert it...

From below came the murmur of voices, then that of de Keradel raised in anger, and following it, the laughter of Dahut—taunting, mocking, brittle with menace. I slipped to the head of the stairs. The lower hall was but dimly lighted. The voices came from the big living room, and that the two were quarreling was evident, but their words were inaudible. I crept down the stairs and flattened myself beside the edge of one of the heavy curtains which covered the doorway.

I HEARD de Keradel say, voice now level and controlled, "I tell you that it is finished. There remains only the last sacrifice...which I perform to-night. I do not need you for that, my daughter. Nor after it is done shall I ever need you more. And there is nothing you can do to stop it. The end toward which I have been working all my life has been reached. He...has told me. Now... He...will become wholly manifest and ascend his throne. And I"—all de Keradel's egotism was in his voice, colossal, blasphemous—"and I shall sit beside Him. He...has promised me. The dark power which men in all ages and in all lands have sought—the power which Atlantis almost attained and that Ys drew but thinly from the Cairn—the power for which the medieval world so feebly groped—that power will be mine. In all its fulness. In all its unconquerable might.

"There was a rite none knew, and... He...has taught me it. No, I need you no longer, Dahut. Yet I am loath to lose you. And... He... is inclined to you. But you would have a price to pay."

There was a little silence, and then Dahut's voice, very still:

"And that price, my father?"

"The blood of your lover."

He waited for her answer—as did I, but she made none, and he said:

"I do not need it. I have pressed the paupers and have enough and to spare. But his would enrich it, and it would be acceptable to...Him. He...has told me so. It would strengthen His draught. And... He... has asked for it."

She asked, slowly, "And if I refuse?"

"It will not save him, my daughter."

Again he waited for her to speak, then said with simulated and malicious wonder, "What—a Dahut of Ys to hesitate between her father and her lover! This man has a debt to pay,

my daughter. An ancient one—since it was for one who bore his name an ancestress of yours betrayed another father. Or was it you—Dahut? It is my duty to cancel that ancient wrong . . .lest, perchance, it should recur."

She asked, quietly, "And if I refuse —what of me?"

He laughed, "How can I tell? Now, I am swayed by my fatherly impulses. But when I sit beside . . . Him . . . what you may mean to me I cannot know. Perhaps—nothing."

She asked, "What shape will He assume?"

"Any or all. There is no shape he cannot take. Be assured that it will not be the inchoatic blackness which the dull minds of those who evoked . . . Him . . . by the rites of the Cairn forced upon . . . Him. No, no—He might even take the shape of your lover, Dahut. Why not? He . . . is inclined to you, my daughter."

Now at this my skin grew cold, and the hatred I felt for him was like a band of hot iron around my temples, and I gathered myself to leap through the curtains and lock my hands around his throat. But the shadows held me back and whispered, and the ghosts of the old house whispered with them—"Not yet! Not yet!"

He said, "Be wise, my daughter. Always this man has betrayed you. What are you with your shadows? What was Helen with her dolls? Children. Children playing with toys. With shadows and dolls! Pass from childhood, my daughter—give me the blood of your lover."

She answered, surprisingly, "A child! I had forgotten that I had ever been a child. Would to God you had left me the child I was in Brittany—not made of me what you have."

He made no reply to that. She seemed to wait for one; then said, tranquilly:

"So you ask for the blood of my lover? Well—you shall not have it."

THERE was the crash of an overthrown chair. I drew the curtain a hair's breadth aside and peered in. De Keradel stood at the head of the table glaring at Dahut. But it was not the face nor the body of the de Keradel I had known. His eyes were no longer pale blue . . . they were black, and his silvery hair seemed black and his body had grown . . . and long arms reached out and long taloned fingers clutched at Dahut.

She threw something down upon the table between her and him. I could not see what it was, but it sped like a racing small and shining wave straight at him. And he threw himself back from it, and stood trembling, eyes again blue but suffused with blood, and body shrunken.

"Beware, my father! Not yet do you sit on the throne with . . . Him. And I am still of the sea, my father. So beware!"

