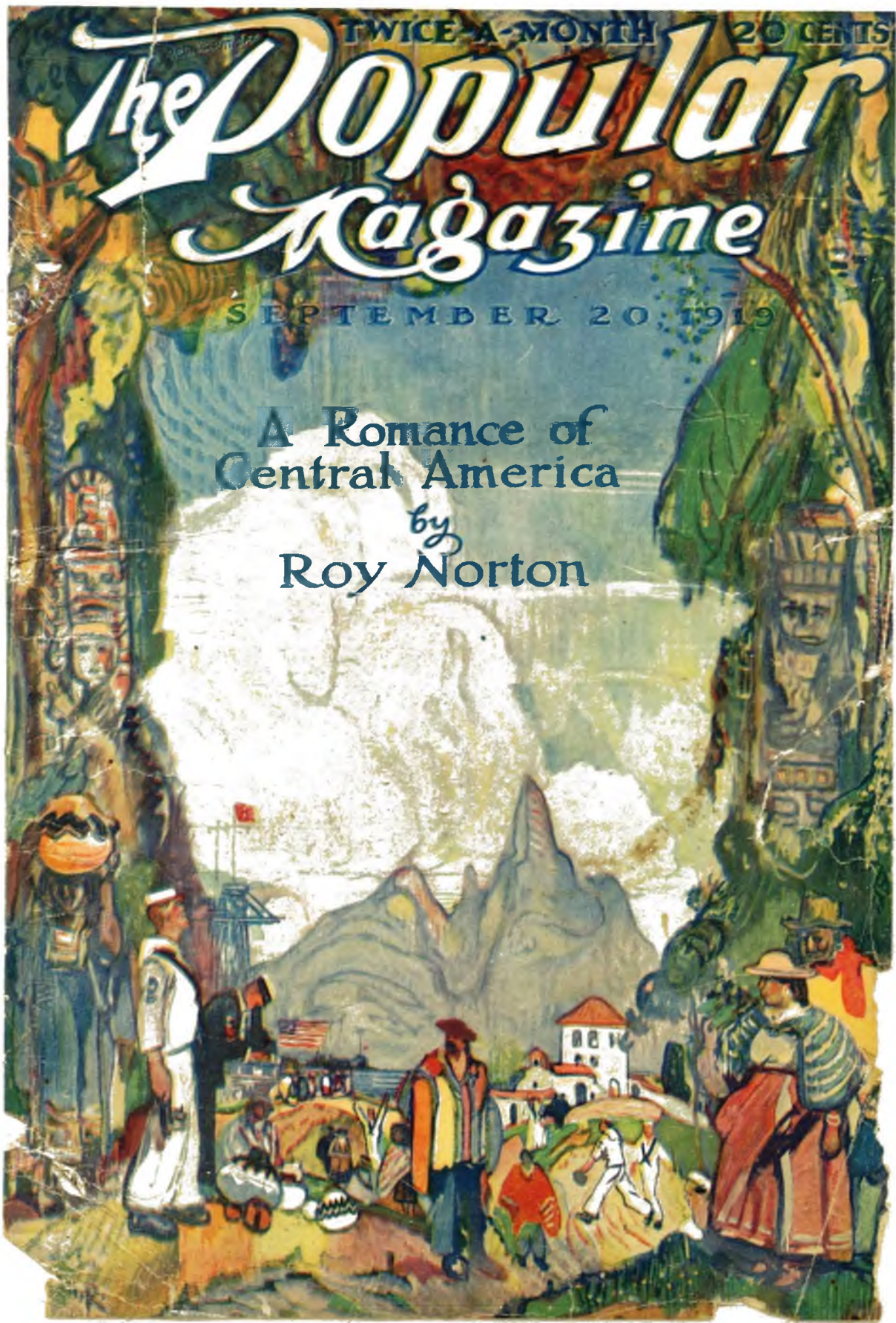


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SEP. 20, 1919

**THE POPULAR MAGAZINE**

Volume LIV  
Number 1





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The long, blissful, dreamy pipe of

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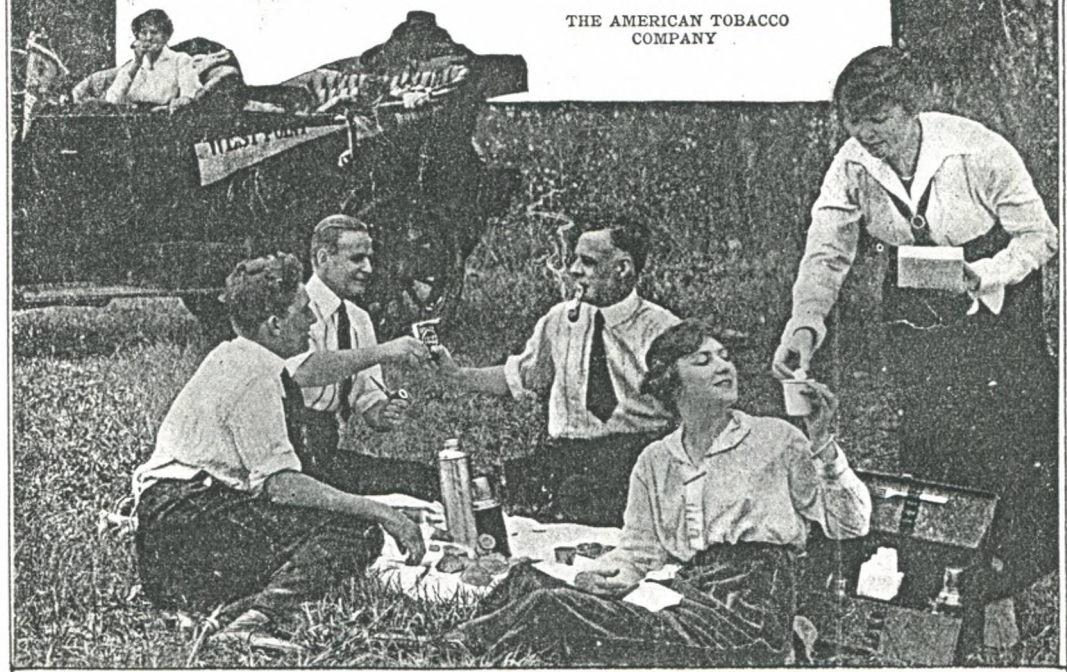
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Vol. LIV. No. 1

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September 20, 1919

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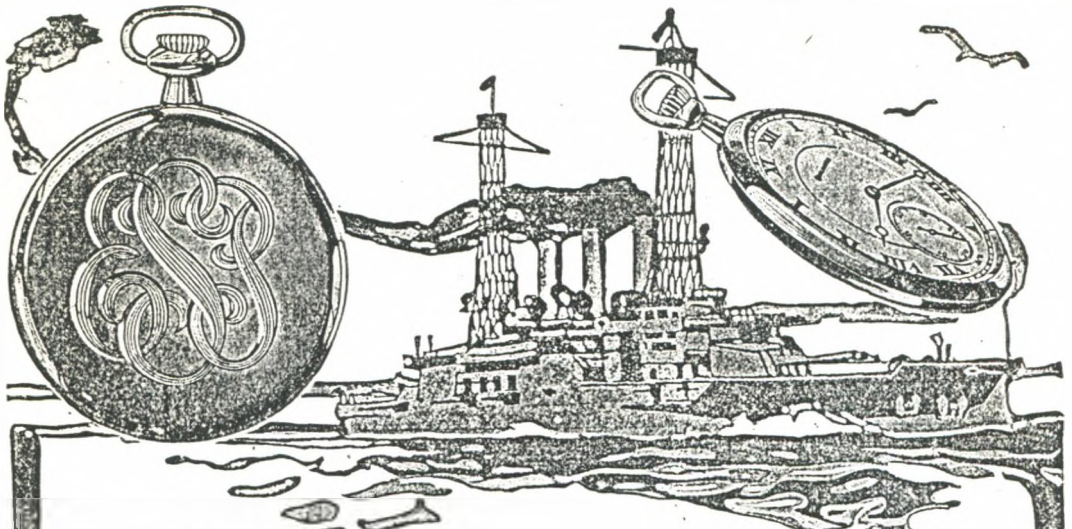


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# THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LIV.

SEPTEMBER 20, 1919.

No. 1.

## The Glyphs

By Roy Norton

*Author of "The Phantom U-Boat," "The Liberator," Etc.*

Who or what are glyphs? will be your first question, probably. They are records carved on stone by a lost people, in this case the Mayas of Central America, a race which achieved a civilization equal to that of the Egyptians, and thousands of years before them! In this story of Norton's there is a little band of daring adventurers who, fascinated by the reading of rare glyphs, go halfway round the world in search of the hidden metropolis of the ancient Mayas. What happens to them savors of the Arabian Nights, only with them it is their courage and endurance which are the magic of the marvelous performance. There is no heroine except the lost city, but the adventurers fall in love with her for good and sufficient reasons.

(A Complete Novel)

### CHAPTER I.

**I**T is impossible for me to decide, even to this day, whether the learned Doctor Morgano was an inspired genius or a crack-brained fool.

He had the strangest set of vices of any man I have ever known. If he desired something that he couldn't buy, he had not the slightest hesitancy in stealing it. If he was in funds, which was seldom, he made it a rule to pay his debts, and then to give away all he had left to the most palpable leeches, tramps, vagabonds, and utterly worthless women of the Quartier Latin where I first met him.

When out of funds and low in credit he drank heavily of the cheapest drinks and—got drunk! In funds, and with credit restored, he became almost abstemious, drinking nothing but rare vintages, which he sipped in obscure cafés, thoughtfully smacking his lean lips and for long, ecstatic pauses eying the ceiling, the trees visible through open windows, and sometimes condescending to lower his eyes to the mere human side of the spectacle, even as a god

given to lofty dreams might pityingly deign to observe the movements of ants in a neighboring hill. Sober he was silent, ascetic; drunk he sang Goliardic songs. He was a splendid liar. Sometimes I used to think he lied merely that he might entertain, enliven, or inspire those who sought the solace of his company. He lied about a hundred things; but, so far as I ever knew, never lied to save himself. If these be virtues, he merits a statue. If they are crimes, he should have been hanged before his progress was extended beyond the first quarter of his allotted span.

Personally, I don't care much one way or the other, because I laughed at him, derided him; laughed with him, and now, unlike Antony, come not to bury this dead Cæsar, but to praise. I take the unsanctioned liberty because it was characteristic of him in life that whenever he stole anything he said so and therefore I am certain he would not object to this childishly frank recountal of our adventures. If he filched a tablecloth from the invitingly open window of a mansion on the decent side of the Seine and within an hour made of it a present to some



gray-haired old concierge on the other side, he never neglected to inform the recipient that it was pilfered. Why, then, following his own self-imposed rule, shouldn't I write? I presume that he is no longer alive, for doubtless he would have told the tale himself had he survived. I was too good a friend of his to neglect this habitual clearance of record now that he is dead. Hence my written accounting!

In was in 1912 that I returned to my old stamping ground in the Quarter from an expedition into and across Africa that was not entirely too legitimate, I am convinced, but an expedition in which I had been duped to lead the way by a bunch of presumably German barons who presumably wished to make a mere trip for exploration and sport. I have since learned that they were more interested in making maps than in the indulgence of the sporting instinct; but they paid all they agreed to pay—in fact, paid well. They sought and secured my services because they wanted an out-of-doors man, and I am that. They learned somehow, and how they learned I have never known, that I had been in most of the out-of-the-way places of the globe from the Arctic to Tibet, and from the Mountains of the Rif to the Mountains of the Moon; that I had been an ivory poacher in Africa, and a fur poacher in Siberia; that, to paraphrase the estimable François Villon, I was “handy with gun, guts, and grub.”

I earned the money they paid. Also I earned the quiet, semibohemian rest that followed in the beloved haunts of my youth—there in the graying majestic part of Paris where I am at home. And so, enough of myself summarized in this: that I was somewhat known, was considered an adventurer neither unscrupulous nor overly scrupulous, a man beginning to show white hair in a clipped mustache, a man beginning to have much tolerance for the weaknesses of other men, and capable of keeping his mouth shut concerning mere peccadillos, fantasies, and frailties. A man who had a little money, was not averse to taking legitimate chances for more, and was unafraid. No hero at all, you see, but just an ordinary individual such as may be found in similar places in any big city on earth from Liverpool to Lacadiva, Singapore to Seattle, or Peking to Paris.

Doctor Morgano was known in Rome, London, New York, Leipsic, Cairo, and

Paris as an archæologist always out of a job. His specialty was deciphering hieroglyphics that other renowned professors and doctors couldn't read, collecting money for the knowledge, writing learned treatises upon such subjects, and riotously spending the revenues thus gained.

He never prospered, owing to his deficiencies. I use the last word charitably, perhaps; but the fact is that once a delegation of learned men from the Royal Society sought converse with him and went to Leipsic, where he declined to talk to them because he was playing pinochle in a beer garden; an agent for the Metropolitan Museum in New York went to Cairo to offer him a life job, which the doctor declined because he couldn't part from association with a dirty old Arab mystic for whom he had conceived a liking; the Royal Museum offered him a place as a sort of honored curator, but he was at the moment engrossed in a profound study of the habits, systems, and social amenities of snails, and so couldn't accept.

There you have the man. One who liked money to spend on others, but didn't like to take much trouble to get it, but could be quite content if he hadn't a centime in his purse; one who could be inordinately industrious in the study of a foolish hobby, but was too devilish lazy to make an honest living merely to pay his bills and be comfortable.

And this was the man who, on a summer's night in 1912, came to the vacant chair on the opposite side of the little, black, marble-topped liqueur-stained table on the pave in front of the Pantheon Café and said, in his soft, broken, foreign-tainted English:

“Ah! It is Signor Henri Hallewell, for whom I have so long looked. It is the signor who is back from—ees eet the sun, moon, or some star? We shall drink if my friend has the money to pay. As for me—thee renowned Signor Doctore—must ordair no more until I have more money! But, the Signor Henri is my guest! Some day I shall pay him. Now, let's have somesing vairy good to drink—somesing extraordinaire, because this is *une grande occasion!* I have to-day stolen from a private collection some tablets that have geeven to me thee secrets of a long-dead race! Ah! I am still *ze maitre* of fools!”



## THE GLYPHS

I couldn't make much from this. The fact that he had stolen something he desired wasn't sufficiently peculiar to arouse my interest or curiosity. I knew he'd steal anything he wanted and couldn't otherwise get. He had no moral sense in regard to property. It was his if he could get away with it—a most simple and satisfying creed. I remember, however, that I was impressed with the premise that this must have been a particularly shocking theft from the fact that he talked to me in English; because on ordinary occasions he discoursed in the Italian tongue, with which I am, through early years spent in Italy, as much at home as was he. I spare you who may read this the tortuous winding and mispronunciation of his words, and, incidentally, spare myself the trouble of phonetic spelling, by a most liberal interpretation of what he said as he leaned across that tiny table and told me the story that started me off with him into a singular if not particularly interesting adventure. An adventure into tropical jungles; into places where miasma hung like a shroud of death to bar our steps where there were deadly things; where each serpeant carried the *coup de grace* behind its laden and waiting fangs; where each insect was the bearer of the keys to another world; where each human being was an enemy, and where a scratch from a thorn might hurl one to earth a writhing, tormented thing until death gave welcomed release.

"I have to-day discovered," he said impressively, as he leaned across the table, "the-key to the glyphs of Guatemala!" He waited for me to express my astonishment and appeared disappointed when I did not immediately enthuse.

"I'm mighty glad to hear that," I said politely. "I didn't know the keys had been lost. If the chap that lost them is liberal he should pay you well. I found a bunch of keys one time in Naples that——"

"By the love of our lady! Hear him jest! Hear him!" he muttered in an awed voice that carried the singular effect of a scream of outrage, and I knew by the fact that he spoke in his native tongue that he was actually shocked and talking of me as a third person. "I find the key to the symbols of a lost race—a race which has hitherto been in the darkness of past and unknown ages—the story of the old, old world, and he, this man, jests! I find

that for which great minds have earnestly sought since the very days of Hernando Cortez and Las Casas, the lost hand for which in vain strove Brasseur de Bourbourg to guide him in his research, and this man—this damned Philistine—gibes!"

Pitying him for his suffering and myself for my intense ignorance, I said: "Well, if you've found the key to something, and it's worth keeping, or selling, worth hanging up or using, suppose you tell us about it. You've mentioned Cortez, the Spanish explorer of the sixteenth century, I presume. Also I know that old Las Casas was about as good a historian as he was peaceable friar; but I've never heard of this chap Brasseur de Bourbourg. He's a new one on me. Whom did he torture and, if he did, what's it got to do with your stealing something for which you may get pinched? What has that to do with a key and with glyphs? Glyphs? What are glyphs, anyhow?"

"Glyphs, my friend," he said, after sadly shaking himself and presumably at my expense ordering another drink, "glyphs are—are—carving on stones and other things. Carving that were made on stone by the lost races of the Central American isthmus—hieroglyphics of the Maya race there, of the Quicha race in Peru, and all those peoples who were civilized and old when Egypt was young. In vain for centuries have men tried to read them. In vain have they endeavored to lift the veil from that long-dead past—to read the history written in imperishable stone. And it is I—I—Morgan, who have accomplished where others failed!"

He leaned back, rounded his eyes, thumped his chest with both fists, and haughtily stared at me as if expecting me to get up and give three cheers or to pay the exaggerated deference due to a great conqueror!

But I didn't. I yawned, much to his obvious contempt, and said: "Well? Go ahead. Tell us all about it. What has that to do with me? You don't think I'm running an exploration society, do you?"

"I think," he said hopelessly, "that you're an incurable fool!" And then, after a moment's deliberation: "No, I shouldn't say that! I retract. I think you don't understand. I think you are the one man I can trust who will help me. You know the ways of the inaccessible hills; of des-



erts, and of snows; of forests and of jungles! You know how to help me to get to the places where I must go. To where I, Doctor Morgano, the wasted, and despised, and dissolute, may read the secrets of the lost races of the world and perhaps fill in the lost pages of man's life on this earth. You are the man who may be the instrument to recover much that knowledge has lost. You, the veteran adventurer, wise and experienced, I the man who would be lost, panic-stricken, mad, when removed from the concomitants of civilization as we know it. If I could but make you see; make you understand; make you appreciate the opportunity!"

He paused, despondently, as if appalled by the perplexing task of getting either an idea or enthusiasm through my skull, then suddenly brightened and leaned across to whisper: "Who knows? There might be treasure in it. The finding of long-hidden jewels, stores of golden ingots, great bars of silver! But," he added hastily and harshly when he saw that I was at last fully interested, "the archæological treasures shall be mine! Mine, you understand, for it would not do for priceless relics to be sullied by falling into ignorant and profane hands!"

"Meaning mine, I suppose," I said with some sarcasm.

"Of course I mean yours," he had no hesitancy in replying. The doctor was never very polite.

I laughed. He didn't seem to mind any more than did that historic philosopher mentioned by Rameses who merely considered the source of insult when kicked by a mule. And then, remembering that I could use considerable more money than I possessed, and that a man can scarcely retire for life on five or six thousand dollars, I began to ponder over what he had so astutely suggested. I recall that I was fascinated by a little pool of wine spilled on the black marble and that it reminded me of a black lake in the midst of a black jungle, a lake of death such as I had once seen in the heart of Africa and into whose sullen depths I had seen disappear for the last time the face of a friend. I can't tell why I was so strangely affected by this flash of imagination; but I do know that I must have momentarily forgotten the doctor, for his voice startled me when he said: "Come, come! What is the matter?" For an in-

stant I was bewildered and astonished by the fact that I was still here in Paris, that the table was still there, and that Doctor Morgano was staring at me in a puzzled way.

"Nothing, nothing!" I replied hastily.

"*Mon Dieu!* I thought you saw a ghost!" he exclaimed, and then reverting to his own enthusiasm: "It is better that we go to my rooms to talk. I will there show you something."