There was a shuffle of feet behind me. The blank-eyed butler was at my side. He started to kneel—and then the vagueness went from his eyes. He sprang at me, mouth opening to cry alarm. Before he could make a sound, my hands were around his throat, thumbs crushing into his larynx, my knee in his groin. With a strength I had never before known I lifted him by his neck and held him up from the floor. His legs wrapped round me and I thrust my head under his chin and drew it sharply up. There was a faint snap and his body went limp. I carried it back along the hall and set it noiselessly on the floor. The whole brief struggle had been soundless. His eyes,

blank enough now, stared up at me. I searched him. In his belt was a sheath and in that a long, curved and razor-sharp knife.

Now I had a weapon. I rolled the body under a deep settle, stole back to the living room and peeped through the curtains. It was empty, Dahut and de Keradel gone.

I stepped back for a moment into the cover of the curtains. I knew now what it was the ghosts of the old house had feared. Knew the meaning of the trembling and the rhythmic thudding. The cavern of the sacrifices had been destroyed. It had served its purpose. How had de Keradel put it?...that he had "pressed the paupers" and had enough and more than enough blood for the last sacrifice. Incongruously, a line came into my mind—"He is trampling out the wine press where the grapes of wrath are stored..." Not so incongruous...I thought: *De Keradel has trampled out another wine press for the Gatherer's drink.* My blood was to have been mixed with it, but Dahut had refused to let it be!

I felt no gratitude toward her for that. She was a spider who thought her fly securely in her web, and was resisting another spider's attempt to take it from her. That was all. But the fly was no longer in her web, nor did it owe her for its release. If I felt increase of hatred for de Keradel, I felt no decrease of it for Dahut.

Nevertheless, what I had heard had changed the vague pattern of my vengeance. The design clarified. The shadows were wrong. Dahut must not die before her father. I had a better plan...it came to me from the Lord of Carnac whom Dahut thought had died in her arms...and he counseled me as he had counseled himself, long and long and long ago in ancient Ys.

I walked up the stairs. The door to my room was open. I switched on the lights, boldly.

Dahut was standing there, between me and the bed.

SHE smiled—but her eyes did not. She walked toward me. I thrust the point of the long knife toward her. She stopped and laughed—but her eyes did not laugh. She said:

"You are so elusive, my beloved. You have such a gift of disappearance."

"You have told me that before, Dahut. And..." I touched my cheek ..."have even emphasized it."

Her eyes misted, welled, and tears were on her cheeks. "You have much to forgive—but so have I, Alan."

Well, that was true enough—

...*Beware...beware, Dahut...*

"Where did you get your knife, Alan?"

A practical question that steadied me; I answered it as practically, "From one of your men whom I killed."

"And would kill me with it—if I came close?"

"Why not, Dahut? You sent me as a shadow into the shadowy land and I have learned its lesson."

"What was that lesson, Alan?"

"To be merciless."

"But I am not merciless, Alan—else you would not be here."

"Now I know you lie, Dahut. It was not you who released me from that bondage."

She said, "I did not mean that... nor do I lie...and I am tempted to try you, Alan..." She came toward me, slowly. I held the point of the knife in readiness against her coming. She said:

"Kill me if you want to. I have not

much love for life. You are all that I love. If you will not love me—kill me."

She was close; so close that the point of the knife touched her breast; she said, "Thrust—and end it."

My hand dropped.

"I cannot kill you, Dahut!"

Her eyes softened, her face grew tender—but triumph lurked under the tenderness. She rested her hands on my shoulders; then kissed the whip-welts one by one, saying, "By this kiss I forgive...and by this I forgive...and by this I forgive..."

She held her lips up to me, "Now kiss me, Alan—and with that kiss say that you forgive me."

I KISSED her, but I did not say that I forgave, nor did I let fall the knife. She trembled in my arms and clung to me and whispered, "Say it...say it..."

I pushed her away from me and laughed, "Why are you so eager for forgiveness, Dahut? What do you fear that makes my forgiveness so desirable before your father kills me?"

She asked, "How did you know he means to kill you?"

"I heard him say so when he was making that pleasant little demand for my blood not long ago. Bargaining with you for me. Promising you a substitute who would be far more satisfactory." Again I laughed. "Is my forgiveness a necessary part of that incarnation?"

She said, breathlessly, "If you heard that, you must also know that I would not give you to him."

I lied. "I do not. Just then your servant forced me to kill him. When I was free to resume my eavesdropping—returned, in fact, to cut your father's throat before he could cut mine—you and he had gone. I supposed the bargain closed. Father and daughter reunited and of one purpose—setting forth to prepare the funeral meats—myself, Dahut—to furnish forth the marriage tables. Thrift, thrift, Dahut!"

She winced under my mockery; whitened. She said, strangled, "I made no bargain. I would not let him have you."

"Why not?"

She said, "Because I love you."

"But why this insistence upon my forgiveness?"

"Because I love you. Because I want to wipe away the past. Begin afresh, beloved..."

For a moment I had the queer feeling of double memory; that I had acted this scene before in minutest detail, had heard the same lines; and realized I had in that dream of ancient Ys, if dream it had been. And now, as then, she whispered piteously, despairingly, "You will not believe me... beloved, what can I do to make you believe?"

I answered, "Choose between your father—and me."

She said, "But I have chosen, beloved. I have told you..." Again she whispered, "How can I make him believe?"

I answered, "End his—sorceries."

She said contemptuously, "I do not fear him. And I no longer fear that which he evokes."

I said, "But I do. End his—sorceries."

She caught the pause this time, and its significance. Her eyes dilated, and for seconds she was silent, studying me.

She said, slowly, "There is but one way to end them."

I made no comment on that.

She came to me and drew my head down to her and looked deep into my eyes:

"If I do this...you will forgive me? You will love me? Never leave me ...as once before you did...long and long and long ago, in Ys...when once before I chose between my father and you?"

"I will forgive you, Dahut. I will never leave you as long as you have life."

That was true enough, but I closed every window of my mind so she might not glimpse the determination that was its source. And again, as it had been in Ys, I took her in my arms...and the lure of her lips and her body shook me and I felt my resolution weaken... but the life within me that had come from Helen was implacable, inexorable ...hating Dahut as only one woman who loves a man can hate another who loves him...

She loosed my arms from round her. "Dress, and wait for me here." She passed through the door.

I dressed, but I kept the long knife close.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LAST SACRIFICE.

THE tapestry that concealed the secret panel wavered, and she was in the room. She wore an archaic robe of green; her sandals were green; her girdle was not golden but of clear green stones that held the shifting gleam of waves, and a wreath of green sea flowers bound her hair. Upon her wrist was the silver bracelet set with the black stone that bore in crimson the trident symbol which was the summoning name of the sea-god. She looked like a sea-god's daughter ...maybe she was.

I felt my resolution weakening again until she came close and I could see clearly her face. It was unsmiling, and the mouth was cruel, and the hell-sparks danced in her eyes.

She lifted her arms and touched my eyes with her fingers, closing them. The touch of her fingers was like that of cold sea-spray.

"Come!" she said.

The ghosts of the old house were whispering, "*Go with her...but beware!*"

The shadows were whispering: "*Go with her . . . but beware!*"

Beware Dahut . . . My hand tightened on the knife hilt as I followed.

We went out of the old house. It was strange how plainly I could see. The sky was heavy with clouds, the air murky. I knew the night must be dark indeed, yet every stone and bush and tree stood out as though by some light of its own.

Dahut led me by a dozen paces, nor could I lessen that distance, try as I might. She moved like a wave, and around her played a faint nimbus of palest golden-green, like the phosphorescence that sometimes clothes a wave moving through darkness.

The shadows flittered and swayed around us, interlacing, flowing in and out of each other, like shadows cast by some great tree fretted by a fitful wind. The shadows followed us, and flanked us, and swayed before us—but they shrank from Dahut; and never was there one between her and me.

There was a glow beyond the oaks where were the standing stones. It was not the wan gleam of the corposants. It was a steady, ruddy glow, as from still fires. I heard no chanting.

She did not go toward the oaks. She took a way that led upward to the ridge of rocks h i d i n g the standing stones from the water. Soon the path topped the ridge, the open sea lay be-

fore me. It was a sullen sea and dark, with long, slow swells breaking sluggishly on the ledges.