"All right. Let's go now," I said, getting to my feet and—to be honest—rather eager to get away from that nasty little black pool that had so strangely disturbed me.

With an air of satisfaction, quite as if he regarded this as a step in advance along his path of enterprise, the doctor walked by my side and directed the way. He talked breathlessly, en route, of lost peoples, of the Atalantis theory that civilization sprang from the West instead of the East and that a continent had been submerged; that perhaps the seat of civilization had been along the great Panama Isthmus and the northern portion of South America; of archæological mysteries in Guatemala and Peru; of Aztecs and Mayas, Incas and Quichuas and a dozen people I had not thought of since being bored stiff by their recital when cramming for my school examinations.

Indeed, so fast had I led the pace and so steadily had he talked that he was somewhat breathless when we came to the door of the tall old building in that narrow ancient street of the Rue Beaux Arts that straggles, narrow and obscure, away from the Rue Buonaparte. The big doors were still open and the concierge merely glared at us through the window, identified the doctor with a sniff that suggested that his rent was overdue, and we began to climb flight after flight of stone stairs, all in darkness save when lighted now and then by a wax match which my conductor scratched to assist me over treacherous portions of the ascent. The place smelled of garlic, of herbs, of fish, and of paints. From the fact that the doctor's quarters were exactly under the tiles I surmised that he had not been in funds for some time. But evidently his gas bill had been paid, because the room was remarkably well lighted by an exceptionally good chandelier. I looked at it with admiration.

"I must have good lights for my work."



he explained when he saw my look. "That is a most excellent light. Excellent! Most excellent! Came from the house of Monsieur le Duc de Angoulême when it was being renovated. It was of far less importance than the duke rather than a savant be without such a light." He chuckled as if amused. "The workman who stole it for me asked but five francs for it!"

I had time to look about me. The place was like a junk shop. It had more worthless plunder in it than I had even seen collected outside a museum. It was the untidiest room I ever saw, and I have dwelt, storm-bound, in an Eskimo barrabara which I had hitherto regarded as the limit of dirt. Actually, the floor was so covered with papers, books, chunks of stone, and pieces of marble, that one followed a trail to get to a chair from which the doctor unceremoniously dumped a pile of manuscript and invited me to be seated. His worktable was littered with dishes and the remnants of a home-cooked meal. This debris he made into a pile and deposited on the floor, after which he unlocked his desk and produced therefrom, carefully swathed, several stone tablets.

"Behold," he cried, "the Glyphs! The key to the break in the history of the world."

They looked to me like a few slabs on which an apprentice to a tombstone maker had been practicing his chisels; but the doctor was so evidently enthused and happy over them that I hadn't the cruelty to bring him back to earth.

"To think," he said with something like tragic agitation, "that these priceless, peerless jewels have been for years, perhaps hundreds of years, in the filthy hands of some idle, ignorant ass of a curio collector, while scientists such as I have unearthed buried cities, lost temples, removed mountains of sand to find them! Braved deserts and death, endured hardships untold, while all the time these were reposing here in Paris! Faugh! *Sapristi!* 'Tis enough to make one doubt the existence of a Supreme Being. There they are! Gaze upon them."

I tried to appear spellbound. He actually fell to caressing them with his long, lean, unclean fingers. For the moment he was certainly mad. His eyes, wildly lighted and glowing, betrayed insanity as surely as I'm here. His leathery, clean-shaven lips twisted as if he were mentally uttering an incantation to strange gods. He looked

like Mephistopheles gloating over an acquisition of lost souls.

"These," he said, patting them, "are key stones; as if some tutor had cut a full alphabet to instruct children how to read!"

I thought to myself that those ancient schoolmasters must have been a lot of bone-heads not to have been able to invent simpler alphabets than those. I was deucedly glad I didn't have to go to school in those times; for I'm convinced I should have remained illiterate all my life.

"Look to me like a lot of funny faces made accidentally by drunken slugs on a garden path," I said, and he opened his lips to anathematize me, I think, when we were suddenly aware that some one with heavy feet was ascending the stairs. The doctor abruptly, nay hurriedly, thrust his stone quarry back into the drawers of the desk and listened intently. The concierge's voice could be heard volubly discoursing, and then there was a breathless moment while we listened to learn if they were passing our door; but they didn't. There was a sharp, staccato rapping, and the archæologist with a frown made his way to the door and opened it. A large, fat sergeant de ville stood there puffing after his long climb, and wheezed out an interrogatory "Doctor Paolo Morgano?"

"Yes. What do you wish?" replied my host with surprising coolness and sang-froid, although I'll bet his heart was thumping a tattoo on his lean ribs.

"I should like to come inside. Official business, monsieur," he said, somewhat pompously.

"Why certainly. Come in," the doctor replied, throwing the door wide and beckoning a graceful invitation to the policeman.

His manner appeared to somewhat overawe the officer, which takes a bit of doing in Paris, as I have sometimes learned to my cost. But so frank, so cool was this old rascal that he could have befooled a much smarter policeman than that fat sergeant.

"Some curios have been stolen from the house of Monsieur Beauvaix in the Bois."

"Oh," said the doctor thoughtfully. "Monsieur Beauvaix the—let me think— Ah! the man who made a fortune out of soap fat and who is the biggest fool of a collector in all Paris! I remember now. He asked me to inspect and catalogue his pre-

cious stuff and after one look I told him it was not worth his while. That was rubbish—all rubbish! Who could have been fool enough to steal anything from him?"

"That is what my superior wishes to learn," replied the officer dryly. "He sent me to notify all collectors in Paris to watch for them. The objects stolen were some stone tablets——"

The doctor suddenly doubled over with laughter, much to my astonishment as well as the agent's, and then, to my much greater surprise, said: "Ah! that explains it. Wait a moment, monsieur. Just a moment." And then he actually walked to the desk, pulled the glyphs out and held them toward the policeman, who blinked at them, handled them, and said as if to himself: "Yes, one had a carving that looked like a sheep's head and another had snakes and—— Perhaps Monsieur le Doctor will tell me how these came into his possession?" he ended rather sternly.

"*Vraiment!* Easily," declared the doctor without the slightest sign of annoyance, or anything other than of extreme candor. "A gamin stopped me on the street at the foot of my stairs the other night and said he had heard that I sometimes purchased funny stones. He showed me these. I bought them there in the darkness for two francs. Ha! Ha! that gamin got my two francs for nothing. He fooled me—Doctor Paolo Morgano—member of a dozen distinguished archaeological societies, author of a thousand monographs, originator of the Morganic theory of Egyptian decadence." Again he doubled over with a pretense of mirth that was sufficiently well simulated to fool even me. I wondered if he had not actually been "stringing" me all that evening. I was convinced of it when he carelessly shoved the tablets into the policeman's hands and said, sarcastically: "You are most welcome to them. Take them back to the soap man; but for heaven's sake, monsieur, don't tell any one about me. It would cause a laugh in every renowned society in Europe that I, Doctor Paolo Morgano, should have been bilked of two francs by a mere gamin of the streets of Paris, an impudent little ragamuffin of a thief who might as well have sold me a parcel of bricks or cobblestones!"

He actually got away with it. The sergeant de ville laughed boisterously. I pretended to do likewise. The doctor slapped the policeman on the back as if overcome

with mirth. The concierge opened the door and stared in as if wishing to hear the joke. And then the officer carelessly tied a piece of string around the tablets, Doctor Morgano assisted him to wrap them in an old copy of *Le Matin*, and, still chuckling at such a fine joke, the sergeant apologized for disturbing so renowned a savant, and disappeared. We were motionless and listening until the steps died away down the well of the staircase. The doctor went to the door, opened it, tiptoed out into the darkness, and, I think, hung over the upper banister. I wondered if this madman had been having a little fun with me, and was half inclined to resentment until he returned, carefully shut the door, and threw a pair of frenzied, gesticulatory hands into the air above his head and burst into a stream of Italian objurcation.

"Think of it! Those precious stones—worth their weight in diamonds or pearls—being carried through the streets by a policeman and back to the house of that father of all asses! That unspeakable, impossible ignoramus of a soap-fat boiler, Beauvaix! What a tragedy! Tragedy! Suppose something should happen to them? Suppose they should be lost?"

He clutched his fingers through his hair and threatened to pick a few handfuls, and I thought it best to calm him.

"Steady, doctor! Steady! Don't take it too much to heart. Beauvaix will doubtless let you look at them again," I remonstrated.

He suddenly relaxed, grinned, and said: "I don't need to look at them again to know their semblance. I took care to make a carbon rubbing and two exact copies of them in indelible ink." He paused and then added quite hopefully, "And, furthermore, I can steal them again when I want them. They'll be safer there, perhaps, than in this room. Old Beauvaix is like a custodian at the Cluny Musée—doesn't know the value of what he keeps, but keeps it well! I think he suspected me. Otherwise I'd not have given them up so easily. You can readily understand," he said almost apologetically, "that it wouldn't have done at all for me to be arrested just now when time is so essential. We must hurry to our enterprise. We must!"

"What's the rush?" I asked in plain Americanese.

"Rush? I suppose that means haste. What is the haste, monsieur my friend?"



Simply this: that I am nearly sixty years of age; that in me reposes a great secret; that my life is to-day more precious than that of any man on earth because of the knowledge that is herein contained!"

And he thumped his head with his knuckles as if to impress upon me the idea that he was thumping a treasure box of exceeding worth. He glared at me with an enormous solemnity, his round eyes, large, black, and inscrutable-looking as if struggling to pop out from the confining caverns of thatched, overhanging eyebrows which twitched nervously above them.

"Now, the tablets have left my possession. That is settled. You seek treasure. I seek knowledge. You know the material side of how to live while penetrating into savage places. I don't. You know what such expeditions cost. I don't. So it seems that we are partners."

I wasn't so sure of this. I hadn't fully taken it on, although I admit that it sounded mighty attractive. I've always maintained a sort of sneaking love for the idea of hidden treasure, ever since, as a boy, I read "Treasure Island." What boy with red blood in his veins hasn't? It's no disgrace, and isn't disreputable, as far as I can reason.

"But," I objected dubiously, "I don't have the remotest idea of how much it would cost to get to Guatemala. I don't even know what the steamer fares would be. I've never been there. Then there is the question of labor—packers and such—a *safari*, as we call it in Africa. All those details mean money. How are we to get it?"

"Oh, that," said Doctor Morgano with an air of boredom, "is nothing. That is for you to accomplish. Maybe you have it. Maybe it could be borrowed from somebody. Maybe you could get it from some bank. I have noticed that banks most always have a lot of money around in trays behind glass cases. It's no good there. Why couldn't you go and get some of that? Perhaps if you told them you wanted a little of it for an urgent need, they'd let you have some of it. Of course, if we find a lot of treasure stored away somewhere, we'd give it back to them and a lot more beside. We can't afford to be ungenerous or stingy, can we?"

As if all obstacles had been successfully negotiated, he bade me good night. It was not until, still in a maze, I was halfway

down the five flights of stairs that the full measure of his absurdities dawned upon me, and I had to lean against the wall and laugh.

## CHAPTER II.

Sometimes I wonder if we should have ever made that trip had not the charcutier kicked J. Dalrymple Wardrop's dog. Also had not Beni Hassan Azdul been there to observe the aforementioned kick. Also had I not been there to remonstrate with the pork butcher and, when called a foul name, administer a kick to him. Hence enter into this bald, plain chronicle, the persons of J. Dalrymple Wardrop, afterward lovingly known as Wardy; Beni Hassan Azdul, familiar as Benny, and Monty, the dog. And let it be further explained that the dog's cognomen was thus bestowed because his owner had won him through a private game of piquet at Monte Carlo. I never knew how he won Beni Hassan Azdul. Perhaps it was out in Bedouin districts of the Sahara desert. Anyhow, he had him.

I felt better after booting the charcutier; because the kick he had handed the dog was gratuitous, and I am one of those persons who aren't quite positive but that dogs have souls of sorts. I was somewhat surprised by the hurried appearance of Beni Hassan Azdul, who hastened up and, in the gloom, proffered me a rather wicked-looking knife with the whispered suggestion that I cut the charcutier's throat and thus make a complete job of it. A crowd threatened to gather, attracted by the lamentations of the charcutier. I have in my time played a deal of football not without some local fame. I know how to kick! But I don't quite know how to face a crowd of infuriated toy vendors, shoe-lace merchants, dealers in post cards and the latest toy novelties. I thrust the nearest one away and beat a strategic retreat in the direction of my favorite café.

Considerably less heated, in fact, quite calm and placid, I was sitting there considering Doctor Morgano, glyphs, ancient civilizations and the marvelous coiffure of a young lady who smoked a cigar at an adjoining table, when I was disturbed by a deep voice that spoke behind me in English—and to hear one's own tongue in a foreign land is always a surprise—"Pardon me. I don't know your name; but it doesn't in the least matter. Thank you for kicking

the man who kicked my dog. If there is any other person you wish kicked, it is my pleasure to reciprocate and I am 'at your disposal!"

He was an enormous man, six feet six in his stockinged feet and built in perfect proportion. There was no mistaking his class or nationality—quite evidently an Englishman of the upper classes, as they call them in a country where class does represent a distinction, after all. He wore a monocle which seemed so firmly fixed in his face that I fancied it would stick there were he awake or asleep, drunk or sober, and it is creditable to my first observation that later familiarity confirmed the estimate. He wore a singularly individual garb as if to defy comment, fashions, and, indeed, the entire world of conventionalities. A "deer-stalker" hat dented down the center and cocked at a defiant, belligerent angle, surmounted his finely shaped head. His golfing suit was startlingly squared and checkered, but expensive and well-woven tweed that must have come from the real old spinners' looms. His shoes were of the type that cost more money than I could ever afford, and that I'm not certain I should order if I were a millionaire, being heavy soled, with huge, punched uppers. His stockings were of rare old homespun, but with a defiant border rolled downward in a broad expanse of reds, yellows, purples, greens, and blues. His hands, that I was later to learn were so practical, strong, and capable, were concealed beneath a heavy pair of expensive dog-hide gloves, and they held a cane of twisted elephant hide that immediately arrested my scrutiny. In fact, I looked at the walking stick with a sharp sense of recognizing something familiar before my eyes lifted to his monocle; to his strong face; to the graying beard that, well trimmed, concealed a combative, stubborn, resolute chin.

"Why the thanks?" said I, disturbed. "It's nothing. I always kick a man who kicks a dog—unwarranted. I presume you refer to——"

And then I saw, standing behind him, the Arabic person who in my street encounter had tendered a knife; but now the high, thin, sensitive nose was twitching in response to its nostrils, and as perfect a set of teeth as I have ever seen were exposed by a faint smile.

"Benny tells me that you are the one who

resented an insult to Monty. Monty is my dog," he explained. "Incidentally, Benny is my man. They're both friends of mine—Monty and Ben. I back, uphold, defend—sometimes support—my friends!" There was a dry flavor of humor, like the intangible bouquet of old wines, in his last explanation that impelled me to stand up and ask him for the privilege of his company. I'm glad, now, that I did.

"Let us celebrate," said I, "such a remarkable occurrence. It's not every day that a man has the opportunity to defend a defenseless beast. There should be a police court, learned doctors of the law, eloquent advocates, renowned compilers of judicial decisions, to protect the rights of dogs. Please join me."

I had expected that his Arabic follower would at least hover near, but with a gentle admonitory wave of his hand my new friend dismissed not only him, but the dog. The latter went reluctantly. I think there was a piece of string tied round his neck, which was occasionally jerked by his conductor.

Amused, I consented. And I was speedily to learn that this was no amateur in ordering, but a real connoisseur who not only knew what he wanted but how to get it. Lots of us know what we want, but getting it is another matter. J. D. W. had both gifts. I sat eying that twist of elephant hide. My host sat eying me.

"You are interested in that?" he suddenly asked, holding it up for my better inspection.

"Somewhat," I replied. "It's about the best one I've ever seen. I've tried to make them, very unsuccessfully, I fear."

"You have been in Africa?"

"Yes—across it twice."

He betrayed more interest than hitherto, which made me believe that up to that time he had been merely paying what he considered to be Monty's indebtedness, but was now curious concerning myself. He fixed me with that monocle of his and then suddenly leaned back and chuckled.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "Who'd have thought it! You're the man I saw at Niobrara—the man with the magnificent red whiskers that flowed down around his chest. Same man! Man with the red whiskers! Can't be mistaken. And—wait a moment—your name is—is—Hallewell!"

It was my turn to be astonished. I was certain that I had never seen him before.



One couldn't possibly forget such a man as he. He must have surmised from my look of astonishment that I was cudgeling my memory, and added: "No, I didn't meet you. Saw you through a window. Friend of mine said, 'That's Hallewell. Feller who goes where others don't. Shoots with his eyes shut and scores a bull. I've an idea he's a bad egg.'"

"Thanks," said I dryly, and my host laughed as if amused.

"Perhaps you will not consider it impertinent, inasmuch as you know my name, that I am somewhat curious to know yours?"

"Not at all! Not at all!" And he thereupon took a card from his pocket and handed it to me. The name was very familiar. I knew much of him; knew that he had once been a Ceylon tea planter, afterward a big-game hunter, something of an explorer, much of an adventurer, and that men spoke well of him. Also that he was a man of considerable wealth, able to gratify all his whims. It is odd to me, in recalling that meeting, that I did not bestow a moment's thought on Doctor Morgano until after more than an hour's friendly conversation, when my new friend asked most politely, if I intended returning to Africa or was bound for the north pole.

"No," replied I, "neither has entered my mind. In fact, I am somewhat unsettled because—well, because a friend of mine wished me to accompany him into the jungles of Guatemala. He wishes to look at ruins."

"Guatemala? Humph! That's where those Aztec Johnnies lived. Funny old temples and— By Jove! I'd like to come along with you! I'm rather fed up with Paris. Been wondering what to do. Eh?"

This was so unexpected that I was slightly embarrassed as to how to reply. I wasn't exactly certain that, everything else being arranged, the doctor would care to have him accompany us. Moreover, I don't believe that up to that minute I had thoroughly resolved to go myself. I wasn't certain that Doctor Morgano was anything other than a fairly harmless old lunatic who, while sincere, was fooling himself. Suddenly the thought entered my mind that it might be best for Wardrop to talk with the archæologist and draw his own conclusions. First, there would be some sport in seeing these two together, and, second, if anything came of it, I couldn't be held to blame.

"The truth is," I said, "that it is rather beyond my authority to arrange this expedition. It originated in the mind of Doctor Paolo Morgano. If he were to decide that——"

"All right! Let's go see him," said Wardrop, immediately snapping his fingers for the waiter and demanding his bill. I had no time to protest before, the indebtedness paid, my host was on his feet towering so high above other men that all eyes were on him. Evidently he was a man of quick decision and action. I grinned to myself with anticipatory enjoyment of the shock he should sustain when ushered into that queer domicile of the doctor's; but my grin was wasted. The big man trudged placidly after me up the six flights of dark, dirty stone stairs, as if expecting to find a savant in such quarters, and when the doctor admitted us, did not show the slightest sign of surprise, curiosity, or disgust. Indeed, he appeared rather to enjoy sitting on a mummy case, quite as if he had sat on many such before I introduced them.

"Mr. Wardrop," I said, "is known to me by reputation. He wishes to go with us to Guatemala."

"Is he going to pay our expenses?" the doctor asked before I could get any further, and James Dalrymple Wardrop's monocle nearly fell from his eye, and he looked at the door, then at us, wondering if he had fallen into some new "holdup" game.

"I hadn't mentioned that trifling matter to him," I replied.

"But you told him about the glyphs?"

"Not a word! He likes to hunt, explore, visit jungles, and so forth."

"Then he must be *insano*!" said the doctor, eying the placid visitor much as if he were a new chunk of stone. "He wishes to go to—merely for—impossible!"

"Quite true, I assure you," said the big man, seemingly amused. "But—perhaps I'm not asking too much if you will explain something of the nature of this—er—this expedition, doctor."