The path climbed steeply over a cliff which lifted above the waves a full two hundred feet. And suddenly Dahut was on its crest, poised on its verge, arms outstretched to the sea. From her lips came a call, low and inhumanly sweet; in it the plaintiveness of the gull's cry, the singing of waves over unfathomable, unspoiled deeps, the chant of deep-sea winds. It was a voice of the sea transmuted goldenly in a woman's throat, but losing no inhuman quality and taking on no human one.

It seemed to me that the surges stopped as though listening while that cry went forth.

Again she sent the call...and once again. And after that she cupped her hands to mouth and cried a word...a name.

FROM far out at sea there came a roaring answer. A long white line of foam sped from the darkness, a great comber whose top was the tossing manes of hundreds of white horses. It raced shouting against the ridge and broke.

A column of spume swept up and touched her outstretched hands. It seemed to me that something passed to it from her hands, and that as the spume fell something within it glittered silver with glint of scarlet.

I climbed up to her. There was no hint of tenderness now in her eyes or face. Only triumph...and her eyes were violet flames. She lifted a fold of her dress, veiling eyes and face from me.

The bracelet of Ys was gone from her arm!

She beckoned, and I followed her. We skirted the ridge, and ever the ruddy glow grew brighter. I saw that the surges were no longer sullen, but that great waves marched with us, clamoring; white banners of foam streaming; white manes of the sea-horses tossing.

The path ran now below the crest of the ridge. Ahead, on the landward side, was another upthrust of rock; and here again she waited for me. She stood with face averted, still covered by the fold. She pointed to the rock, and said:

"Climb—and see." Once more the spray-cold fingers touched my eyes... "And hear." They touched my ears.

She was gone.

I climbed the rock. I scrambled over its top.

Strong hands caught my arms, pinioning them behind me, forcing me to my knees. I twisted and looked into the face of McCann. He was bending, his face close to mine, peering as though he found it difficult to see me clearly. I cried, "McCann!"

He swore, incredulously; released me. Some one else was on the rock—a lean and dark man with thin, ascetic face and snow-white hair. He, too, was leaning and peering at me as though he found it difficult to see me. That was odd, for I could see them both clearly. I knew him...he had been in the old room where my shadow search for Helen had ended...Ricori.

McCann was stammering, "Caranac—my God, boss, Caranac!"

I whispered, steeling myself against any blow, "Helen?"

"She lives."

It was Ricori who answered.

My whole body went weak with reaction so that I would have fallen had he not caught me.

A new fear took me. "But *will* she live?"

He said, "She has had a—strange experience. When we left her she was fully conscious. Steadily growing stronger. Her brother is with her. You are all she needs. We are here to take you back to her."

I said, "No. Not until—"

Gale blast that closed my mouth as though a hand had struck it. Crash of wave against the ridge, shaking it. I felt the spray of it on my face, and it was like the whip of Dahut and it was like the cold fingers of her on my eyes...

And suddenly McCann and Ricori seemed unreal and shadowy. And suddenly I seemed to see the shining body of Dahut swaying onward upon the path between the sea and the ridge ...and I heard a voice in my heart—the Lord of Carnac's voice—and mine: *how can I kill her, evil as I know her to be?*

RICORI'S voice...how long had he been talking?..."and so when last night you did not appear, I used, as you had suggested—my judgment. After we were assured of her safety, we set out. We persuaded the guardians of the gates to let us enter. They will guard no more gates. We saw the lights, and we thought that where they were you would most likely be. We distributed our men, and McCann and I came by chance upon this excellent place for observation. We saw neither you nor Dahut . . ."

Dahut!... another wave broke upon the rock and shook it, then surged back shouting...shouting — *Dahut!* Another gust roared over the rock... roaring—*Dahut!*

Ricori was saying, "They are down there, awaiting our signal—"

I interrupted, attention abruptly centered, "Signal for what?"

He said, "To stop what is going on down there."

He pointed toward the inward edge of the rock, and I saw that its edge was outlined black against depths of the ruddy light. I walked to the edge and looked down—

The Cairn was plain before me. I thought: *how strangely close it seems ...how stark the monoliths stand out!*

It was as though the Cairn were but a few yards away...de Keradel so close that I could reach out my hand and touch him. I knew that there were many of the standing stones between me and the Cairn, and that it must be a full thousand feet away. Yet not only could I see the Cairn as though I were beside it, I could see within it as well.

Strange, too, although the wind was roaring overhead and whipping us on the rock, that the fires before the Cairn burned steadily; flickering only when those who fed them sprinkled them from the black ewers they carried... and that although the wind came from the sea, the smoke of the fires streamed straight against it.

And strange how silent it was down there among the monoliths when steadily grew the shouting and the clamor of the sea...nor did the flashing of the lightning marching ever higher dim the fires, nor did the rumbling thunder invade the silence of the plain more than did the clamor of the combers...

Those who fed the fires were not now in white but in red. And de Keradel was clothed in a robe of red instead of the white robe of the sacrifices.

He wore the black belt and the cincture; but the shifting symbols on them glittered not silver but scarlet...

There were ten of the fires, in a semicircle between the three altars and

the monoliths which faced the threshold of the Cairn. Each was a little more than a man's height, and they burned with a cone-shaped, still flame. From the peak of each arose a column of smoke. They were as thick as the arm of a man, these columns, and having risen twice the height of the fires they curved, and then streamed straight toward the threshold of the Cairn. They were like ten black arteries of which the ten fires were the hearts, and they were threaded with crimson filaments, like little fiery veins.

The blackened, hollowed stone was hidden by a greater fire which burned not only red but black. Nor was this, like the others, a still flame. It pulsed with slow and rhythmic beat—as though in truth it were a heart. Between it and the great slab of granite upon which he had beaten in the breasts of the sacrifices stood de Keradel.

There was something lying upon the stone of sacrifice, covering it. At first I thought it a man, a giant, lying there. Then I saw that it was an immense vessel, strangely shaped, and hollow. A vat.

I COULD look into this vat. It was half filled with a clotted, reddish-black fluid over the surface of which ran tiny flames. Not pale and dead like the corposants, but crimson and filled with evil life. It was to this vat that the blank-eyed men who fed the fires came to have their ewers refilled. And it was from it that de Keradel took that which he sprinkled upon the pulsing fire...and his hands and his arms were red with it.

On the threshold of the Cairn was another vessel, a huge bowl like a shallow baptismal font. It was filled, and over its surface ran the crimson flames. The smoke from the lesser fires, the ten crimson threaded arteries, met in the thicker column that arose from the throbbing fire, mingled with it, and streamed as one into the Cairn—

The silence of the plain was broken by a whispering, a faint wailing, and up from the bases of the monoliths shadows began to rise. They lifted, as I had first seen them, to their knees... and then they were wrenched from the earth, and whimpering, wailing, were sucked into the Cairn...beating about it...fighting to escape.

Within the Cairn was the Gatherer ...the Blackness.

From the first I had known It was there. It was no longer shapeless, nebulous — part of an infinitely greater Something that dwelt in space and beyond space. The Gatherer was breaking loose...taking form. The small crimson flames were running through It... like corpuscles of evil blood. It was condensing, becoming material.

That which filled the font on the threshold of the Cairn was empty. De Keradel filled it from the vat...and again...and again. The Gatherer drank from the font and fed upon the shadows, and upon the smoke of the fires which were fed by blood. And steadily it assumed shape.

I stepped back, covering my eyes.

Ricori said, "What do you see? All I see are men in red, far away, who feed fires—and another who stands before the house of stones . . . what do you see, Caranac?"

I whispered, "I see Hell opening."

I forced myself to look again at that which was being spawned from the Cairn's stone womb...and stood, unable now to look away...I heard a voice, my own voice, screaming:

"*Dahut...Dahut*...before it is too late!"

As though in answer, there was a lull in the clamor of the sea. Upon the ridge at our left appeared a point of brilliant green light... whether far away or near, I could not tell with that strange witch-sight Dahut had given me. It became an oval of brilliant emerald...

It became—Dahut!