"Got any money?" asked the doctor in about the same tone that he might have used if asking for a match.

"Some," said Wardrop. "Depends on what for."

"Ah, my friend, you are the man we have been seeking. By the shades of Pharaoh, it is fate! We have knowledge—you have money. What a happy combination. You

shall come. You shall have the privilege of sharing in the greatest scientific discovery of your generation. You shall become renowned as——”

I saw some signs of either alarm, amusement, or withdrawal on our visitor's face and decided that it was time to interrupt.

“Doctor, perhaps you had best let me explain. Mr. Wardrop, Doctor Morgano, of whom you have doubtless heard as a distinguished archæologist, believes he has discovered the key to the hieroglyphics sculptured upon the ruins in Guatemala and Yucatan, which, as you also doubtless know, have been unsolvable mysteries heretofore. He—pardon, Doctor Morgano, let me finish, please! As I was about to say, Mr. Wardrop, the doctor wishes to go there to conduct his investigations. He confided in me because he thinks he might need the services of some one a trifle more accustomed to exploration, travel, jungles, snakes, Indians, et cetera, than he is. His inducement to me was that we might find treasure, and that my recompense should be to share in that. All he asks is for means to study those ruins, and interpret lost history. I have not the money to equip the expedition unassisted. If you are interested, and care to take such extraordinary risks of ever being reimbursed for your share of the outlay, I would cheerfully share with you on any terms we might agree upon. That is the plain statement of the situation.”

Wardrop shifted his eyes from mine to the doctor, who was now prancing up and down and cracking his finger joints with impatience. For a time he studied the doctor, then I think smiled behind his beard, and addressed himself to me.

“Do you really think there is any hope of discovering buried treasure?” he demanded ironically.

“Not one chance in a million!” I asserted, whereupon the doctor went into a sudden paroxysm of rage, shook his fists in the air, called upon the gods to witness that in me they were beholding the greatest of fools, and then roared, in Italian, with his face not more than eighteen inches from mine and exhaling passion and garlic strangely intermixed: “Is that the way to induce a man to advance capital for our search? Pah! Poof! You do tell the signor that there is nothing in it! That you think there is no treasure! That I, Paolo

Morgano, known everywhere as a savant, and accepted, with honors, by a score of learned societies, do what you call in your barbaric English ‘speak through my hat!’”

He might have said more but that he was interrupted by a stentorian roar of laughter. J. Dalrymple Wardrop was rocking to and fro on his mummy case overcome by enjoyment. It was palpable that he thoroughly understood Italian, a fact which I afterward knew.

The doctor retired sulkily to his chair and threw himself into it with outsprawled feet in an attitude of hopeless dejection and resignation.

“Go on. Continue. Spoil everything,” he said to me with a glare.

“Hallewell, do you think he's really got what he thinks he has—the key to the hieroglyphics?” Wardrop asked me as if the doctor were not even present.

“Oh, no doubt of that,” I declared. “He's peculiar but—well, he knows his job. He's a whale in archæology—no small fry.”

“I thank you for that,” interjected the doctor acridly. “I am at least a leviathan and not a shrimp!”

“And you think there is a chance for some sport?” continued Wardrop, paying not the slightest heed to the irate doctor.

“Of sorts. Maybe not much. I don't know. I've never been there and that's the only reason why I'm interested,” I admitted, telling nothing but plain truth. He grinned sympathetically and his eyes sparkled like those of an adventurous boy.

“How much would the whole trip cost?” he asked with a grain of evident caution.

“Anywhere from ten to a hundred thousand francs,” I said, giving it a nice comfortable margin. “I can stand twenty thousand myself. If we find anything in the way of treasure, which, as I said, is doubtful, we might cut it into three portions, although the doctor says he doesn't seek money.”

He got to his feet and stretched his arms as if to adjust himself into his coat.

“All right,” he said. “I'm in on it. I can start to-morrow morning if it suits your plans. Where do we outfit? On this side, or at some port across the Caribbean? You'll have to look after that part of it because that sort of thing annoys me.”

I was somewhat knocked off my pins by this unexpected, off-handed acceptance of so indefinite an adventure. I was yet to



learn that this man made all decisions as quickly and unhesitatingly. But now he was assailed by the doctor. I can call it nothing less than an assault, for the archaeologist leaped to his feet, seized the visitor's hand, twisted it, wrung it, and then cast it aside as if it were wet linen being flung on the grass to dry.

"Ah, comrade!" he shouted. "Partner in the mystery of the ages! We shall share the joy of unfolding history like the leaves of a sealed book. *Mon Dieu!* Think! Think what it means to know what they did, those lost nations! Where they went; who ruled them; their habits; their hopes; their strange worships! You are *sympatico*. This hard-headed Henri is cold. A man who sees nothing that he can not touch, handle, barter, or throw aside. But—ah, forgive me, friend!" he cried, suddenly rushing toward me. "It is the heart of gold but with the head that sees no visions! The practical man. At what hour do we start to-morrow?"

I think he was vastly distressed when I explained that there were many things to be thought of and arranged; many purchases to be made; much knowledge to be acquired before we could start. Also that steamships didn't run daily to the Isthmian coasts and ports. I was glad of an excuse to get away from him, and accompanied Wardrop down the stairs and to a quiet retreat where I could tell him all that I knew of the quest, of Doctor Morgano's discovery.

The milk cans were rattling over the cobblestones of old Paris when we parted company in the morning.

### CHAPTER III.

When it came down to the practical side of our venture, the doctor didn't know a single fact regarding Guatemala that could be of the slightest assistance to me. I sometimes doubt if he had any very exact knowledge as to its location. All that he knew about it was that it was some place where there were jungles, and that it had numerous ruins. He could tell a lot about those. Wardrop knew exactly where it was, and how to get there, but didn't care to be bored with investigations as to its climate or what sort of equipment we should carry. He knew all about big-game shooting and had made some most extraordinary

trips; but always he had left it to some one else to get the outfits together. It's a fact that, sitting one night in a London club, he got interested in Lhasa, which was then a Forbidden City, walked to his apartments, where he arrived at three a. m., decided he would like to go there, and at five a. m. took a train from Charing Cross with nothing but a hand valise containing a change of linen, three cases of rifles and shot guns, and a bass viol. Had I known this latter caprice before we started, I should have jibbed; but I didn't.

Fortunately for the party I found a Guatemalan in the steamship office who did know a little about his own country, and who gave me much advice—most of it bad. But it enabled me to purchase a lot of plunder that afterward proved useful; and a lot that didn't. I never knew until we reached the dock at Cherbourg, where we were to board a tramp steamer, that Wardrop was taking Benny with him. Also a bass viol in its case, which took up more room than a small moving van. Furthermore, he had a portable bath tub, a motion-picture camera that neither he nor any other of us ever knew how to operate, and a gramophone. The only joyous possession he left behind was his dog, the reason for that being that he didn't care to have Monty suffer any hardships. I think he put him in a boarding house.

Doctor Morgano's luggage consisted of a tin cylinder filled with maps, and a dozen notebooks; but his waistcoat bulged. One upper pocket contained a toothbrush and a razor, the other a shaving stick and some tooth soap.

"About luggage, doctor," I asked solicitously, when he stepped off the train, "I suppose your trunk was checked through to here?"

"Trunk? Trunk? I have no trunk," he replied.

"But what about changes of linen, extra equipment of that sort?" I asked hopefully.

"Never thought of them!" he said, looking troubled. "But—what do they matter? It is a great quest, my friend. That is all that counts now." And he waved his hands as if dismissing an entirely immaterial obstacle. Wardrop roared with delight. I could have cursed fluently; but we fortunately had time to buy the doctor a few things for the voyage before the steamer sailed.

And in time it did, with our menagerie aboard. We were the sole voyagers. Wardrop was too seasoned a traveler to be at all disconcerted by the sea, and his man Benny might have been a sailor. The doctor was too much absorbed in the books he had brought aboard at Cherbourg to have time for seasickness, and we made a propitious start. It is true that when Wardrop first tried the bass viol the crew was panic-stricken; but I can't blame the men. So was I. I rushed to his cabin—stalked it—to learn the cause of the trouble. Wardrop was sawing away with evident pleasure. He couldn't play at all.

"Why do you do it?" I asked solicitously.

"Because it kicks up such an infernal noise," he replied, which was all the satisfaction I ever got. And I honestly believe he played it for that sole reason. And so, in time, we came within sight of Barrios. We got our outfit together and checked it in a wretched wooden hotel to the accompaniment of the humming of mosquitoes that seemed to be a part and fit into that mosaic of swamp and houses that was reached by wooden bridges. We thanked Heaven when we reached Livingston, which lay clean, well ordered, and white on its low bluff. But in conversation with some of the residents, I began to wonder if our outfit was quite such as we required. It appeared that all that portion of Guatemala where there were ruins was about as much of a wilderness as Piccadilly Circus in London, or the Place de l'Opera in Paris. However, there was nothing for it but to continue this journey of wild exploration, and so we shipped the stuff and took a railway train to the nearest point by Quirigua, where the doctor said he would first attack this lost civilization of which he could no longer speak without tears in his eyes.

We got there all right because it was but fifty-seven miles from Barrios. We put up at a hotel, where Wardrop passed hours in oiling his stock of weapons, and Benny took his first lesson in that accursed American game of draw poker. The doctor was wildly excited.

I shall never forget our first trip into the wilderness.

We got a permit from an American fruit company that owned it. We took a sort of cab from the manager's office, and drove through a magnificent plantation until we reached what might have been an exquisite

tropical park. The big ceibas and other trees were rivaled by the size of banana plants. The roads and paths were very nice. I looked for the band stand but couldn't find it. I hope they have built it by now. Also, some sort of a refreshment bar might assist other explorers in that terrifying spot. James Dalrymple Wardrop, sitting with a gun on his knees, grinned malevolently when he descended from our conveyance and sought a nicely sheltered path which should lead us to the archaeological director of research in the long-dead city of Quirigua, of which the doctor had talked constantly for the preceding week.

We met the director. He was a gentleman all right, and an archæologist of distinction. He had a lot of plans for excavation that he was carrying out. I think the doctor would, in his delight at meeting a kindred spirit, have unbosomed his secret if I had not opportunely stepped on his toe. The director showed us where they had begun to dig out a lot of old ruins on Temple Court. There were several very nice tramways there to carry away the rubbish, and already they had unearthed some stuff that looked to me like chunks of stone, but over which the doctor threatened to weep large tears of excitement. Wardrop yawned, and I determined then and there to decoy the doctor to some place where we could have a few minutes undisturbed conversation. It was after we had returned to our quarters and the doctor and I were alone.

"Are you going to tell that professor chap there at the ruins what you have discovered?" I asked pointedly.

"Science, my friend, preserves no secrets," replied the doctor grandiosely.

"All right, that settles it!" said I. "You can stay here. I'll get Wardrop and find out when the next seamer sails."

"Why?" the doctor queried, blinking his eyes.

"Why just this: Wardrop came over here for sport, adventure, exploration, and all that sort of thing. I came over here because I hoped you had the secret to where the chaps who carved all those rocks hid their boodle when they moved on, or died, or were massacred, or whatever it was that wiped them out. It's not fair to us to rob us of our chances," I concluded, in no very good humor.

The doctor seemed to consider this for a long time.



"I'll promise," he said, "provided you keep away from me! You have no knowledge of the important things of life. You are too unimaginative. But there is no reason why I shouldn't keep what I know to myself until your claims are satisfied. Understand?"

"Yes, I understand," I said, secretly pleased by his promise, for I knew that he would keep his word. But it looked as if Wardrop and I might remain there a long, long time while our partner in enterprise luxuriated in ruins.

"Hereafter," the doctor announced, "I shall conduct some private explorations. I have engaged the services of a Maya Indian named Ixtual to assist me."

"What does he cost and who is to pay him?" I queried, somewhat ironically, I fear.

"I think I promised him a dollar a day; but have forgotten the exact figures. And you, of course, will pay him, because I have no money," replied the doctor, airily dismissing the subject. "Oh, by the way, he is waiting outside for me now. I must be going."

I had no chance to protest, but accompanied the doctor to the door. There, standing by the side of a pillar, I saw for the first time Ixtual. Lean and lithe, his body and pose suggested the very jaguar, or American tiger, that his ancestors had held to be the king of beasts. He was as straight as a pampas plume on a windless day, yet as ready to quiver and move. I think that I must have appraised him with a careless eye that took in his proportions first, even as a horseman glances admiringly at the form of a beautiful animal before studying its head, and then with something akin to a start, my eyes met his. I have never seen such in a human head! Veiled, they seemed, but filled with unutterable qualities; grief, power, ambition, disdain, courtesy, kindness, and cruelty were all brooding there in their somber depths. His face was finely and resolutely featured—finer cut, indeed, than that of any Indian I had ever met. I felt that he had measured me in one swift, flashing survey, and then he gravely bowed to me, and turned away with the little doctor. I stood watching them depart, strangely disturbed.

"What an extraordinary man!" I exclaimed aloud, thinking that Wardy had come up behind me.

"That exactly describes him," replied a voice behind me, and I turned to discover that it was the manager for the fruit company, who, as he sometimes did, had dropped in to pay us a visit. He, too, was staring contemplatively at the doctor and his companion with a speculative frown.

"That is one man—that chap Ixtual—I don't quite understand and never shall," he said thoughtfully. "I've never quite made him out. The Maya Indians that come down from up around Coban are the best and most industrious laborers I can hire. I pay them higher wages than have ever been paid here. I like them. I house some of them; but this Indian Ixtual has never yet worked for me. I don't know what it is. He never works but always has money enough to pay his bills—if he ever makes any—which I doubt! The others seem to pay him a mysterious sort of deference. He always strikes me as a cross between an irreconcilable savage and a perfect gentleman, if you can dope out what I mean."

"That's about the way he impressed me," I agreed as we went inside to find Wardy.

Three or four days went by with nothing at all interesting developing from the doctor's new and individual efforts, save that while prodding around one day at his behest Ixtual was bitten by one of the small venomous snakes with which the country abounds, and, I doubt not, would have begun to chant his death song had not the doctor applied a tourniquet, gashed the wound, sucked the poison therefrom, and applied an antitoxin. Inasmuch as the recipient of that sort of snakely attention usually hastened to the pearly gates, I think that Ixtual thereafter regarded the doctor as a medicine man beyond compare. Either that or—I don't know what tie developed between them that caused the taciturn Maya to become the savant's shadow. Perhaps it was the fact that the doctor speedily developed a surprising facility in the Maya tongue which, in the course of his researches, he had assiduously studied for years and now required nothing more than practice for perfection. Or could it have been that Ixtual himself, for reasons of his own, perhaps as the last hope of his race, had been striving, with laborious pathos, to interpret the long-lost meaning of those strange records and symbols? I presume I shall never know.

Yet I do know this, that when, on a hot

mid-afternoon, the doctor, hatless, begrimed with dirt, burst into the room where Wardy and I were playing piquet, Ixtual was at his heels, dark, haughty, and vainly striving to conceal a pronounced exultation.

"I've found it!" the doctor cried, shaking a paper covered with rude drawings. "I've found what is probably the last stone ever cut before Quirigua became secondary. The Maya chronology was based on Katuns which numbered seven thousand two hundred days, or nearly twenty years each. Twenty Katuns constituted a cycle. Thus the temple which my scientific colleague is now excavating was built in 9.19.0.0.0:9 Ahau 19 Mol, of Maya records, which would be about the year 320 A. D. of ours. Now, you see in those times this particular place was devoted to human sacrifices. Was called the "Place of Sacrifice" for the nation, as each cornice of a temple proclaimed in sculptured hieroglyphics."

He had been raving in his rapid Italian but was now interrupted by Wardy's drawling voice.

"Pardon me, doctor. While I do speak and understand some Italian, you go too fast for me. You use words that are unknown to my vocabulary."

The doctor at first threatened a frenzy, then, catching sight of Ixtual's inquiring look, seemed suddenly and unaccountably to feel the necessity for restraint. He folded the paper and put it in his pocket. He looked at his watch, at his grimy hands, and then, turning to Ixtual, said something in the Maya tongue that caused Ixtual to bow obediently, almost deferentially, and leave the room. The doctor watched until the Indian was well on his way, then turned to us and in muttered French said: "I told him we would work no more to-day. I sent him back to put away the tools and bring my hat. He must not know all that I have learned. I have found what I think is the last record of Quirigua, which I surmise was abandoned with the advent to power of some more enlightened priest-king who declared against further human sacrifices, or because the place was cursed with fevers or similar plagues owing to climatic changes. In any event, Ixtual and I unearthed this record."

He pulled the dirty slip of paper from his pocket and read:

"By decree of the Highest God Icopan, communicated through His High Priest and

Mouthpiece'—and so forth and so forth in the Mol—Ummh! and so forth and so forth." He mumbled hurriedly a long string of titles and dates. "And for the guidance of those who have not hitherto heard, the Place of Sacrifice is on this date abandoned and its priests and dwellers retired past the Mountains of the Mines—to the Sacred City, carrying with them to the Temple of Treasure all of value hitherto herein. To those who know not the way but would communicate with any who here dwelt; to those barbaric seekers after truth who would find the true and only gods of our people and would journey thither; six days' journey to the westward must ye go upon the highway, and three days to the northward, where ye shall find the sacred twin peaks to which the sun is tied, and beneath it those who guard the way."

He stopped reading, refolded the note and replaced it in his pocket, with the air of one who had given explicit information.

"Well, it seems as if there was some other place to go," said Wardy, "and as if there was some place where one might find treasure. But there's nothing particularly sporting about it. It doesn't say whether there was any big game, or shooting of any sort, and——"

"Listen to him! Listen to him!" screamed the doctor in exasperation. "Shooting! He talks of shooting when I have discovered the solution of the great historical mystery of ages!"

"But," said I in what I hoped was a conciliatory tone, "your information is, you must grant, a trifle indefinite. There are a thousand twin peaks in this country. The great highway, in a country where vegetation grows by inches per night, would have been obliterated by the jungle a thousand years ago. All that we know is that over it one traveled so many days to the westward and so many to the north."

"But there must be some peaks that are different from others," the doctor protested.

"Then suppose you tell us where they are," I demanded dryly, foreseeing a hopeless task.

"Very well. I will," angrily retorted the doctor, and fell to pacing backward and forward through the room, cracking his finger joints and muttering to himself.

"The señor's hat!" said a voice from the doorway in Spanish, and Ixtual had reappeared.

"Ixtual," questioned the doctor peremptorily, "where are the sacred twin peaks of your people?"

The Indian started as if he had been aroused from sleep. He stared from the doctor to us and then back at the savant as if troubled by this abrupt demand for information. For the only time in our acquaintance that I ever knew him to do so, he stammered, hesitated, and appeared undecided. The doctor said something to him in the Maya tongue that had the effect of relieving him; for he slowly and patiently made a long reply. For a long time they talked. Now and then the doctor referred to us, I am confident, for his gestures indicated that he was speaking of us, perhaps arguing in our behalf. He evidently refused some offer of Ixtual's, and then asked a question. The Indian did not immediately reply but turned and almost rudely stared at me for a long time, then shifted his scrutiny to Wardy as if pondering over some terrible problem which he must decide. The doctor again spoke what I inferred was a plea—quite as if overcoming some objection made by his strange henchman, and the latter somewhat reluctantly gave way.

"May I tell them?" the doctor asked, reverting to that Spanish which was common to Ixtual as well as ourselves.

"If the great reader of mysteries vouches for them as for himself," Ixtual declared.

"He says there is a legend among his people that in a spur of the Sierra Chuchumatlan mountains are two peaks beyond which no living man has ever looked and that they were sacred to those who built the temples here," the doctor answered concisely enough, and still speaking in Spanish as if to make certain that Ixtual might understand. But the latter was not satisfied.

"Señores," he said gravely, "those peaks are sacred to my people and were once a part of their religion. A man does not betray his religion, does he?"

"But I saw you kneeling in the Catholic church!" Wardy exclaimed, and for a moment the Indian looked troubled.

"There may be other gods than mine, and in which some of my people who work for the white man believe," was his unanswerable argument. "For the sake of those, I do propitiate them. Listen! I do not know that beyond the great peaks are

either mounds or ruins. I know that they are guarded by jungles more terrible than you have ever seen and through which my people believe that none may pass lest he incur the anger of our ancient gods. Not within the knowledge of man has any one ever gone through them. Men of your race who cared for nothing but gold tried and——" He shrugged his shoulders and added: "Died! In later years my people have killed those who made the attempt."

He paused as if to let this sink in, stared out through the open door at the languid palms as if still undecided, and then turned upon us almost fiercely and with harsh resolution manifest in every line of him, from flashing eyes, gesturing hands, and tensed body. With something between vow, threat, and promise, he said:

"But for reasons of my own I will try to take you there. The Great One for whom the Maya has long waited asks it and answers for you."

He turned toward Doctor Morgano—that boseiled, frowsy, unkempt savant who with long, black, straight and neglected hair stood there eagerly blinking as if he were a Maya god, and with the utmost deference bowed to him. "But this I say," he declared, confronting Wardy and me, "that if harm comes to my people; that if upon them is turned a horde of those heartless ones who seek for naught but gold; that if the Maya is again overrun by white barbarians who debauch with words our women and with drink our men, then may all my gods give me the means and way to kill you; may my days be prolonged though it be to the life of the oldest man to slay you, and may all the curses of the hereafter rest on your souls when you are dead!" Suddenly all his half-concealed air of hatred was dropped as if exhausted by vehemence, his face softened, his lips twitched, and his hands were thrust out in appeal. "Understand my position, señores," he said in a totally different tone. "I am Maya. My people have suffered. They have been beaten. Once they ruled, but now they are ruled by those who are not worthy. By those whose skins are white. I ask you not to betray my people through me who am but trying to repay one who saved his life, and who hopes through him to lift his people from bondage. You as men would do this for your own. I beg you help me do it for mine."

There was something almost pathetic about him as he stood there before us; something dignified as if he were a man ennobled by high purpose; something that commanded respect. Indian that he was—and mark you I am without either sentiment or poesy—I saw in him a brave and worthy advocate for the few and pitiful survivors of a great nation which had flourished when my people were unborn, or mere barbarians.

I think I put my hand out to meet his. I do not remember whether he accepted it; but I do know that I stood in front of him and said: "Ixtual, I give you my word of honor that no harm shall ever come to you or yours through me. No matter what we may learn, I shall never lead any one to where you may guide us. Is that sufficient?"

"That is also my pledge," said Wardy solemnly.

"It is enough," said Ixtual. "To-morrow morning we start," and turned and walked away as if, having once made a decision, it was irrevocable. And neither in this nor anything after did I know him to break his word.

#### CHAPTER IV.

Somehow all our individual positions were altered when, at sunrise, our party left the rich loamy lowlands of the Montagua River and swung off over a bullock trail toward the west. We had hurriedly packed our belongings, bought pack burros and saddle ponies, hired a muleteer, paid our bills, and now blindly followed Ixtual, our Maya guide. He, the despised—no, not despised, but regarded tolerantly as an inferior—had been lifted to a plane equal if not above ours. He rose in front, a man broad shouldered and graceful, with stiffly held head. That he was in laborer's garb with a straw mushroom of a hat on his head, and bare feet that swung limply beneath stirrups that he scorned did not detract from his dignity. He was leading us by sufrance and not through either compulsion or tolerance. We were off to the Sacred Peaks in the care of a master guide who had decided to show us the coveted way.

It was a marvelous journey, sometimes through beautifully fertile and cultivated lands, and again through dense jungles where we were compelled to ride in single file. Sometimes we stopped in a village

posada, and other times we slept in the open; but always considering that we had a rather good-sized pack train to look after, we made fair progress. At first, the natives we met were all friendly; but, stage by stage, we could discern an alteration not only in the regard of those we passed but in the people themselves. Friendliness gave way to indifference, then to curious stares, and at last to pronounced disregard followed by black and sometimes threatening looks. I was convinced that we had entered a country which would have been extremely unpleasant, difficult, and, as we advanced, nearly impossible to travel had it not been for the presence of Ixtual.

Moreover, as we got clean away from the lowland tribes, we entered a land where the Maya stock was altogether in evidence. In the lowlands Ixtual had been treated as a workman; but now we began to note that he was accorded a subtle deference as if among his own people he was a man of importance. I cannot say that his demeanor toward us at all altered, save that now he quietly insisted on certain things, such as the places we must make for our next camps, routes we were to take that plainly brought us into wide and tiring detours through bad trails, and once I heard him caution the doctor to betray no knowledge of the Maya tongue if our camp was visited that night.

The five days indicated by the doctor's glyphs had stretched to twelve on that afternoon when, emerging from a jungle trail, the Maya stopped until we were all huddled together and then pointed impressively toward the north.

"There, señores," said he in Spanish, "are the Sacred Peaks. It is to those we must make our way, if you still insist."

Far away, rising dimly against the afternoon sky we saw a chain of mountain tops and, towering above them, two singular peaks that were of such needlelike sharpness as to suggest twin Matterhorns, and of such regularity, as seen from that distance, as to suggest the handiwork of man rather than nature. They were twins! They appeared to have the same height, shape, and regularity. I have seen many twin peaks, so-called, in the course of a wandering life, but never have I seen two such as these. Their tops were white, as if shrouded in dull silver, verging gradually to blue-gray, to pale blue, and then to purple, dense and solid, at their base.



"By George!" exclaimed Wardy, "they're wonderful. Worth coming to see, all right, if there isn't anything to shoot."

Benny said something in Arabic that I fancy was to suggest that these peaks reminded him of others they had seen, for Wardrop nodded and said: "But not so fine as these." And then turning to me: "What do you think of them?"

"If the trails aren't too bad, we should be there by day after to-morrow night," I said.

"Philistine!" Wardy chuckled. "Aren't they beautiful?"

"Yes," I admitted. "But somehow I have never felt that I came here to look at the scenery. I'm seeking something more substantial. If I find what brought me here, I shall have ample time to admire my surroundings. If I don't, the finest view in the world will look pretty rotten to me!"

I discovered that Ixtual and the doctor had drawn ahead of us to sufficient distance to be out of earshot, and that the Indian was evidently giving impressive, if not emphatic instructions or admonitions to his companion, who listened attentively and frequently nodded his head as if to emphasize that he understood. And now he turned back to us, leaving Ixtual alone, staring at those distant peaks.

"Ixtual says," the doctor imparted, and then stopped and took off his hat and ran his fingers through his hair as if in considerable perplexity, "Ixtual says that it is necessary for all of you to camp here until—until he and I return." He blurted the last in desperation as if eager to have it out.

"He says that he must take me to meet some of his people who, as far as I can gather, live about four or five leagues from here—in a sort of village, I think. He says that we can't go any farther without getting permission from a council, whatever that is."

"He means the town council—the village burgomasters, or maybe the constabulary," said Wardrop, taking his monocle out, polishing it carefully and then staring at the imperturbable Ixtual, who was still gazing, as if in a reverie, at the distant peaks. "Well, mate," he said, addressing me in English, "what do you think of it? Is it safe to let the doctor go along with this bally chap to some place where maybe they'll do things to him?"

"I don't see what else we can do," I replied thoughtfully. "That is, if Doctor Morgano is willing to accept the risks. In a way, we are rather at the mercy of this Indian; but he seems to be fond of the doctor, so I don't suppose means him any harm. What do you think?"

Wardrop for a long time appeared to be considering the situation. Now he shifted his eyes from the savant to the imperturbable Ixtual, then back to me, then to Benny, and at last said: "It looks to me as if it were for Morgano to decide, rather than us. Doctor, how do you feel about it?"

"Just the same as when I was beginning to be seasick," said the doctor. "But I can't reason him out of it. He says it's necessary to get their consent. He assures me that all I have to do is to tell the men we have to meet that all I wish is to decipher the lost history of the Mayas. He says he will be personally responsible that no harm will come to me."

"Humph! Jolly lot of good his personal guarantee would be if they took you to some place and skinned, hanged, and then fried and ate you!" growled Wardrop.

"If you think they would do that, perhaps I had better not go," said the doctor; and I rather agreed with him that this might prove unpleasant.

Ixtual interrupted us.

"Come, brother," he said to the doctor. "We have far to travel. It grows late. You can not pass to those peaks without doing as I say. Perhaps not then. If it is still your wish to continue the quest——"

"It is still my wish!" interrupted the doctor with quick emphasis. "I must learn what the secret of the lost——"

"Then," suavely interjected Ixtual, "it is time we started."

The doctor suddenly came to a decision.

"I'm going," he said. "I can't let an opportunity like this pass by. I trust Ixtual."

But just the same, I noted that he spoke in French, which this adopted brother of his couldn't understand. Then he turned and said something in the Maya, and Ixtual gravely listened, then addressed us in Spanish.

"No harm shall come to my brother," he said quietly. "Of that I give you my word, which is never broken. You are to remain here until we return, if it be a week." And with that he remounted his horse, the doc-

tor crawled painfully into his saddle, and they rode away, leaving us to pitch camp.

That night we speculated rather aimlessly and anxiously as to what had befallen our companion, and finally went to sleep. The next day we passed much time in watching for Ixtual's and the doctor's return. But they didn't come. The next day Wardy took Benny and turned into the jungle in the hope of finding something to shoot. He got a small deer, which helped out the larder. I fished, and got nothing, although I had excitement enough at one time with a devilishly aggressive snake that I killed and whose diamond-shaped head warned me that it was a deadly type. That evening we began to be apprehensive lest the doctor be in trouble, and sat up late. Finally we turned into our hammocks, and Wardy snored exasperatingly; but I couldn't sleep. I was just turning over to stretch my limbs when I heard a noise, and sat up, reaching for my rifle, which I had hung on hooks under the hammock shrouds. Then I piled out and kicked the camp fire into a blaze, having recognized the voices of the doctor and Ixtual as they approached. Wardrop rolled out, as did Benny and the muleteer, just as the missing members of our party dismounted and came stiffly toward the fire.

The doctor's face, habitually skinny and cavernous, looked inordinately drawn and tired.

"Brandy! For the love of the Virgin, give me a drink of brandy!" he exclaimed to me in French. "I've been through a purgatory! They've made me take oaths! Compelled me to swear by all sorts of awful, horrible things, that I seek nothing other than the decoding of their lost history. I have been frightened—terribly frightened. I have been tempted to renounce all desire to continue my research. Nothing save the fact that I alone might ever reach the secrets of the lost civilization could have induced me to do what I have done. I am now a member of their accursed tribe, renouncing all other allegiance! Brandy—give me——"

And I believe he was on the verge of swooning when I poured him a drink which he gulped, raw and hot, as if it were water. As he lifted his arm I observed that he gave a sudden twitch as if in pain; but I did not learn until later that upon his breast above the heart and extending diagonally upward over the muscles of his right

arm and shoulder were sacrificial wounds into which had been rubbed red and purple pigments that were to brand him until death and dissolution. We never knew what he experienced in that initiation into the Maya tribe. Sometimes Wardrop and I speculate vainly as to what took place. We never knew from his lips; but this we do know, that there are martyrs in science as well as in religion; that it is possible for a man to become so immersed in the great quest for knowledge that he will sacrifice even his body, or his life, to gain the knowledge which he seeks. I am certain that Doctor Morgano was one of these.

The situation wasn't altogether unimpressive. I sometimes think of it. I see again the edge of the jungle, the vivid stars overhead, the agitation of rank verdure moved by a gentle breeze, the lift of torn flame from the fire, the shadowy background in which squatted Beni Hassan Azdul and the stolid muleteer, and near me, Wardrop, huge and intent, as he looked from one to another. And then I see myself staring at the doctor and Ixtual as they two munched, like men famished, the food I had put before them. But I do not remember spoken words. As far as I can recall the conversation was almost trivial, confined to polite inquiries, recountals of how we in camp had passed the time, and finally, of Ixtual's admonitions that we must get to rest and fail not to be on our way at dawn.

Thinking it over, I seem now to understand that he was apprehensive lest some decree of his tribe be revoked, and we be prevented from farther advance. Somehow I conjecture that all he passed through in our behalf was not precisely beer and skittles for him; that he had given pledges that might terrify the souls of less steadfast men. But I do know that he was desperately intent on our early departure; for it was still dark with the blackness preceding the dawn when he aroused us, and curtly insisted that we must lose not an instant's time in preparing for the march forward toward the Sacred Peaks.

## CHAPTER V.

We passed over trails where the tired animals stumbled, and once we aroused a chorus of dog protests as if we had disturbed a village. Ixtual seemed ever anxious that we hasten our pace, and sometimes was impatient because we made no faster progress;

but when the dawn burst and broke with the speed it always has in those latitudes, the Maya seemed relieved that we had come to the borders of what appeared to be a virgin jungle. He sought a place that permitted us to enter it, found it, and led us through what was nothing more than a narrow path into its depths, where we rested. Looking back as if through the egress of a tunnel, I saw plantations below me, the occasional thatched roof of a nipa hut, the stretch of a gentle declivity up which we had climbed in the darkness, and, far away to the right, the morning light on something that looked like a temple in the heart of greenery. It was very distant, almost obscure, tantalizing in its want of detail. Yet somehow I surmised when Doctor Morgano stared at it for a moment with distended eyes that for him it carried trying recollections. He shivered, then turned away toward the jungle as if eager to forget that distant edifice and all that it meant to him. We paused merely long enough to make cocoa and eat some biscuit, and then Ixtual insisted upon our resumption of toil; for it was that and nothing less. Toil of a most distressing character.

For some hours we made our way in half darkness through tunnels of fern and vegetation, over what seemed to have once been a road but was now nothing better than a game path. Creepers festooned across our way until cut; fallen trees necessitated detours; sometimes the trail diverged into a dozen paths, and we waited while Ixtual examined each one. And then when it was nearly noon and the sun beating upon the jungle roof with hammers of white rays we emerged into what had sometime, I opine, been a clearing, and waded through pampas grass higher than our heads although we were mounted, and came to the ruins of a house.

"We are safe now," grunted Ixtual as if vastly relieved because he had found the way to this spot. "Here we will rest until to-morrow."

And if I can speak for the others of the party, I think no one at all was inclined to object. I know I didn't; for after we had killed a few snakes, and thrown out a section of fallen roof from the once-on-a-time house, we had a real meal, and fell into our hammocks exhausted. We needed the rest. And I was even sorry for the poor lathered burros and ponies that drank so

feverishly of the water we gave them, and plunged their noses so ravenously into the food we heaped before them.

We felt like new men the next morning when it was time to start. It was but little beyond sunrise, and yet Ixtual had been long awake and exploring the sole paths from the central clearing.

"This is the way," he said to us, when the last ax had been slid beneath harness, and the last pot tied on the pack. "We cannot travel so far to-day. It will be hard work."

He spoke plain truth if ever a man did. I vouch for that. I have learned what hard work is. All day long we struggled and fought, twisted and curved, through a jungle that seemed ever to grow more obdurate and dense. We labored with machetes now and then, slashing and cutting at tangles of vines as if they were living enemies. Sometimes we fairly bored our way through the vegetable enemy by sheer weight and driving power. Sometimes, exhausted, we sat dripping in sullen silence, finding momentary solace in pipe or cigarette, only to resume that heartbreaking toil of trying to force our way through an interminable and malevolent jungle. Ixtual was conducting us now through the aid of a compass alone.

"We are too far to the left." Or, "we must bear to the right, señores," he said, and yet I cheerfully admit that the soul of the man was ever brave and determined. And that night when we found a tiny open spot and made camp he said, as if satisfied: "This is far beyond any place that any man within our time has ever reached. If we can keep on long enough, we shall pass the jungle that holds, and fights, and keeps all men away, and beyond it find places where travel is easier; where no man for hundreds of years has passed. It is well!"

I am certain we liked him for that. It at least gave us something to hope for. It was fortunate for his reputation as a prognosticator that he didn't venture on how long we were to continue such heartbreaking and muscle-aching effort. Otherwise, I doubt not, we should have given it up as a hopeless task. We thought we might get through within a day or two. Had we known that we were to work this hard for sixteen days, we might have quit in despair! A recountal of physical agonies endured through sweltering heat, stinking fermentation of dead vegetation, innumerable

pests of insects, and the constant danger of small deadly vipers and more noble constrictors of the boa tribe, that occasionally sought to embrace one of us or a mule, the insane chattering of monkeys, parrots, and a million other nerve-racking birds, would be useless; but this I assert, that on the day when the jungle thinned and we again saw daylight above us, we were a party of hollowed-eyed, unshaven, unkempt madmen. Men so exhausted they could not speak; men who were ready to murder over imagined insults; men who cared not whether they lived or died, so long as they might find rest! And then, when it seemed that even the fatalistic Oriental stoicism of Benny must break under the strain, and when that giant Wardrop, never complaining, never relinquishing, but ever doggedly beating his way forward came to the final end of strength, we broke through.

We came to an open spot, cut through a thin tangle of creeper, came to a wider open glade, found a way around an upjutting clump of forest, found a narrow water course, another tangle of less stalwart vine, creeper, and tree, and then forged suddenly out upon bare and ascending rock. The half-dead pack animals, urged on by blows and thrusts and prods that in less strained times would have been unthought of, staggered on behind us as we human beings, driven by will power alone, mounted those slopes. Together, men and animals, we threw ourselves upon the sparse grass. Together we looked downward over that barrier of green that we had cleft, traversed, and conquered. It lay behind us malignant, sullen, brooding, and motionless, bathed by a sympathetic and helpless sun.

To our left a narrow strip of bushes and shrubs seemed laid like a belt up the mountain side, and conjecturing that there we might find water, we turned laboredly toward it. A beautiful stream of water, clear and cold, proved that but a little farther it gushed from the earth; otherwise it would have been heated by the sun's rays. We decided to follow the stream upward to the spring. We climbed the hillside that was now becoming constantly steeper, and stopped with exclamations of surprise. The spring was in a barren spot of rock and was conducted to an elaborately carved and wrought basin through a pipe shaped like an enormous snake from whose huge, distended mouth the water gushed in a four-inch

stream. For more than forty feet that curiously carved serpent lay stretched in graceful curves, a solid piece cut from the solid rock beneath, and this rock itself bore a long series of inscriptions. Instantly Doctor Morgano forgot his fatigue and literally threw himself upon these records, digging away the patches of lichen and moss with his fingers for all the world like a man gone suddenly mad.

"We may as well camp here, it strikes me," said Wardrop with a significant look at the savant.

"There's not the slightest use in trying to drag him away until he has deciphered the whole caboodle," I agreed, and spoke to Ixtual, who assented to our making camp.

I observed, however, that he placed it in such a position that by night no flame of fire nor reflection therefrom might be visible to those who dwelt beyond the jungle. I spoke to him of this fact and he replied: "None but the chiefs of my people know that any man has come this way. The people might be angry if they knew. It is not wise to enrage a people."

"But why shouldn't your people be glad to learn all that can be learned of their history?" I asked curiously.

"My people," he said with great aloofness, "believe these peaks guard something sacred, and that until a sign is given them by the Great Priest who passed countless of hundreds of years ago, no one may come here to disturb the rest of the gods, who do but slumber."

"But haven't they been asleep a long time?" dryly asked Wardy, who had been listening.

"What is a sleep of a thousand or five thousand years to those whose lives are eternal?" Ixtual demanded scornfully, and then to put an end to a conversation that to him was becoming distasteful, turned and walked away to where the doctor was still pawing the inscriptions. Wardrop and I were contented to rest, but Benny decided to take a hand, and when I fell asleep in the shade of a tent fly, mentally thanking Heaven that at last we had reached an altitude where mosquitoes and gnats were not so pestiferous, he was patiently gouging away here and there, with the doctor occasionally cautioning him to be careful.