DAHUT...clothed with pale green sea-fires, her eyes like violet sea-pools and wide—so wide that they were ringed with white; her slim black brows a bar above them; her face white as foam and cruel and mocking; her hair like spindrift of silver. Far away or not, she seemed as close to me as did de Keradel. It was as if she stood just above the Cairn...could reach out, as I, and touch de Keradel. To me that night, as in the shadowy land, there was no such thing as distance.

I caught Ricori's wrist and pointed, and whispered:

"Dahut!"

He said, "I saw far away and dimly a shining figure. I thought it a woman. With your hand upon me I seem to see her more plainly. What do *you* see, Caranac?"

I said, "I see Dahut. She is laughing. Her eyes are the eyes of no woman . . . nor is her face. She is laughing, I say...can't you hear her, Ricori? She calls to de Keradel . . . how sweet her voice and how merciless...like the sea! She calls, 'My father, I am here!' He sees her...the Thing in the Cairn is aware of her...de Keradel cries to her, 'Too late, my daughter!' He is mocking, contemptuous . . . but the Thing in the Cairn is not. It strains ...toward completion. Dahut calls again, 'Is my bridegroom born? Is the labor done? Your midwifery successful? My bedfellow delivered...' Can't you hear, Ricori? It is as though she stood beside me..."

He said, "I hear nothing."

I said, "I do not like this jesting, Ricori. It is—dreadful. The Thing in the Cairn does not like it . . . although de Keradel laughs. It reaches out from the Cairn...to the vat on the stone of sacrifice...It drinks...It grows... God!...*Dahut...Dahut!*"

The shining figure raised hand as though she heard...and bent toward me...and I felt the touch of her fingers on eyes and ears, her lips on mine. She faced the sea and threw wide her arms.

She cried the Name, softly—and the sea winds stilled...again, like one who summons as of right—and the shouting of the combers waned...a third time, jubilantly.

Shouting of the combers, thunder of the surges, roaring of the winds, all the clamor of sea and air, arose in a mighty diapason. It melted into chaotic uproar, elemental, bellowing. And suddenly all the sea was covered with the tossing manes of the white sea-horses ...armies of the white horses of the sea...the white horses of Poseidon... line upon endless line racing out of the darkness of ocean and charging against the shore.

Beyond the lower line of the ridge between that high rock on which stood Dahut and this high rock on which stood I, arose a mountain of water, lifting, lifting swiftly, yet deliberately. Changing shape as it lifted ever higher ...gathering power as it lifted. Up it lifted and up; a hundred feet, two hundred feet above the ridge. It paused, and its top flattened. Its top became a gigantic hammer...

And beyond it I seemed to see a vast and misty shape towering to the clouds,

its head wreathed with the clouds and crowned with the lightnings.

THE hammer swung down, down upon the Thing in the Cairn, down upon de Keradel and the red-clad, blank-eyed men, down upon the monoliths.

The Cairn and the monoliths were covered with waters, boiling, spouting, smashing at the standing stones. Uprooting, overturning them.

For an instant I saw the evil fires glare through the waters. Then they were gone.

For an instant I heard an unearthly shrilling from the stone womb of the Cairn, and saw a Blackness veined with crimson flames writhing under the hammer stroke of the waters. Struggling in the myriad arms of the waters. Then it, too, was gone.

The waters rushed back. They licked up at us as they passed and a wave swirled round us knee high.

It dropped...chuckling.

Again the mountain arose, hammer topped. Again it swept over the ridge and smote the Cairn and the standing stones. And this time the waters rushed on so that the oaks fell before them... and once more they retreated...and once more they lifted and struck and swept on...and now I knew that the old house with all its ghosts was gone.

Through all, the sea-fire shape of Dahut had remained unmoved, untouched. I had heard her merciless laughter above the bellowing of the sea and the crashing of the hammer strokes.

Back rushed the last waters. Dahut held her arms out to me, calling, "Alain...come to me, Alain!"

Clearly could I see the path between her and me. It was as though she were close—close. But I knew she was not and that it was the witch-sight she had given me that made it seem so.

I said, "Good luck, McCann. Good luck, Ricori. If I don't come back, tell Helen I loved her—"

Alain...come to me, Alain...

My hand dropped on the hilt of the long knife. I shouted, "Coming—Dahut!"

McCann gripped me. Ricori struck down at his hands. He said, "Let him go."

Alain...come to me...

The waters were rushing back, over the ridge. A swirl swept out. It coiled around Dahut to the waist. It lifted her ...high and high...

And instantly from over her and from every side of her a cloud of shadows swept upon her...striking at her with shadowy hands...thrusting at her, hurling themselves at her, pushing her back and down...into the sea.

I saw incredulity flood her face; then outraged revolt; then terror—and then despair.

The wave crashed back into the sea, and with it went Dahut, the shadows pouring after her...

I heard myself crying, *"Dahut... Dahut!"*

I rushed to the verge of the rock. There was a prolonged flaring of the lightning. By it I saw Dahut...face upturned, hair floating around her like a silver net, her eyes wide and horror-filled and...dying.

The shadows were all around her and over her...pushing her down... down...

THE witch-sight was fading from my eyes. The witch-hearing stilling in my ears. Before that sight went, I saw de Keradel lying on the threshold of the Cairn, crushed beneath one of its great stones. The stone

had pulped breast and heart of de Keradel as he had pulped the breasts and hearts of the sacrifices. There was only his head and his arms...his face upturned, dead eyes wide and filled with hate...dead hands held high in imprecation and in—appeal . . .

The Cairn was flat, and of the standing stones not one was erect.

Witch-sight and witch-hearing were gone. The land was dark save for the glare of the lightning. The sea was dark save for the foaming tops of the waves. Their shouting was the voice of waves—and nothing more. The roaring of the wind was the voice of the wind—and nothing more.

Dahut was dead.

I asked Ricori, "What did you see?"

"Three waves. They destroyed all that was below. They killed my men."

"I saw much more than that, Ricori. Dahut is dead. It is ended, Ricori. Dahut is dead and her witchcraft ended. We must wait here till morning. Then we can go back...back to Helen..."

Dahut was dead.

She was dead as of old, long and long ago in Ys...by her shadows and by her wickednesses...by the sea... and by me.

Would I have killed her with the long knife if I had reached her before the wave?

The cycle had been reborn...and it had ended as it had of old, long and long and long ago...in Ys.

The sea had cleansed this place of her sorceries as it had cleansed Ys of them that long and long and long ago.

Had there been a Helen in Carnac when I set forth from Carnac to Ys to slay Dahut?

Had she cleansed me of the memories of Dahut when I returned to her?

Could—Helen?

THE END

* * *

River Runs Under Its Own Bed

ALTHOUGH the Arkansas River is listed on government maps as a navigable stream, there are long sections of it, during dry seasons, where there is not so much as a trickle of water along its white sandy bed.

These waterless stretches are sometimes several miles in length. The queer part of it is that above and below, upstream and downstream, there is water flowing along as though with no thought of interruption. Apparently the water merely sinks into the sand and gravel to flow under the river bed and reappear like magic to flow again miles below.

These dry stretches sometimes occur at intervals the entire length of the river in southwest Kansas. The sand bed gets so dry the dust blows as if there hadn't been any moisture for years. But somewhere under this deceptive surface the river runs, virtually under its own bed.

David Baxter.

Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

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MR. MERRITT has another story in mind:

East Cleveland, Ohio.

Whenever a new Merritt story appears I rejoice. But—"Creep Shadow's" beginning revives a pet grievance about Merritt's "The Moon Pool." Countless times have I reread that book, and as many times wondered in what straits the *O'Keefe* and *Lakla* the handmaiden found themselves when *Goodwin* and *Von Hetzdorp* fell off the bridge—and *Goodwin* found the Moon Pool closed, shattered, under water. I ask myself: "Did *Goodwin* ever get back to his friends? Are his young friends (and mine) still alive? Were other horrors than the Shining One loosed by the catastrophe which sealed the Moon Pool?"

I'd like mightily to read a sequel to "The Moon Pool." The questions I have raised must have occurred to many who read this story—years ago. And to you others I say: "If you are as keen as I am to read a sequel, write and make your desires known. Let's make Mr. Merritt see that he must write down for us the continuation of the strange events related in "The Moon Pool." He has the story in mind. I know that.

DON HELMUTH.