I was awakened by a gunshot, and found that it was nearly dusk. Wardy, who had disappeared, returned after a while with



three very palatable game birds that he declared were of the grouse variety, and a wild guinea fowl. Also, he was happier than he had been at any time since we started. He carefully looked over his rifles by the fire-light after our evening meal was finished and I chaffed him about it.

"That's all right," he said, puffing away at his pipe, and looking up at me through his monocle that in the reflection looked as if he had a mirror patched over one eye. "I have my reasons!"

"Seen any big game? Got wind of any pumas or black jaguars yet?" I asked banteringly; but he merely grunted in a self-satisfied way and continued his everlasting rubbing and oiling. The doctor was working away at some cabalistic work of his own, lying flat on his belly and painfully writing in a huge notebook with a fountain pen. Benny and Juan, the stolid muleteer from the lowlands, were gambling with some card game they alone understood and I think the astute Benny was steadily winning as usual, and Ixtual sat hunched up and dreaming, with wide-open eyes in the fire. I wondered what he saw there. I was the first to turn in, and was not disturbed when the others retired from their diversions. A good night's rest was all I now required to make me fit again.

I was dreaming of a girl I met one time in Bombay when my dream was suddenly ended by a terrific, blood-stirring scream. Instantly afterward there was the deafening report of a rifle fired not more than a foot or two above my head, then another animal scream and the furious sounds of something rolling, snarling and clawing the grass and rocks, together with the panic-stricken snorts of the pack mules and ponies as they tried to break loose from the rawhide reatas with which they had been fastened to convenient rocks.

"A light, Benny, you scoundrel! Where's my other electric torch? I've just smashed this one. For the love of Allah, thou ivory-headed one, a light!" Wardrop's voice was roaring, and Benny soon flashed an electric torch.

"This way—this way, fool!" Wardy again yelled, and I knew that he had gone in the direction of the animal snarls. Juan was now in the midst of the rodeo pacifying his animals, and Ixtual was heaping the kindling prepared for the morning's fire on a heap of embers he had hastily kicked to-

gether. The blaze climbed higher. There was another shot, and stillness. I ran over to where the giant Englishman was now dancing around in ecstasy.

"Look at him—look at the beauty! I've got one at last. The trip has paid for itself as far as I'm concerned!" he shouted.

And in the light from the electric torch and fire I saw, stretched out and still, the first jaguar I had ever seen, and the finest I was ever to see, a magnificent cat whose glossy, sheeny fur was as black and glistening as the coat of Erebus. My old hunter instinct awoke, and for the moment I envied Wardrop.

"You lucky beggar!" I exclaimed.

"That's what made me get ready," chorled Wardy. "I saw spoor this afternoon. Laugh when I clean up my rifles next time, will you? It's lucky!"

And then we were given another fine treatment for a good night's rest.

"By the mother of riddles!" cried the doctor, who after a single glance at the rare jaguar had strolled indifferently away toward the camp fire. "I've got it!"

"Now what on earth do you suppose he's got?" I asked Wardy, who could not tear himself from his kill.

"Oh, probably the colic. Whatever it is, it's not so important as this."

"I've got the key to the left-hand inscription," roared Doctor Morgano. "The one I was puzzled by this afternoon. It's inspiration—that's what it is. I'm a genius. It's a combination of the glyphs of the first and second cycles, and perhaps antedates either. It is a most marvelous discovery! Prodigiously valuable. It opens a new record, it does!"

"By Gad!" said I to the muleteer, who was the only one in that camp who seemed sane. "If you and I aren't turned loose in a wilderness with a lot of maniacs on a vacation!"

## CHAPTER VI.

Wardy was so intent on the preservation of his black jaguar pelt, so rapturous over it as a trophy, so boastful because he claimed to be one of a bare half dozen living men who had shot one, that he was unapproachable. He and Benny were so smeared with their slaughterhouse work as they painstakingly picked and scraped and tore away minute pieces of fat from the inside of that unfortunate beast's hide, that one might

have thought the fate of generations of sportsmen to come hinged upon their doing this job thoroughly. Wardrop rhapsodized like a poet.

The doctor and Ixtual and Juan all clawed moss and lichen. I knew we couldn't advance until the work was done, so, being the only practical man in the party, borrowed Wardrop's shotgun and started out to get a few wild birds for the pot. I had heard in the dawn the screaming see-saw-see-saw whank of wild guinea fowl farther up the mountain's side. I'd have given my watch for a good hunting dog just then, but within half an hour had three wild guinea hens, and one of those booming grouse that lived in that isolated place. After that I had rather bad luck and slow work for an hour or two and had by this time got pretty well up the mountain side. I had gone higher than I intended and was thinking of turning back a few yards farther, and then I made a discovery.

There was a shelf as if the land had slipped some time in past ages, and there, broken off at its very edge and in naked rock where not even the sparse grass of the higher altitudes grew, was a well-cut road. Not a mere path, but a road cut through living rock like those old Roman roads built by the Mediterranean conquerors when they moved northward. A road with gutters for freshet waters at its sides, and as well engineered as could be done by any man of this day. Here and there the sparse vegetation of the high altitude had found lodgement in a crevice; occasionally rubble stones from the sides had slipped across, and a few huge bowlders that had rolled from higher points had found lodgement. But the great highway was there, clear, passable, unbroken through all the lost ages, so well had those ancients built. Forgetful of game, I traversed it for nearly a mile as it wound like a modern switch-back to and fro by easy gradients on the steep mountain side.

And then I consulted my watch, saw that it was nearly noon, surmised that my companions below might begin to worry over my absence, and somewhat reluctantly retraced my steps. I arrived to find the camp half packed, and some anxiety or annoyance visible because of my nonappearance. But they all welcomed the game and speedily luncheon was being prepared.

The doctor was again off by himself with his notebook, and working like a madman over his interminable puzzles. He ate of those most palatable and delicious fried birds as if they were merely tinned tripe. The others of us, I record, gnawed the last tender morsels from the bones and wished for more. But I, in the meantime, had not divulged my discovery. I thought I was entitled to some archæological credit myself.

"The stone reads," said the doctor, at last, "as follows: 'This spring was opened and this basin built by the keepers of the Sacred Portals, Quantex and Totlipan, in their hours of idleness. It was begun in the latter part of the eighth cycle and completed in the beginning of the ninth to the glorification of the god Icopan, to whom it is humbly dedicated. The Great Road by which it is situated, leading up to the Sacred Portals of the outer gate, was then narrow but has since been widened by the zealous labors of those who believe that it is fitting that the way should be made easy for those who visit the Sacred Temple City of the *God of all Gods.*'"

The doctor paused, looked up at us, and said, almost shame-facedly: "The inscriptions on the right-hand side I am not quite clear about. I require other links in this lost history. Those records seemingly chronicle the journeys of various persons of importance who passed this way. There is but one of them that is highly interesting, and that records that on a certain day there passed along this so-called sacred highway those who had fled from or abandoned Quirigua. Thus it ends. Now the next step for us is to direct our efforts to the discovery of that road."

It was my turn.

"While you have been wasting your time in immaterial points here," I said, "I have taken pains to search for and find that road. I knew we should need it," I said loftily. "I will guide you to it whenever you are ready."

By one o'clock we were on the old road, and I think that all of us, men as well as beasts were grateful for the change. It was vastly different from burrowing our way through a jungle. It was, indeed, a highway. What it must have been in those past ages when it was carefully maintained and cleaned, we could readily conjecture. Higher and higher it led us by long an-

gles, sometimes gently ascending and other times unavoidably abrupt, until in the very shadows of the peaks we could see it winding white and clean back to its beginning.

Ahead of us was a black and lofty opening into the very heart of the hills. On either side of it were watch towers cut from the rock itself, curiously ornate, profusely decorated with Maya art, and imposing even to us who had seen modern works attesting man's ingenuity and fancy. Almost reverently we advanced until we came within the shadows of the opening. I was struck by the profound stillness of the late afternoon; the same feeling that one sustains on the summit of some lofty peak far beyond other voices, the murmur of humanity, or the rustling of growth and vegetation. It was as if we stood in the portals of a dead world.

"We must investigate these sentinel houses," said the doctor, and with Ixtual at his heels turned toward the nearest. It was overhung by the cliffs above, which protected it—hollowed out like those temples and habitations of long-dead cave dwellers in the cañons of the Colorado, and not unlike them, save that here were evidences of a higher state of civilization.

In silence all of us followed the archaeologist and his Maya companion, peering over their shoulders as they advanced. The doctor paused just inside the door, bent forward, and then in a hushed voice said: "Peace to the sentinel! He died at his post."

We saw the crumbling remnants of a man's skeleton, persisting with that singular obstinacy of human relics in mute attestation to the fact that once here had lived and died a man. By its side lay something that still preserved its shape in that dead and motionless atmosphere, a shape that had been a spear shaft and at its end gleamed dully a spear head that we examined. It was of hardened copper; hardened by that lost art of the ancients; so hard that I could not so much as mar it with the file in my pocketknife. What was left of the skull was adorned with a headband of similar metal but bearing curious marks like the insignia of a modern regiment. We learned afterward that this was the emblem worn only by the Guard of the Gate.

We found inside this artificially made cave house several rooms. One of them

was evidently the dining room, or mess, for on a stone table there stood plates of copper, ancient jugs betokening the development of Maya ceramics, and tiny heaps of dust which I think must have been some time food. Beds were there, with their garnishings mere heaps of dust and dry mold. In one room on a stone table we found round pieces of carefully cut bronze that I think must have been coins from an ancient purse.

But of the cause of death, or the story of that last sentinel's end, there was no trace. It was as if he, the last of the watch, had died across the portals of his lookout when some dread plague had stricken the land.

The sentinel house on the other side of the roadway was bare. Evidently something had happened in the end that made it difficult, or unnecessary, to maintain a double watch, and its belongings had been removed to the opposite side by the last of the guardians. The doctor believed from the glyphs above the doors that on one side had dwelt those who guarded by day, and on the others those who watched by night; but aside from the ceramics and smaller relics, he found but little to arouse his enthusiasm. Wardrop and I thought we should bury the bones of the last sentinel; but the doctor insisted that they should be left until he could collect them and transport them to some museum. He could not be dragged away until he had made measurements of the skull, constantly bemoaning the need of an expert osteologist who could have pointed out to us the difference between the poor bones of this dead soldier and those of a modern man.

"It doesn't seem quite fair to the poor bloke's remains," said Wardy to me, outside the place. "As far as I can guess, he stuck it like a Briton and so he shouldn't be mauled about after his job was done."

"I agree with you," I said, and we went out to where Juan was draped over the withers of a mule, patiently and unexcitedly waiting for orders.

When the doctor and Ixtual returned to us, we held a consultation and decided it might be wise to investigate before proceeding with the outfit. Accordingly we advanced into the great cavern but came to a halt before we had gone more than twenty paces. Above us was a half-lowered gate of great bronze bars, ornate in design.

"I think we'd better prop the thing up somehow before passing it," said Wardrop, eying its prodigious height and estimating its great weight. "If the thing was to jar loose and fall after we had passed through, it might—might be awkward."

His caution was heeded even by Ixtual, although Doctor Morgano raged, passed beneath the barrier, out again, and besought us to continue our exploration. He was overruled, and we decided to camp that night in the empty guard house to the right and devote some time to blocking up the gate. It was well that we did; for when, on the following day, we had piled rocks in the slots to the height of a man's reach the prodigious weight was unaccountably released and slid downward as if endowed with a malevolent wish of its own to cut us off from what lay behind.

"You see?" Wardy called to the doctor. "That mass of metal has been sometime suspended by ropes or cables, and they had rotted away and if we hadn't taken the precaution to stuff up those slots with rock, some of us would have been shut off behind there for the Lord knows how long."

But the doctor didn't answer, being at that moment more interested in solving the mystery of the mechanical appliances by which the great gate had originally been raised or lowered. Indeed, had we not pointed out to him that this was a puzzle that could be unraveled when we had more provisions on hand and more time, I think he would have delayed all further progress.

We advanced into that enormous and overwhelming darkness as if entering some vast, high-vaulted, unlighted cathedral in the middle of the night and had not gone more than a hundred yards before we came upon a set of gates and outposts similar to those at the entrance, save that these had been fastened up by great bronze pins, as if the outer sentries, finding their numbers diminished, had taken this precaution before it was too late. Here, too, were guard houses on either side of men who dwelt in artificial light during their time of duty. These houses had other ceramics, and signs of habitation in those long-past days, but we found no skeleton remains of the post. There were racks of spears, javelins, and arrow heads, as if this had been an armory. There were glyphs on the walls that the doctor deciphered and then walked out to investigate.

"Above us," he said, pointing his electric torch, "are tons and tons of balanced boulders that could be released by following the directions embossed in those stone tablets. You see all they had to do was, when things became desperate, to seize the stone levers referred to and which I think must be behind the second gates, and there would fall upon an enemy standing where we now stand, hundreds of tons of stone. Enough possibly to fill this entire cavern. Maybe it would run into thousands of tons. That we can learn only by investigation."

"It's a long tunnel all right," Wardy had just said to me, when we had walked at least two miles.

"It is that," I agreed, holding the white flaring carbide reflector lower to see if any impediment lay at our feet. And it was well that I did so, for there, scarcely ten yards ahead of us, lay the black edge of a gulf.

Cautiously we advanced to its verge and threw the light downward. Powerful as was that reflector and its acetylene blaze, it fell upon nothing save the void.

"Here's a pebble," said Wardy in an awestruck voice. "Listen, everybody, and see if you can hear it strike."

He pitched the chunk of rock forward. It vanished into the gloom. We listened for a long time. There came no audible sound. We drew back and stared at each other in the ghastly white light. It was as if we had stood on the verge of a bottomless pit.

"There must be some way around this place," said Ixtual. "Surely there was some way of crossing or avoiding it."

"There," said I, throwing the light forward at my feet, "is the answer," and pointed at what in some ancient time had been seats for girders hewn into the solid rock. Lifting the reflector upward into the gloom we saw the remnants of what at some time had been a roof support to fortify a suspended span. The other side of the chasm could not be discerned. It was as if we had come to the final and hopeless end of the road.

It is impossible to tell of all the expedients we tried to light that cavern sufficiently to expose the opposite side in the hours that followed. We went outside and collected from the lower-lying jungle mule-loads of fagots that we piled and made from them a huge bonfire. We used carbide flares, and electric torches, and everything



we could call to resource to augment the light; but it was useless; for beyond us still lay that wall of impenetrable darkness. We searched for secret side passages and found none, and then when about despairing, held another consultation.

"There must have been some other road," insisted Ixtual. "Surely they must have had an emergency way so that if by accident the bridge was destroyed they could rebuild it. How was it ever built in the first instance?"

That set us to effort again. This time we decided to fasten together all reatas of rawhide, all pack ropes, and lower a man into the depths as far as we could. I insisted that this risk must be mine. Wardrop with equal insistence said he believed he should be the one to go, at which we all laughed derisively, for his weight would have required the use of much stronger ropes than the make-shift lot on which whoever descended must trust his life. I finally had my way and we rigged a bosun's chair into which I seated myself and was swung out over that somewhat terrifying blackness, and lowered away. The edge proved to be a projecting shelf, so that I swung clear of the wall. There were several anxious questions I asked myself as the depth increased, among which was whether the lines by which I was suspended were anywhere weak, whether the knots might hold, and also whether the air into which I was dropping might not be foul. To my considerable satisfaction I discovered that the air remained as pure as above, and there was no sign of the ropes yielding or parting; but the light from my electric torch showed nothing in the wall in the way of steps or break. It was as nature had left it, smooth and unbroken. When at last a shout from above told me that our entire line was paid out, I cast the light downward. Blackness alone was still below me. I took from my pocket a chunk of rock which I had brought with me and dropped it. I thought it would never strike, and so far away was it that when it did the sound was barely audible. For an instant I had a sickening feeling of giddiness brought on by imagining what my fate would be if I tumbled after that stone.

"All right! Hoist away!" I shouted, and was slowly drawn upward.

In my slow and laborious ascent I swung the torch to and fro sidewise, and suddenly observed something that had escaped my

attention before, something away over to the side that appeared to be either a deeper shadow or a break.

"Hold fast a moment!" I called, and strove to discern more clearly whether I had been mistaken; but there was no doubt of it that fully thirty yards to my left there was a deeper shadow. Whether it was cast by an outjutting stratum of rock or was a hole, I could not decide. I tried to estimate the distance, and shouted to my companions above to measure by making a mark on the line as they brought me upward, the depth at which I then hung.

When they brought me up over the top I was amazed at a strange silence and relief that fell over them. Wardrop suddenly caught my hand and clutched it tightly. The doctor patted me on the back nervously, and Ixtual looked at me gravely.

"What's the matter?" I demanded.

For answer Benny picked up the improvised line behind and held up to the light of his torch a section of pack rope. It had parted until but a single strand remained.

My knees abruptly and uncontrollably trembled and weakened, for now I realized that for a time I had hung suspended above that awful black abyss by a strand of hemp not much thicker than my little finger.

## CHAPTER VII.

Fortunately for our further exploration, there were rawhide reatas sufficiently long to reach the fifty-foot depth at which I had been suspended when attracted by the black spot, or shadow. And it was as much to conquer my own cowardly fears as to continue the work that I insisted upon being the one to make the second descent. But I will admit this—that I am no hero. I'll admit that, remembering the narrowness of my previous escape, I was afraid when it came time to descend once more. I'm rather proud of the fact that I compelled myself to the test.

"You said about thirty yards to the left of where you were," commented Wardy. "Well, I've measured that distance off along the edge of this cursed hole, and find that it brings us squarely up against the wall on that side. That is, so far as the roadway goes. It looks to me as if the cavern, however, is circular beyond that edge. It's impossible to see around a big corner there."

And his surmise proved correct, for again I found myself being lowered from a shelf and the cavern extended to an indefinite distance to my left after a single wall was passed; but this time I noted that I was so close to a wall on the left hand that I could reach out and touch it. I began to fear that this wall had thrown the shadow I had seen and that it would prove nothing after all. I tried to estimate the distance of my descent as I was lowered. At fifty feet there was still the unbroken rock; at fifty-five feet there was still nothing different, and then, flashing my light downward, I saw not five feet below my feet a shelf of stone plainly the work of human hands, and a handhold cut in the solid rock. So ingeniously was it arranged that I could almost reach the shelf without stepping from my boatswain's chair; but in the end I was compelled to do so and stretch a leg far out to make contact with it. A slight shove outward sent me into a pendulum motion, a second shove widened the arc, and I landed on the shelf of rock with ease and steadied myself with the handhold. There was a single moment of trepidation lest the shelf beneath my feet or the handhold give way; but it was a needless terror, for both were as firm as on the day they were hewn by the long-dead hands of their maker. I moored my line, shouted to those above that I had found something, and turned toward the wall behind. There, so cleverly concealed that it might have escaped detection save by sheer accident of shadow and the powerful ray of a modern electric torch, was a passageway.

Cautiously, I turned into it to discover that probably it had originally been a natural one, enlarged later by the handiwork of man until it was possible for me to advance with head erect as through a tunnel in a modern mine. It led upward, and now I was aware that through either natural or artificial passages the air was sweet and cool. For perhaps fifty feet I followed it and then came to two flights of steps cut into the rock. Up one of these I ascended to discover three other openings. I paused to consider my situation. Perhaps I was entering a place honeycombed by those ancient workers. It did not seem wise to invade these many ways with no means of retracing my steps.

I went back out and shouted my information to those anxiously waiting above,

my voice coming back in numerous and repeated echoes from that great cavern surrounding us and the abyss beneath.

"What do you suggest?" Wardrop's voice called.

"That some one come down bringing some spare torch batteries and chalk or something with which to make guiding marks," I called back.

"Good!" he replied, and then I heard a confused lot of echoes and sounds as if they were discussing something, followed by a shout of encouragement from above and Wardy's voice, asking: "Do you wish to remain there, or shall we hoist you up?"

"I'll wait here," I replied. "But mark this: Whoever comes down had best bring a pole or a piece of rope with him so that he can throw it to me and I can pull him over to this footing."

"All right. We understand," was his reply, and I released the boatswain's chair and saw it disappear upward from sight. I sat down and smoked a cigarette until, remembering the necessity for economizing the battery in my lamp, I extinguished it, threw away what was left of my cigarette, and sat in a stygian and overpowering darkness. Time lengthened until I became impatient and wondered, in all that silence, what could have happened. And then I heard voices above me as if some unusual preparation was being made. It continued at intervals for quite a while and then came Wardy's voice from above: "All right, down there?"

On my affirmative answer I heard more noises, and a harsh creaking, then in a few moments a shape came within the light from my torch. It was James Dalrymple Wardrop, and the tough rawhide reatas were straining and stretching as if at any moment likely to part under his weight. In his hand he carried a pole that he reached out for me to grasp and I gave a mighty tug and pulled him over to the shelf, wondering it if would bear his weight, then fairly dragged him inside.

"Of all the reckless things I ever knew of a man doing, your trusting yourself to that line is the worst!" I declared with a heat that was merely the reaction from anxiety.

"By Jove, old chappy!" he said, readjusting his monocle. "I thought when I felt that rawhide spring and bound that I was done for. However, here I am!"

"But how on earth did the other three lower you?"

"Oh, we rigged up a sort of windlass," he said unconcernedly. "You see, I had to come. Rum place down here—what?"

The line had disappeared and now it came down again, this time carrying a wicker pannier from one of the mule's equipment.

"I thought it might be wise to have some food and water and a lantern, as well as the extra batteries," Wardy explained, and I snorted in derision. Had I known what was to follow I should not have been so merry.

For a long time we wound round and upward until we came to circular steps that twisted spirally as if climbing up the shaft of a monument. There were hundreds of them, and we began to think these must lead us to the top of one of the peaks. Our legs ached by that continuous and unchangeable motion. We rested at intervals, and then, when about to discuss the advisability of returning, came to a singular feature.

There was an open door with stone bars across it as if to guard something beyond. The bars lifted easily and with great caution I advanced, now using my electric torch. Suddenly I paused and involuntarily drew back a pace and then fell to my knees and crawled forward. I had come to a great void so enormous that my light would not penetrate it.

I crawled cautiously out and looked over its edge. Away off beneath me, appearing small, was something like a flickering star. While I looked it leaped into a great blaze, and to my astonishment I made out figures moving around a fire and replenishing it. Pygmies they looked from that height; but it was certain they were our companions. I shouted loudly to them, and saw them pause and flash their torches hither and yon. Their voices came back with multiplied echoes. I could not distinguish their words, but flashed them signal after signal until they looked upward and waved a response. Wardy took his turn and then we examined our surroundings.

Enormous triangular stone posts with the apexes of the triangles leaning inward from the cavern for a time puzzled us, and then we discovered that the perpendicular sides of these were shielded with bronze and that these betrayed wear. We could not im-

agine the object of these and so turned back and resumed our search. For a time we passed along a level gallery and then came to another side entrance and another set of those peculiar and massive posts. A third set was reached, and we were at the end of the gallery.

Disappointed, we retraced our steps and descended the tiresome stairs and called up to our comrades above. The voice of Juan answered and explained that he had been left alone and that the doctor and Ixtual had gone outside to study the guardhouses. We made a lunch from the pannier, smoked, and then took the opening that led to our right. Again we made the toilsome climb and again we found three sets of posts, and the end of the gallery.

"That makes their reason plain," said Wardy. "They had some sort of a bridge suspended across that hole and held up by cables of some kind that were fastened here."

"Either that or else there was some sort of mining carried on in this shaft under us and this was a mechanism for hoisting," I conjectured; but it was useless to waste time in surmise, because we had gained nothing thus far by our discoveries.

It was growing late in the evening and we decided after a short consultation to postpone our further search until the next day. It was not until then that I remembered the risk of my companion's weight on that rawhide line, and was somewhat troubled thereby.

"I think," I suggested, "that I had best go up first and personally get together all the spare straps and pack ropes and strengthen that line before you trust your weight on it. What do you think?"

"Strikes me as a most excellent idea," he said. "I've been thinking a bit about that confounded rubber string since we got back here."

In the light of the lanterns I could see his calm grin; but I am certain he would have run the risk without betraying fear had I not voiced an apprehension for him.

I called up to Juan but got no response. I called again and then Wardy joined his bellowing voice to mine. A sleepy voice answered, recognizable as the doctor's.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" muttered Wardy. "That old cuss has been left on watch and has calmly gone to sleep! What do you think of that!"

"What's the matter?" I called upward.

"Nothing," the doctor's voice replied, and we could hear him vent a great yawn. "Ixtual and Juan are tucking the animals in bed in one of the guardhouses to keep them safe from those devilish jaguars. Find anything?"

"Not much," I replied. "We have done all we can to-day and want to be hoisted up."

"All right. I'll lower the line and then call them to help," said Doctor Morgano; and then a moment later: "I can't get the blamed contraption to work. The rope just coils around this drum-thing we fixed up. Wait, I'll tie a big rock on the end of it, then it'll come down."

We could indistinctly hear him fumbling around and occasionally yawning like an old hyena, and then his voice, triumphantly: "I've got a rock on now that'll pull that rope tight. Only one I could find, and it weighs about two hundred pounds; but I can roll it over."

"Stop! Stop!" I cried in alarm; but too late. With a rush of wind that warned me that something had fallen so closely that had I been leaning outward at that moment I must inevitably have been smashed, something fell past me. I clung to the rock handle, momentarily panic-stricken with suspense, and my voice was tremulous and weak as I called: "Morgano! Doctor Morgano! Are you safe?"

"I'm safe enough," came the reassuring but lugubrious reply from above, "but that infernal rawhide line has broken off where it was fastened and—dear me!—how on earth are we ever to get you up again?"

"The damned old imbecile!" growled Wardy. "Wants to know how we are to get back up again. That's something I'd rather like to know myself!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

If it had not been a situation of considerable consternation, I think we might have laughed at the bawling conversation that followed. Ixtual suggested that by cutting up all saddlery, and leather pack cases, and weaving in with it strips of canvas he could make a line that would bear our weight. But he knew that in the meantime we should be compelled to remain underground, and that meantime would probably be a matter of two or three days. There was noth-

ing else for us to do but agree. Wardy had but one admonition which he bellowed upward:

"Don't you dare to cut that pelt of mine up to get leather! Do you hear me?"

"It shall be cut last of all, señor," replied Ixtual calmly. "And we shall work fast and hard."

Both Wardrop and I were much too seasoned campaigners to grumble over a situation that could not be improved, and so extinguished our lantern to economize oil, ate a cold meal, and went to rest as best we could some distance from the opening into the cavern. The last thing I heard him mutter was to thank Heaven that he had never walked in his sleep.

On the morning following we renewed our exploration, not much the worse physically for a night passed on the somewhat cold and hard stones of our prison. We followed one tunnel that proved tiresome, long, and that came to an abrupt and broken end, as if some contemplated work had been abandoned. We tried another that led us into a series of small chambers whose use we could not even surmise. We took the last one in the afternoon and carefully marked our way on the walls at intervals, as we had done with all the others; but this time we found that it led into a broader passage across which a gallery crossed at right angles which was much broader and more liberal than any we had hitherto encountered.

"This shows that whoever built it had some sense," declared Wardy, stretching himself. "It's the first time since I came down that rope that I've found a place high enough to stretch my head. I've got a double joint in my shoulders and neck that will leave me deformed for life!"

It was the first complaint he had made, but only one who has been compelled to stoop for hours on end can appreciate his physical weariness of posture. Our sense of direction was by this time entirely gone and we had no compass, so we tossed a coin to see which side we should explore.

"Heads to the right; tails to the left!"

Tails won, and we started onward with our spirits by this time in that numbed state when everything one does seems useless; but the broad road continued, for which we were thankful. We trudged soberly along without much conversation. We had passed beyond mere words down there



in the darkness while surrounded by perplexities and anxieties. Almost groping, and constantly pausing to inspect the floor beneath or the walls and the roof of this stone highway, we must have been walking for nearly an hour when we came to a halt. Our tunnel appeared to end in a most unexpected manner. It was as if we had stepped into the midst of a chamber devoted to huge, crude, archaic machinery consisting of stone levers, wheels, and weights.

"Well, this beats me," I admitted, staring about me and bringing out the electric torch which I had so carefully economized for emergencies.

"Looks as if it might be the original power plant for Noah's ark," Wardy murmured, staring about him through the monocle that had never been dropped even in the heart of a pitch-black darkness. "What do you suppose it's all for?"

"That's what I'm curious to learn," I answered, trying to work out the amazing puzzle done in stone.

For at least an hour we tried to discover the meaning of this mass of stuff. We sat down and talked it over, smoked, and tackled our project anew. Then we decided to crawl upward into its intricacies to learn if anything were concealed behind. Again our efforts proved useless. It was as if we had come upon an unsolvable mystery there in the heart of the mountain. One peculiarity of the chamber was that here for the first time we found dust, heaps of it, and in climbing in and out we had disturbed this until we looked like a pair of road sweepers. We had no inclination to laugh, but Wardy found time for expletives as he took that precious monocle from his eye for about the hundredth time and polished it on his handkerchief. We were both standing on the floor of the tunnel at the moment, somewhat exhausted by our efforts in crawling through that bewildering maze of cut-stone arms, pillars, and rollers.

"I think we're wasting time here," said Wardy. "Suppose we have a smoke and then go back the other way? How does that strike you? It's getting late again—almost six o'clock," he added as he consulted his watch. "And—I'm deucedly tired!"

"Right-o," said I. "Smoke it is, and then back to the grub!"

With a sigh of disappointment Wardy fished a pipe from his pocket, filled it, lighted it, and flashed his lamp around for

a final survey. His gaze fell upon a huge stone lever that projected outward into a space hollowed like an alcove. He gave a grunt of satisfaction, said there was a seat big enough to keep a man of his size from squatting on the floor, and, putting both hands upon it, swung himself upward and sat down.

The result was amazing. It was as if he had added his weight to the lever by which Archimedes said he could move the earth. Great stones ground suddenly into place, rollers revolved, and with as harsh a noise as if hundreds of long-disused grindstones had been set in motion the whole mass of crude mechanism moved in bewildering complexity until suddenly the end of the closed tunnel lifted and the first daylight we had seen for hours began streaming in. I shouted loudly. And what did J. Dalrymple Wardrop do? He sat still, calm, voiceless, and phlegmatically watching the course of events as he was slowly lowered to the floor of the tunnel. We heard exclamations of astonishment in Italian, Spanish, and Maya; the sounds of men in flight, then returning to see what cataclysm had disturbed them.

I rushed through the opening to learn that I was in the back of the guard chamber, and had disturbed the doctor, Ixtual, and Juan in the midst of leather braiding and that the sun was still shining bravely and brightly outside. For an instant, as if paralyzed by the unexpected, as if spell-bound by a miracle, they stood gaping at me, and then the doctor rushed forward and threw his arms about my neck, and I think that he might with Latin fervor have kissed me had I not repelled him and recalled Wardy.

"This way, this way!" I cried, and rushed back through the opening.

Wardrop was still seated on the beam, the great counterpoise that by mechanical cunning had lifted tons of stone, and was still calmly smoking and patiently waiting.

"By Jove!" he said. "By Jove! Some machine this—what? To think that one man like me could move a mountain with it! Who'd have thought it? But what I'd like to know now is if I've got to hold this lever down all night, or if you fellows are going to get a pile of rocks that weigh as much as I do to keep it in place so I can get off my perch. My legs are deucedly cramped, you know, sitting here."

Forgetful of the joy of deliverance and grateful only that we had found a way to reunion, we fell to blocking open that immense stone door and substituting bowlders on the lever for Wardy's weight. At last we accomplished all this, and stood outside, sweating and panting, to inspect our work. It was Juan, the muleteer, who discovered the secret.

"See, señores," he cried, "a single block of stone in the wall of the inner room has receded!"

It was true. So delicately poised and balanced was that enormous mechanism of stone weighing tens of tons, that by merely thrusting inward a stone in the wall of the guard chamber the apparently solid wall of the tunnel opened and lifted upward. So carefully was this concealed that when on the following day we removed the impediments to the fall of the door and lowered it to its place, we could not have told save through previous knowledge where the opening was. I had until then never seen so perfect an example of the stone-cutter's art.

And on the following day Wardy and I conducted, with an air of great experience and certitude, our companions through the chambers we had visited. The reason for the existence of the secret passage was still a mystery. We could be thankful for two features—our escape and the fact that not all the saddles and cases had been destroyed to provide a new line to lift us from the hollows of the cavern.

"If that chap Ixtual had ever laid a knife against that jaguar skin before we got out," Wardy confided to me, "I'd have murdered him!"

We now turned to further exploration. It was comparatively easy, particularly as far as our minds were concerned when fortified by the knowledge that we could, in ultimate failure to return to the open air of the free mountain side, retreat. We followed the long vaulted way of the single road that Wardrop and I had not traversed. It led, straight and true and without difficulty for more than a mile, when it abruptly turned a right angle and we were aware by the change of sound and reverberation that we were again confronting an open space. Exercising all caution, we moved through an opening. Our lamps again caught no reflection from walls. Our whispered comments again threw back repeated echoes. We moved slowly outward and paused once

more on the edge of a fathomless and yawning abyss.

"We've come out to the edge of that devilish hole again!" Wardy said. And indeed it looked as if we had done just that, and been disappointed anew. But then we turned to learn whither the other way led and once more traveled in a great natural chamber quite similar to the outer opening of the caverns which we first found. It narrowed as we advanced, but still it was like a comparatively broad street. Its floors were level and white. The lost vault of the roof came lower and lower until we reached a place where nature had been assisted by man to cleave it away; yet still it was thirty feet above our heads. Remarkable stone niches appeared in the walls as if for the disposal of statues, and in them we found the charred sticks as of ancient braziers, and the ashes of long-dead fires. And then, almost at high noon, we came to the end of that marvelous pathway. Again we were confronted by a ponderous mechanism of stone, which we scanned, inch by inch.

"It's the same as the one we found at the other end," shouted Wardy. "Just the same. Find the big lever and—if it busts this mountain open and me with it—I'll sit on it!"

Again we found the alcove in the rock, the great monolithic beam, the carefully adjusted weights of a counterpoise, and again this sportsman, adventurer, and veteran of many vicissitudes threw himself up until his weight was added to the balance. Again a great stone shield slid slowly upward, and again daylight—the light of high noon—momentarily dazzled our eyes. We rushed forward and looked out upon a strange scene, doubtless beheld again by the eyes of man for the first time in centuries.

We were looking down into a deep valley, saucer-shaped and circular, overgrown with forest and jungle through which there gleamed here and there ruins of what had once been important buildings, giving evidence that at some period this whole area had been densely populated and tilled.

In the center of the depression was a lake and an island, and it was this that held our attention the longest and that afforded the greatest surprise; the astonishing feature of the island being that not only was it devoid of vegetation but that it bore stone edifices of impressive magnificence. In the

exact center it rose upward in high, pyramidal shape, and the very apex of this eminence was covered with what appeared to be a vast temple gleaming dull gray in the sunlight. Stretching from the entrance beneath our feet was nothing but jungle growth, but our attention was attracted to what seemed a line broken through this at some three hundred yards to our right, and with slight difficulty we made our way thither, to meet with another surprise.

The great main entrance to the cavern in the mountain opened high and wide above us, and its portals were flanked with guard houses and sentry boxes exactly like those we had discovered on the other side of this great natural bore. The line we had seen through the jungle was a wonderful roadway built with such lavish care and fidelity, and with such excellent engineering that not even the jungle, nor storm, nor age, nor weather had ruined its splendid proportions. It swept away in graceful curves to reduce the gradients and invited us to venture upon its surface.

We turned to explore the guard houses, and therein found splendid and intact specimens of Maya ceramics, including the grotesque effigy vases and pitchers and steins in which they delighted, and also the remains of stands of spears, bronze-headed, the shafts of which crumpled away at our touch; for the white-ant pest was here in evidence. But of more gruesome relics of ancient humanity we found not a trace. It was as if the inner portals of the great tunnel had been abandoned without haste, perhaps because there came a time when it was no longer considered necessary to guard it.

"The reason for the great stone posts in the upper sides of the interior is plain now," said Doctor Morgano. "They had a suspended bridge there that was broad and strong. The passage through which we passed at the sides was kept secret for emergency use. If an overpowering enemy sought to invade them, they could easily destroy the bridge across the chasm above. That is what probably eventually took place. Either that or, when gradually driven here by the ravages of disease, decimation of population, and slowly approaching death of the nation, they deliberately cut themselves off from communication with the outside world save through the secret passage, of which probably but a very few trusted sen-

tinels ever knew. Once the bridge was destroyed the main highway became useless and was abandoned. Think what it must have been like in the great days of Maya prosperity! Think of the traffic that rumbled through this arch and over that road. See, even yet can be noticed the wheel ruts!"

I'll admit that, unimaginative as I am, I was awed by the thought of all that these old portals must have witnessed through centuries of peace and prosperity; or vicissitude and war. Through these had come the last remnants of a nation that had at one time dominated a country of magnificent extent and offering unlimited room toward both a northern and a southern continent for its expansion. Who could ever know why they had not spread out? Was it impossible for a nation to grow beyond a certain size and strength before meeting with some disaster, or some cancer of arrogance, or some terrible sloth and impotence that must in time destroy it? I think some such thoughts must have been Wardy's, for he said, quietly, as if to himself:

"To tell the truth, this saddens me. 'Pon honor, I'm sorry for those poor beggars, whoever they were!"

I looked at Ixtual, curious to know of what he was thinking. He had withdrawn from us and stood with his back against a sentry post, with his arms folded across his chest, and his head bent forward, staring at the distant temples of his ancestors and in his eyes was a deep and unfathomable sadness. There was heartbreak in them. As I looked he lifted them to mine and, I fancy, understood the sympathy I felt for him. I think it must have been that; for from that hour onward this strange man who regarded me with some distrust, became my friend. It was as if of a sudden we understood each other entirely without the use of words. I can't tell to this day why I, so rarely impulsive, stepped quickly to his side and said: "Ixtual, if you wish it, I for one will never take a step in that direction over there, will walk back through that passage, and never through life mention it to a living being!"

Quickly he thrust his hand toward mine, and his immobile, grave face broke into a smile. He said something in Maya that I think was a blessing, then, remembering that I did not speak his tongue, reverted to Spanish.

"I thank you for that. I thought you nothing more than a treasure seeker. I was mistaken. I apologize. You are a man of refinement and feeling." He hesitated for a moment, sighed deeply, and then, resuming all his habitual gravity and dignity, added: "No, I do not wish you to return. It is written here"—and he tapped his breast—"that we are to advance and that good will come of it for my people. A very poor people, it is true, but—my people!"

I looked around at our companions. Wardy was scanning the distance with a tiny pair of glasses that he invariably carried. Benny was calmly rolling a cigarette. But Doctor Morgano was staring at an inscription over the guardhouse, and looking for all the world like a living question mark endowed with a prodigious scowl.

"It is a royal cipher," he shouted as if disappointed. "Just a royal cipher and nothing more! And that glyph under it dedicated its guardianship to the royal care of those who keep watch. There isn't a thing of historical value in it!"

"What more do you want?" demanded Wardy with a dry grin. "A poem, or the lines of the last popular song?"

With lofty disdain Doctor Morgano turned his back and said to me: "Had we better bring the outfit through to this side, or leave it with Juan, where it now is, on the other side?"