A HOME bindery:

711 Union Street,
Northfield, Minn.

I save and bind all ARGOSY serials, and some of the best novelettes; and I now have an action-adventure library of some eighty volumes, although I have been buying your magazine for only three years. Any fan who wants to know how to bind ARGOSY serials may write me and I'll send back full instructions.

"The Prophet of Death" was great. I think the best story I ever read in ARGOSY was "The Unknown Island," by Fred MacIsaac. My favorite characters are *Bill* and *Jim*. The author whose stories I enjoy best is Theodore Roscoe; I shall never forget his "Last Minute," or "The Voodoo Express."

COURTNEY B. CLELAND.

THE ARGOSY Derby:

Ferguson, Mo.

I have been reading ARGOSY since the time of "The Great Commander," "Throw Up Your Hands," "Flight to the Hills" and a short story I can never forget, "The Nervy Guy."—If all your writers were entered in a race like the Kentucky Derby, here is how I would place my bets: Fred MacIsaac, 1st; F. V. W. Mason, 2nd; C. A. Seltzer, 3rd; Max Brand and E. S. Gardner to place.

R. BAGLEY.

WHO wins ARGOSY's war?

St. Louis, Mo.

I know the war is over, but for me it is still going on. Why? Because my two sons, my two daughters and my husband stage a battle every week over who gets to read the ARGOSY first. And it's just too bad for the one who lays the book down to get a drink or something—the whole family make a nose-dive for it.

But I'll admit the ARGOSY is a wonderful book. I like *Mme. Storey* best of all, but the rest of the "gang" vote for Max Brand's characters and those by H. Bedford-Jones and George Challis. Anyway, when ARGOSY comes into my house it seems like a game of "I've got it!"

MRS. DON PAEDAE.

HARD times hit an old friend:

Alma, Ark.

It was seventeen years ago, either in Scotland or Norway, I have forgotten which, that I traded papers and magazines with a sailor from a tramp steamer flying a foreign flag. But I came out with several ARGOSYS, and that started me. I haven't missed over a dozen issues since, until about a year ago.

Have you ever lost a dear friend and it seems you cannot forget him? Even while working you have thoughts of him. Well, I have located out here on the farm. News-stands are scarce, also money and everything else in these times.

To tell it straight, I haven't been able to buy an ARGOSY for a year. Now, friends and readers, if you want to experience a near calamity, try that once!—I long for the day when I shall be able to send in a full year's subscription and so continue to be an ARGOSY fan. A. W. C.

DOLLARS—or opinions?

Roswell, N. M.

Almost fifty per cent of the letters since your dollar offer read: "I think you are doing wrong to offer money for letters," etc. Probably the only reason these same readers wrote in at all was because the dollar was offered. Therefore, if they are all so anxious to write without receiving a dollar, please stop offering it. If you do this, maybe they will give their opinions of stories instead of dollars.

HARRY BURKSTALLER.

DON'T throw away the icing:

San Marion, Calif.

I wish to congratulate Jack Allman on his excellent and interesting Polar yarn, "Frozen Gold." Personally, I've never read a better story portraying the human emotions of men faced with slow and certain death as his characters were with scurvy.

It's a shame the way some readers go to the extreme in their criticisms of the magazine, telling the editor to cut out the "Men of Daring" feature, do away with Paul Stahr's great cover designs, and omit "Stranger Than Fiction." Their actions remind one of an obstinate and unruly kid who wants to throw away the icing of his piece of cake just to spite himself.

CLARENCE M. FINK.

INTERESTED—or not:

Camden, N. J.

Five things I'm not interested in:

1 Nuts who criticize technical flaws in a story.

2 Other nuts who don't want certain departments in the ARGOSY.

3 People who criticize fantastic stories.

4 These small-arms-and-ballistics experts who pick a yarn to pieces.

5 Whether or not I get a dollar for this letter.

Five things I am interested in:

1 ARGOSY

2 ARGOSY

3 ARGOSY

4 ARGOSY

5 ARGOSY

CHARLES HEIK.
(Age 12 years)

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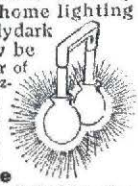

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