"We must bring it with us, of course," I replied. "We might need something to eat when we get down into this valley. And, moreover, you will require notebooks and cameras, and——"

"I'd forgotten all about them. I must have them. But we must lose no time. It is very important that I get over to that island at once. How fortunate it is that it is I, Doctor Paolo Morgano, who am the first to reach here! I, the only living man who can decipher the ancient glyphs."

We retraced our steps, found Juan sound asleep and entirely incurious and unconcerned regarding us, or what we had seen, or where we were going. We packed our outfits as best we could with what was left of saddle equipment and harness and prepared to pass through the tunnel. Ixtual had assisted with his usual energy but with a certain air of dubiety that was noticeable, somewhat as if his conscience were not

entirely easy, and manifested it more plainly just as we were ready to start.

"Señores," he addressed Wardy and me gravely, "I trust you have no reason to repent the promises you have given me never to lead any one to this spot; for now I do question my own conduct." Reassured by our replies he turned toward the little archæologist and went on: "Of you, Doctor Morgano, I need have no fear; for you have been accepted as a member of the highest council in my race and by our rites are now a brother of mine. But what of you, Beni Hassan Azdul? Do the men of your tribe ever break the laws of hospitality? Do they betray those who have trusted them?"

"By Allah, no!" declared Benny angrily. "You would have my pledge?" And then turned until he faced the east, suddenly dropped to his knees, bent forward until his forehead touched the earth, raised his hands, and made a vow in rapid Arabic, bowed again, and arose. It was as if something of the Orient had been brought to this strange setting.

"He has sworn to his god in his own tongue, Ixtual," explained Wardy. "His word will never be broken."

The Maya bowed his acknowledgment and then turned upon poor Juan, who, stupid and indifferent, appearing almost bored, stood by the side of the mules.

"As for you, peon," Ixtual said with savage contempt, "if ever you betray by word, sign, or look, that you have passed through the Sacred Gates of the Maya, you shall die unshriven! Your bones shall be scattered like the manure of a traveled road. Your torment shall be passed on to the mother of your children until they curse your name, and by the knife or need for bread they shall die in the streets from which you sprung. I call upon my gods to witness and to watch! Understand?"

Poor Juan! He looked terrified. He was like one beaten to earth under the breath of storm. His eyes bulged, his dark skin turned blue, and his tongue was paralyzed in that moment of stress. All he could do was to swear by all his saints and cross himself, and stammer, and then turn toward his mules as if seeking protection and friendship from those whom he understood.

Ixtual turned to him and said quietly: "All is now well! We go!"

When we again emerged into daylight, we paused for but a few minutes to make certain how the inner gate was raised from outside, and to mark it beyond forgetfulness, then forced our way to the beginning of the great road, above us were many hours of daylight. Beyond us rested an unknown land.

### CHAPTER IX.

At some time, when the road was at its best, it had been bordered with low walls and deep gutters. Where the growth had broken the walls and in places filled the gutters with an accumulation of debris, the watercourses had cut new channels and here and there the jungles had actually cut completely across the road; but for the greater part it was in good condition. On either hand were still visible the marks of intensive agriculture or horticulture in the shape of fairly preserved terraces, indicating that the population had at one time been so dense as to necessitate the use of every foot of arable soil. Here and there through jungle openings could be seen ruins of what had been stately homes, and nothing save his intense desire to reach the shores of the lake restrained the doctor from halting to investigate these.

"If ever we turn him loose in here," Wardy muttered to me with a grin, "we'll never catch him again without a lot of work; so if he says anything we must do all we can to keep him moving. Eh?"

"He'll not stop until he reaches those temples, or whatever they are," I said. "But after that——"

"The biggest job will be to get him to leave. We may have to run a blockade and starve him into submission," Wardy finished hopefully.

"Not with all that stuff growing wild around here," I remarked, pointing to a grove of wild banana plants.

But as for the doctor, he rode silently ahead with his nose turning from side to side, birdlike in quickness, for all the world like some old rook seeking a nesting place or something to steal. As we approached the shores of the lake we discovered, to our gratification, that the drive widened and at the edge of the water it formed an esplanade so broad that not even the jungle had been able to mar it. Moreover, there were rows of fine, solid buildings facing the lake as if keeping watch over the island

in the center. So well constructed were these that most of them appeared intact. Many of them had been two storied, and several had imposing porticos upheld by monolithic pillars. The roofs of stone were almost as perfect as on the day they had been built, save that nearly all were green with moss, and on some, where by chance vagrant seeds had lodged, stunted trees had found growth as if bent on covering man's handiwork. We halted and looked about us.

"We had better seek a house that is best preserved," said Ixtual, breaking the silence that had fallen upon all of us.

"Sounds sensible," said Wardy, and we dismounted and began our explorations.

"That one over there seems the largest," said Benny, pointing to one near by, and we moved toward it.

The steps leading up to its porch were hollowed in the center, as if worn by generations of feet, and one of the big stone pillars was cracked but still strongly supporting its burden of weight. The doctor was in advance and would have boldly entered had not Benny called to him:

"Is it not better to be careful lest there be poisonous serpents within?"

And the doctor hesitated with ridiculous quickness, being forever in terror of anything that crawled. But Benny's fears proved groundless, for in that house we found nothing—positively nothing—alive. A strange feature this, when I come to think of it; for we entered other houses that were alive with venomous serpents, centipedes, and tarantulas. I observed that in these latter cases the walls of the houses, or the roofs, had given way and that the first marks of ruin might have been the signal for the advance of living jungle and desert pests. But the house we entered was still immune.

We stood in a large living room with stone window seats on which were fragments of rubbish that the doctor believed had at some time been cushions, although how he arrived at that conclusion I can not say. To me they were mere heaps of dirt and mold where rain had beaten through in wet seasons. A table of inlaid stone, one of a very few we ever found, and indicating that probably the customary household furniture was of wood, stood in the center of the room. Several carved stone projections, the ends of which were hook-shaped, sug-



gested that at some time tapestries had been hung thereon as wall coverings. Bronze fixtures in the wall evidenced some method of holding lights. Upon a stone shelf were excellent examples of Maya ceramics. Over each of which the doctor rhapsodized. The floor was of inlaid stones of diverse colors formed into a pattern which seemed curiously prevalent in all the Maya decorative designs and was still, after all those ages, intact.

"Knew how to build for keeps, didn't they?" said Wardy to me, pointing up at the stone rafters overhead that were like the wooden beams of an old Dutch tavern. "No jerry contractors in those days!"

"They certainly knew how to handle stone," I agreed as we turned through a doorway leading to another room, leaving the doctor behind to fondle the jugs and vases on the shelf.

We found here a room that was nearly bare, and a door leading outward into a paved court, proving that the patio system of architecture was not confined to either the ancient Egyptian courts or to modern Spanish construction. This was bordered by about a dozen rooms, some of which were mere cubicles, and one larger than the rest in which were stone ovens, a huge bronze caldron, and in its exact center under a pile of broken stuff that might have some time been a chimney, what was evidently a fireplace for cooking. The court was rapidly reverting to the jungle, being open and exposed save for the surrounding porticoes.

We returned to the front of the building and found a staircase of stone up which we ascended with doubtful steps. We came into what might have been the sleeping chambers; for in each room we found carved cornices and decorations. In one room we found pathetic relics of some long-dead feminine industry—a few bronze knitting and crocheting needles not unlike those used by the mothers of our time, and in another on a ledge some tiny pots turned from marbles of different hues, proving that even in those far-off days femininity delighted in artificial adornment. A few more odd vases, some heaps of rubbish, accumulations of dust here and there, some lichen, and that was all.

Despite the protests of the doctor, who wished us all to sift the rubbish we shoveled from the rooms, we fell to making them habitable for our needs, and by nightfall

were comfortably ensconced in our new quarters, commandeered from dead owners.

"I feel like one of the last men on earth," declared Wardy that night when, after a meal, we walked out along that wide stone esplanade.

"And I, like one who is desecrating something, or trespassing—I'm not certain which," I replied.

"What interests me most is what lies over yonder," declared the doctor, pointing toward the mysterious island that, bathed in the summer moonlight of the tropics, shone clear, white, and still, in the midst of waters that were as unmoved as if cast from brilliant glass. We turned and looked at the monolithic stone residences facing the esplanade. The blackness of their windows and doorways were like calm, inscrutable eyes, watching our every movement and scorning us for the brevity of our lives while theirs were numbered by centuries.

"I don't like it, sir," wailed Benny in Arabic to Wardrop. "They are ghosts."

"Nonsense! They are merely tenements to let," Wardy rejoined; but I think I caught an inflection in his voice which indicated that he, too, had not entirely missed that peculiar feeling of superstition. Moreover, I noted that all of us seemed under some restraint of silence, that conversation lagged; that not even the sometimes voluble doctor had much to say, and that I for one was glad when we turned in.

On the following morning the doctor was apathetic. I first saw him in the bright sunshine out in front of this residence we had commandeered, staring, as if fascinated, at the island and its buildings that somehow seemed the key of all mysteries. It was as if he had lost all interest in that research which was accessible.

"We must get over there! We must!" he exclaimed when I spoke to him. "But how are we to do it? I must say that as a man in charge of an expedition, you have proved singularly shortsighted."

"What's the matter now?" I demanded. "What have I forgotten?"

"You should have brought a boat," he said in all seriousness. "What are we to do without a boat?"

"Build a raft, man," I replied in no very good humor. "It's not more than a mile across to that island."

"*Sapristi!* Wonderful! I never thought of that! A raft—that's the thing!" he

shouted with an enthusiasm that convinced me he had expressed the truth.

"All right!" he exclaimed again. "Come on. Let's build it and get across there. How—how does one build a raft? I never saw one."

He learned how, all right, in that forenoon when, under the sage advice of Ixtual, we cut logs of a lightness that would float, and sweated and dragged and hauled them out of that poisonous wilderness where heat, gnats, thorns, vines, and an occasional snake made the job anything but a holiday. But no one worked harder than the doctor, after all, so complaints are unwarranted. Fortunately, I had brought three or four of the simplest tools with us, including an auger; we had spikes, and by that night we had our raft completed, after which by lantern light inside our quarters we laboriously hewed out our sweeps.

When we awoke, prepared to venture, a gentle breeze was blowing so favorably for our purpose that we stepped a crude mast and with tent canvas for sail made our final preparations to embark. We loaded food and supplies aboard, left our animals in their improvised stalls with sufficient food and water to last for at least two or three days, barricaded them in lest some jaguar scenting prey emerge from the wilderness, and, for the first time in days as merry as a party of boys, cast off. No argonauts in quest of adventure ever set sail with more ardor. True, our voyage was not long, but it flavored so much of assailing the unknown that it was enjoyable. From some recess of his brain Wardy elicited an old piratical song that he bellowed hoarsely as he and Benny labored at one of the long sweeps. The breeze assisted us mightily and our raft made great progress.

"There's a quay ahead to the right," called the doctor, who alone did no work and had an unobstructed view from the bows of our raft.

"Aye, aye, sir! Point to starboard it is!" bawled Wardy, as if he were taking orders.

And slowly we crept forward until it was decided best to lower our sail and inspect what lay ahead of us. We had hoped vaguely, I think, for some sign of human occupation; but there, even more than on the mainland, was lifelessness. A broad and noble quay ascended from the water's edge by a splendid and impressive flight of a hundred steps, very like some I had seen

in Odessa. On each side were ornate columns covered with hieroglyphics and surmounted by huge bowls that may have been used for fires or for plants. We remained uncertain which, although the doctor said he doubted not that they had been used for both. We moored our raft and landed.

"Now," said the doctor briskly, "I must decipher these inscriptions at once."

"You can stop here if you wish," said Wardy, "but as for me, I'm going to see if there's a pub, or a cinema show in this place. By the way, what's its name? Have you found that out yet?"

The doctor somewhat sulkily said he hadn't, and then decided that perhaps he might accomplish more by remaining with us. So together we climbed that long flight of steps, then halted at the top overcome by the stateliness of our surroundings.

The tops of the steps were flanked by two great obelisks and beyond lay a horseshoe-shaped plaza a full hundred yards across. It was entirely bordered by one great low, massive building with a deep portico in front supported by columns that were square and were completely sculptured with hieroglyphics. The columns were without capitals and the roof deep and flat, giving an impression of great solidity. The edge of the roof was without cornices, but this, projecting beyond its supporting columns, was also entirely sculptured with historical scenes. The portico was fully thirty feet in depth. The entire plaza was paved with a mosaic so smooth and firm that not even a seed of grass had found lodgment thereon, and, cleaned by wind, sun, and dew, it was as if it had been garnished for our coming. At the upper end of this great space, and directly opposite us, where in a horseshoe would be found the central caulk, the structure assumed greater importance not unlike the Pantheon save that we could see through its center where a great arch opened toward whatever lay behind.

"There's glyphs enough on those columns, Doctor Morgano, to keep you busy for a year," said Wardy, not without a slight tinge of irony. "And just take a look at the sculpture on the edge of that roof! Battles, priests, vestal virgins, plain hoi-polloi and proletariat; kings, iduanas, chiefs, and high muck-a-mucks by the thousand. But not a horse in sight. Nothing but bullocks, llamas, and——"

"Llamas? What? Where?" demanded the doctor in a frenzy of excitement, and then on these being pointed out said, gravely: "Most important discovery! Most important! Shows the possibility of this civilization and that of Peru being akin. I congratulate you on this very important find." And then he rushed over to Wardrop and seized his hand and shook it vigorously. "In my notes you shall have credit for this, sir. You shall, on the word of Paolo Morgano!"

"Er—er—thanks!" replied Wardy, somewhat overcome. "Hadn't we better get on with the work?"

Ixtual, impatient with delay, followed by Benny, had already started away from us toward the main building and archway, and we followed, the doctor in the rear and constantly looking over his shoulder, as if fearing that those records upon the columns might vanish. He moved with great reluctance while the others led with impatient eagerness. Through the archway we came to a long narrow quadrangle, paved like the great place we had first invaded and surrounded by buildings which were evidently either minor temples or the abode of priests, guards, or priestesses.

The great avenue led onward to spaces where isolated buildings lifted themselves somberly from smooth rocks so destitute of soil and moisture that all the original vegetation with which it may have been clothed had died for want of nourishment.

We decided the island must originally have been a barren mass of rock cut and shaped and terraced to suit its occupants' tastes, and there were evidences that in its past days of glory artificial gardens had been cultivated with an extraordinary amount of labor and care. But for these we had at that moment scant thought, for the great road now led upward to the peak we had seen from the mainland, the peak that proved to be partly artificial and partly natural and which was crowned by the greatest structure of all, the one that we afterward referred to as the Great Temple.

The reason for the peculiar and beautiful whiteness of this hill was now visible; for, from bottom to top, it was overlaid, as were the Egyptian pyramids when originally constructed, with marble so smooth and perfectly joined and fitted as to form practically a solid shell. But here no vandals had stripped it away or marred its

symmetry. It was intact, impregably defying the elements and time.

We gazed at it in awe, thinking of the hundreds of years required for its making; of the tens of thousands of men who had toiled upon its creation in those distant ages when this was the most densely populated and most highly civilized portion of the earth.

"This," said Ixtual to me with a wave of his hands and arms, "was the work of my people. And yet white men call us today 'poor Indians!' and deride us, and—hire us as laborers. To such low state have my people fallen. And this"—and again he made that eloquent, impressive gesture—"tells of what we were!"

Steadily we ascended, pausing now and then to look back on the roofs of temples and buildings beneath, and at the watchful and far-lined row of buildings across the lake from whence we had embarked on our raft. Wardy and I once picked out the place from which we had first sighted this island, and fancied we could descry the opening of the great cavern from which the white highway sprang. Miles distant it now was, but we felt that we knew it well. The twin peaks in all their grandeur, towered high above us all as a lasting landmark; as if they still stood sentry though all men they had watched and guarded were dead.

And so, in time, ever climbing, we reached to the Great Temple. We came to the great flat place whereon it stood, a square made on the mountain top, paved, guarded by stone walls, and on whose four sides the multitude of a people might have assembled when priestly kings wished to speak, or when unkingly priests might wish to preach. An enormous structure it was and doubtless still is, impressive for its size alone, impressive again because it appeared the embodiment of power, of rule, of organization, and of the ideals of a race. We had called it the Great Temple, and unwittingly we had named it well. For on earth there are but few such monuments as this to races, living or lost.

We entered it as might men overawed by its prodigious significance. Our alien boot heels ringing upon its sacred floors sounded profane. Its great arches and groins and spaces seemed to frown upon us pygmies who had thus dared to enter it after all its long rest in solitude. We drew closer into a group as if seeking the strength of

human companionship in this peculiarly dignified awfulness of desertion. Colossal stone statues of dead emperors, priests, rulers, and kings frowned upon us; scores of them sitting in state as we walked through toward the center of this Valhalla. And there, in the very center of all, in a spacious place where lesser gods were represented, we found an effigy, idol, or presentation, as one may decide, of what was probably Icopan, supreme god of the Maya race—perhaps of the Aztecs, of the Quichuas, and so on down to those Incas of the southern continent for whom, alike, this may have been the sacred shrine, the mecca of their faith!

Upon a base twenty feet high and fifty square towered that unequaled image, seated, squat and stern, and the sun rays of its crown were full eighty feet above us. It leaned forward in the attitude of that famous piece of sculpture by Rodin, "The Thinker." It looked down upon us, and in its somber face and contemplative stare there seemed the mystery of all the ages combined; the aloof wisdom and sternness of a veritable divinity. It sat beneath a circular opening in the apex of the domed roof as if enthroned in a place upon which the sun might shine. It was as if we, unannounced, stood at the feet of a living god.

For a moment we stood spellbound and then Doctor Morgano, as if unable to restrain his curiosity, sprang forward, and upon a structure not unlike a pulpit, where, I suppose, the high priest of the Mayas stood when delivering an edict. I saw that he was intent on reading a single glyph above it, and he turned his back toward us and lifted both hands as if to catch a projection and pull himself upward for a better view. His fingers were almost catching hold when there was a single scream as of a man in terror, and Ixtual had thrown himself upon the stone pavement, groveling, crying, and uttering what I surmise were appeals for pardon. Somehow his cries broke the spell and I ran to him and lifted him up, solicitous for his sanity. Wardrop hurried to my assistance and caught his other arm.

"Stop it! Stop, Ixtual!" he shouted, his great voice roaring and rebounding from the hollows about us. "Don't be a fool!"

And then he lifted and shook him as a terrier might a rat. Suddenly he laid him down again and then, bending forward

above him said, in a quiet voice: "We'd better carry him out. The poor devil has fainted. Give us a hand, Hallewell. This won't do at all."

I hastened to assist him, and we bore the Maya out to that broad terrace, where from a pocket flask we trickled brandy down his throat until he revived, and, weak and helpless, sat up and leaned his head in the hollow of my arm.

Was it superstition, or something else, that prevented him from ever again entering the Gréat Temple? I cannot answer. But this I know, that he never did. And if it was merely superstition inherited, why was it that from that hour neither Beni Hassa Azdul nor Juan, the humble muleteer, could ever again be induced to step beyond these frowning portals? Again I cannot answer. But, again, they never did. It seems incredible that a mere thing of sculptured stone should have such an effect upon men, yet upon these three the effect was produced and permanently remained.

## CHAPTER X.

Doctor Morgano stood to one side with his arms folded as if either intensely bored, or considering some mental problem pertaining to ancient forms of worship. Ixtual having partially regained his senses, suddenly threw himself on his knees before the doctor and bent forward until his head touched the pavement. The archæologist abstractly said something in the Maya tongue and, discovering the need for pacifying Ixtual lest the latter go insane, reached over and gently assisted him to his feet. He talked to him in a fatherly sort of way and then said in Spanish:

"Perhaps it is best that you and the Arab and Juan return to the raft and bring up the provisions and find a place in the outer circle that will do for our quarters. Forget the gods, my son. They do but forgive if you believe you have done them wrong. They are very merciful, otherwise there would be no gods. Go. We shall come later."

And so, strangely pacified and returning to his normal senses, Ixtual with Benny and Juan accompanying him as if eager to escape, hurried away. Benny went hurriedly with a long, swinging, graceful stride that made me think he had reverted to the bur-noose and flowing robes of the desert. Juan

was crossing himself, and I have an idea was muttering prayers; but Ixtual, as if obedient to a command, never looked back.

"The poor Indian is upset," said the doctor. "I can't imagine such folly, but I suppose that——"

"That bally old idol did look as if it was alive; but of course it was all some sort of trickery," growled Wardy.

"Trickery?" the doctor and I spoke in unison and considerably surprised by his words.

"Why, yes. Trickery! Didn't you see it open its eyes and glare at us? By Jove! There was something uncanny in the way they scowled and flashed at us, wasn't there?"

"You haven't gone balmy, too, have you?" I demanded. "What are you talking about? Rubbish!"

"Rubbish, nothing! If neither you nor the doctor saw that thing's eyes glare, you must have been looking at something else. I tell you I saw them. It wasn't as if they opened, but as if they had suddenly come to life and the old chap was pretty sore about something."

"Ha! We must investigate this," said the doctor, turning and almost running back into that inner chamber.

We stood looking at that great effigy for some time but could observe nothing unusual about it beyond that majestic and impressive workmanship which I had already noted.

"You see, Wardy," I jeered, "its eyes are just as they were when we first saw them."

But as if doubting his own senses, or at least very dissatisfied, Wardy took out his monocle, carefully cleaned it, and frowned upward at that impassive idol. He stepped sideways for a few paces as if to see whether the change of position produced the effect, tried the other side, fell back, then again moved forward.

"I'll swear I couldn't have been mistaken," he murmured. "I saw it too plainly, and was just going to speak when Ixtual went off his crumpet. You were standing about where you are now. I was just about here. The doctor had started up there to—— Hold on! I believe I've got it."

He shouted the last words and then laughed.

"Doctor," he said, "would you mind doing just what you did before—if you can remember what it was?"

The savant for an instant blinked as if bewildered by the effort of memory, rubbed his chin, and then said: "Oh, yes! I recall that I was interested in getting to where I could read that tablet above the altar. From where I stood I could not see it. I must look at that now. Whether the eyes of this image shone or not are of the very least importance; but I must see that tablet! Perhaps it is of great scientific value. Who knows, my friends, but what it may contain the very key to that ancient form of worship! We will defer the investigation of your—ummmh—hallucination, and I will continue my great work."

And with that, as if dismissing us to our own researches, he again advanced toward the image. I was on the point of retorting somewhat sarcastically to his speech, but was silenced by a swift gesture from Wardy which the archaeologist did not observe. The doctor, as if forgetting us entirely, again climbed upward to the pulpit and again, finding the tablet too high above his head for close inspection, stepped forward and lifted his hands upward to clutch a projection by which he might lift himself up. And then, for the first time, I saw the eyes of the idol blaze as if filled with wrath! I admit that the sight was terrifying to me, so what must have it been to those superstitious minds that had witnessed it before?

"Stop! Stand where you are!" roared Wardrop in a voice so loud that it resounded thunderously in that space. "Stand just as you are, doctor, and don't move until I get up there."

He ran forward and climbed up beside the doctor and bent over and marked with a piece of chalk the outlines of the astonished savant's feet.

"Keep your eyes on those of this bally image, Hallewell," he shouted to me, and I kept my gaze steadily thereafter upon the glowing lights above. Somehow they seemed less terrifying and less intent, under the caustic, practical admonitions of this big, practical Englishman who conducted the investigation.

"Now, doctor, come over here," I heard Wardy say, and there was the sound of movement, and the eyes of the image were again dull and lifeless, as if once more brooding over the past ages.

"They're dark again!" I cried. "You were right, Wardy. You were right. It is



nothing but some sort of mechanical trickery."

"Of course I'm right," jubilated the giant. "Have another look. I'll work it myself!" and then he stepped over, placed his feet in the spots he had marked, and again the light glazed forth above us.

"Which foot is it? Let's see," he called, and stood on one foot and then the other to learn that it required pressure on two spots, upon which the doctor had unwittingly stood, to produce the effect. "You come up and stand on 'em, and give me a chance to look," Wardy called to me, and I took his place while he, highly triumphant, stood beneath and watched the effect; but the doctor, caring nothing for our investigations, had climbed upward until he could see the tablet plainly, and now called down: "The tablet is to the god Icopan, supreme over all the Maya world, sacred to the Maya religion; a god of gods; presumably the god of the sun, and for the first time known to modern civilization. We have made the greatest discovery of its kind that has been made in hundreds of years!"

"I suppose," said Wardy, still intent on his own find, "that on days when they had something to tell the roughnecks—for instance, that the fat old god here was exceedingly sore about something they had done—the high priest got 'em here and then pressed the button. Some effect—what? Scared 'em stiff, I'll bet!"

"What on earth is the sense in talking to a pair of narrow-minded, unappreciative, irreverent numskulls like this?" howled the doctor, throwing his hands and arms in the air and shaking them like a pair of agitated tentacles. "Here am I, Doctor Paolo Morgano, the greatest discoverer of the age, distinguished internationally for my erudition, lecturing to a pair of impractical, illogical beings who have found and play with a mere toy!"

That we both laughed did not appease his frenzy, and he threatened to leave us in a state of mad exasperation.

"My dear doctor," said Wardy apologetically, "we can't all be practical and gifted like you. I beg your pardon. And so, I'm certain, does Hallewell. You were saying that this was the great god—What's his name? Please tell us. We are most interested!"

And, mollified, Doctor Morgano again enthused over his glyph, while we stood

patiently waiting for him to conclude, which he did when he had run down like a clock.

"Now," he finished cheerfully, "it is certain that the high priests who guarded such a holy of holies as this must have lived in its immediate proximity. I doubt not that, day and night, some of them stood watch by the entrance, over which there were probably hung huge curtains to protect it from the ordinary scrutiny. We may be certain that when those curtains were parted it was on the rarest and most important of dates. Perhaps these came but once or twice within a generation; perhaps on set days when an appeal was made to the god for rain to save the burning crops, or to allay floods that threatened national calamity. You must try and realize that from the Maya viewpoint you are in the presence of the supreme god of the universe."

He paused impressively and then, as if completely satisfied by the deportment of his audience, said: "We will now explore the surrounding chambers where, doubtless, the keepers of this shrine lived."

He headed the expedition and Wardy, lagging behind, whispered: "By Jove! If Thos. Cook & Son knew about him they'd give him a contract for life."

But our investigations proved the doctor wrong in his surmise. The entire series of inner chambers, looking out from between their massive columns, were devoted to lesser gods. They were like the abodes of supernumerary divinities. There were hay-makers and rainmakers; fish gods and gods that restrained the serpents; gods that increased families and gods that restrained their exuberance; gods for almost everything and, as a rule, they weren't exactly prepossessing. Most of them were, indeed, rather ugly. I conjectured that those who appealed to them were ruled by fear rather than affection. And yet I tell you that the pavement in front of some of these was worn into hollows where the knees of devout thousands had knelt!

"The priests must have lived somewhere close by," said Doctor Morgano, perplexed and dubious as if he had proven a false prophet. "That, we know, was invariably the custom. There must be some place where those who guarded the god lived."

"Maybe it was through that narrow door in the center—the one over there that we missed," suggested Wardy.

"Ah, the one I believed an exit," said

the doctor. "Very well. We will try that one."

We entered a corridor, followed it for some distance, and then debouched into what had apparently been a communal room; for from its spaciousness led many doors. One after another we entered. They were alike, austere, small, more like cells than human habitations. They were uniform—always the same, with the same narrow but long window opening out to the afternoon sun and presenting a magnificent vista of distant mountain and intervening jungle, bordered always by the waters of the turquoise lake. Always there was the same stone bed, the single shelf of stone, and the solitary niche with a basin of stone cut therein as if to enable its user to perform the simple ablutions of a simple life. In none of them was there a decoration, nor a decorative object. In all were those simple heaps of dust telling of long-decayed garniture. And then we came to the greater cell that in a measuse explained all.

"This one looks as if it had been something more than a cell in a monastery," said Wardy, who was now leading the way. "This is getting rather slow. Too much like looking for an unfurnished flat in London. All look alike. All empty." Then there was a moment's silence and an exclamation, "Hey! What's this? Come here, you fellows!"

Morgano and I obeyed his call and entered a room larger than those we had peered into, a room with four window openings. In the middle of it stood Wardrop with a human skull in his hand.

"There seems to be several of them here," he said as we stopped and stared at him. "I picked this one up because it happened to be the nearest. Take a look around you, and you'll see what I mean."

With no very happy curiosity I looked and saw that the remains of at least a dozen men were in that death chamber. I felt their presence. I stood as one in a charnel house, although these remnants of skeletons were merely the bones of men whose souls had passed for hundreds of years. But the doctor, heedless of the gruesome relics, moved about the room like a hunting dog that scents game. He stopped and then squatted down beside one heap that was immediately in front of a central window. He hastily clutched some-

thing from the pavement and examined it. I saw that it was another stone tablet on which were sculptured, shallowly, as if the writer were in haste, a message. Doctor Morgano was dusting it with great care, and studying it, as if the man who had done the work and who now lay at his feet but a collection of half-eroded bones was nothing of interest. He seemed puzzled by some of the characters, held the long, narrow tablet up to the window where the sun, now past its meridian, was staring through, and with a grunt of annoyance said: "I'll have to consult some notes to read this. What a pity that I haven't them with me. They must be down in my portmanteau. I must get them."

"I'm rather glad to hear that," said Wardy in a most matter-of-fact voice. "I'm hungry. And as far as I can see, we haven't discovered anything at all to eat. This will keep, won't it, until afternoon?"

The doctor looked as if his feelings were hurt, and then, somewhat reluctantly, but still hugging his precious slab of stone, followed us out and down the hillside.

We found our three companions waiting for us in front of a building in the "Horse-shoe Plaza"—as we called it, irreverently—and on our approach Benny, who was the cook for the party, hastened away to the quarters they had decided upon for our camp. We had to urge the doctor to join us in the very good camp meal that Benny laid upon a stone table in what had evidently been a refectory well provided with stone benches. The doctor had found his notes and was himself again. But it was not until we had finished that luncheon that he imparted to us his information. And even then he waited until we three were alone in the room. He apologized for his delay by saying, "I thought it might be as well, considering the way our men have acted, that I waited to read this until they were all absent. It is a highly important record. It deals with the tragic history of a once noble race. It is in a way the solution of a question that has engrossed the minds of archæologists for centuries. It supplies one of the most vital blanks in the chain of—"

"By the will of the gods we, the last of the keepers of the sacred place, are to die. And by the will of my brothers who guard the last fires on the sacred altars, I, the priest of records, am to strive to finish my

task before the great plague which has already laid its hand upon me, ends my mortal life. Of all those of our once great people who dwelt by the borders of the sacred lake, and of the priests of the Holy Island, all are fled, or dead, save we who, with fidelity, abide to the last in this room. We who have been initiated into the secrets of the Mountains of the Sacred Gods have, obedient to the inspired ancient commands, cast loose the great bridge above the chasm that the sacred temple of the god Icopan may remain inviolate until it is HIS WILL that it again be visited. We, his priests, have no knowledge of how long the great god Icopan may choose to rest. The key tablets to the deep treasure chambers of the sacred god have been left in his possession and care guarded by his feet."

"What's that? What's that he says about the key tablets?" I interrupted, and the doctor lifted his eyes and glared at me as if shocked by some profanity.

He read that part over again and then mumbled ahead with his translation. It told how this priest ~~and that one had been~~ stricken by this unknown plague and died. ~~It must~~ have been deadly swift, for according to the record a man lived not more than three or four hours after the first symptom manifested itself. The last sentences of the tablet were rather interesting:

"My own time has come and I am the last alive. The marks are on me, and my heart struggles. This is the last of the soft stones at hand and, write rapidly as I can, I grow too weak to add more than that the treasure chambers are sealed with the great seal which to break save by will of the great god Icopan means——"

The doctor laid down his paper and said: "That is all. Now from this I have learned a most interesting geological feature, which is that the ancients had here on this continent certain stone formations probably like those in the deeper caverns of Bourre in France which the Romans worked. A stone which, when removed from the earth was of a cheeselike softness, but that hardened rapidly when exposed to the air. That accounts for the profuse decorations, records, and sculpturing that we have seen. I believe that a similar stone is quarried, shaped, and used in Somersetshire, England, to this day, and is known commonly as Bath stone. This stone, a yellow limestone from the Lower Oolite, although it hardens from

exposure, cannot possess the durability of the stone so lavishly utilized by the Mayas. In geology there are several distinct variations in the composition of——"

I made an excuse to get outside. I thought I knew as much about geology as was either practical or good for me. It is disastrous to know too much; but when I returned a half hour later Wardy was serenely asleep in his corner, and the doctor was still talking learnedly.

"Isn't it about time we investigated that idol's feet?" I asked.

"Oh," said the doctor slowly, facing me. "I had forgotten all about that part of the tablet. Perhaps we should take a look for what are called the key tablets. They might—ummh—might be of great historical interest."

## CHAPTER XI.

After long consideration, I am convinced that the three of us who stood at the foot of the idol that afternoon were possessed by three distinct incentives. Doctor Morgano desired nothing but knowledge of a very long-dead past, Wardrop was merely engaged in a curious adventure, and I, being neither archæologist nor millionaire but more of adventurer, craved wealth. True, I was profoundly interested in those long-dead peoples and their ways; but I thought I could study their history with far greater assurance of mind if removed from the necessity of wanting money in the very imminent future. I have read and heard of philosophers in garrets with empty stomachs, and let me admit here and now that I'm not built that way. I believe I think better when mine is full. I'm a strong, healthy, animal man with but little of that ethereal endowment upon which poets are said to thrive. Plainly, I wanted to find that treasure, and had come a long way imbued with that hope.

"I'll swear I can't see anything at that blessed old god's feet!" said Wardy, after studying the carved toes of the great god Icopan through his monocle, and strolling completely around him several times.

"Isn't it possible that we have to dig under them?" I asked. "All I can discover are the stone blocks on which they rest and of which they appear to be a part, and then, beneath that, a rather badly designed mosaic."

"That pattern of mosaic, my friend," in-

terjected the doctor sourly, "is probably symbolical. Its meaning is yet undisclosed; but these were a people who did not think as we do. Everything about such an edifice as this was a symbol, or utilitarian, or intended to preserve a secret."

"All of which doesn't help to find the chronicled keys," I retorted, and Wardy grinned.

He moved to and fro beneath the frowning eyes of the god, while Doctor Morgano stalked here and there, presumably seeking inscriptions. Nonplused and disappointed by failure, I stood outside scanning the towering crown of that enormous image.

"Let's make him blink," said Wardy as if uttering a joke.

I shifted my scrutiny to the idol's eyes. They remained blank.

"Are they still ugly and awesome?" asked Wardy with a laugh.

"What do you mean?"

"Didn't they flare and glare when I stepped on the right spots?"

"Did you step on the stones we marked?" I queried.

"I certainly did. Here, let's try again. How's that?"

The eyes of the image continued as before, somber and brooding. In vain I looked for that pallid ferocity that had startled us all that forenoon. In vain Wardy made certain of his pressure. The eyes no longer responded to the touch of feet.

"Can you see any tablets there at all?" I asked hopefully.

"No," he replied slowly, "I can't; but—peculiar! Most peculiar!"

"What is?" I ventured to disturb him.

"Why this—and this—and—they look like broken sections of characters; as if hieroglyphics had been formed, then deliberately cut into sections like one of those jigsaw puzzle pictures. I wonder if these, reassembled in proper shape, might not tell something?"

I was instantly hopeful, and Wardy complimented the savant on his ingenuity.

Wardy and I were left to our own devices the next morning, and entered many of the sometime luxurious buildings behind the temple. In many of them were tablets and sculptured pillars, leading Wardy to remark that if Morgano remained until he had read all these, he would be a very old man before his departure. We were talking in this strain as we returned through

the temple intent on reaching our quarters for lunch, and Wardy paused and stared up at the god.

"Funny about those eyes," he said thoughtfully. "Can't understand why they went out of commission. I'm more puzzled by that than anything we have yet found up here."

He climbed the steps, his boot heels ringing sharply on the stone and bringing back a chorus of echoes from the vaulted surroundings, and again stepped on the tablets. Instantly the eyes of the image responded and with a fiercer, more fiery, more brilliant glare than we had before observed. They were so devilishly alive and gleaming that I uttered an exclamation that brought Wardy down with the request that I step up and show him the effect.

"By Jove! The old chap is certainly far angrier than he was yesterday. What's the answer?"

We worked it several times more to assure ourselves that it was not in the least intermittent before continuing on our way.

"I suggest we say nothing to the doctor about this—if he is still working on that puzzle," I said. "If he will only keep on trying to tell us where the treasure is, I, for one, don't feel like distracting him."

"Right-o! And—why shouldn't we have a research party of our own?" Wardy halted and chuckled and twinkled his monocle at me. "Suppose you and I quietly loot a hatchet or an ax, and put in the afternoon finding out how the blessed thing works? If the doctor knew he might either object or insist on being there—eh?"

Fortune favored us; for the doctor had not solved his problem, and Juan, Benny, and Ixtual were to cross to the mainland, replenish the supplies for the mules, and bring back more for our own consumption, so we could be certain of working unmolested and could have not only axes and hatchets but machetes. We lost no time in beginning, and fell upon the stone slabs that worked the mechanism as our first point of attack. We pried and tried the blades of axes and hatchets and the points of machetes to pry one of these loose; but they were as immune as adamant and the stonework so cleverly joined that we could no more than insert the barest edges of our blades. We rested and discussed the advisability of smashing them with an ax.

"Why not smash one of those surround-

ing it?" said Wardy. "That shouldn't break the mechanism of the thing." And on my assenting struck a slab close to one of the movable tablets. The result was entirely unexpected. It did not break but sunk downward a full inch. He struck again, and it lowered still another inch. Once more he brought the ax down upon it and now a whole section of the pavement began slowly to move as if collapsing.

"Look out! It may drop us into a hole!" I cried, leaping back, as did Wardy, and watching the slow lowering of the mass. It stopped at last and we went cautiously forward and looked into the cavity. We flashed an electric torch into the darkness and saw that at about four feet depth the trap door had tilted, exposing a narrow flight of steps. We carefully blocked the trap to prevent its resuming its place through any device of cunning, and lowered ourselves downward. Flashing the light about us, we learned that the stepping tablets were merely the tops of cunningly contrived levers that acted together upon another, but separately were useless. The narrow flight of steps led upward, following ~~round~~ and round the interior of the great image, and so narrow were they and so unprotected at the side, that it was not a very inviting task to ascend them. Above us was complete darkness.

I took the lead, being the smaller of the two, and began to climb. For me it was not difficult; but for my companion it was extremely trying, as he had to climb upward step by step with his back against the wall, the narrowness of the steps and the breadth of his shoulders making it impossible for him to ascend otherwise.

Always there was the acute knowledge that if we fell, we must certainly be dashed to pieces in the well-like hollow below. Although we judged that the image was about eighty feet in height from the floor of the temple, it seemed hundreds before we began to approach the top and then we came to a little opening, climbed through, panting with exertion, dripping from the tropical heat without intensified by the confinement of the interior shaft, and found ourselves in a tiny cell and surrounded by strange mechanical appliances.

The great metal rod that had been visible in the center of the shaft throughout our ascent, was attached to something directly over our heads. In front of us was a cu-

rious contrivance not unlike a huge system of modern megaphones supplementing one another until all their sounds concentrated upon a narrow slit. We crawled beneath these and peered through. The floor of the temple, sun-bathed here and there, with its great columns, lay exposed to our view. It appeared far beneath, with that strange exaggeration of height which comes from peering through a conined opening at an altitude. The pillars appeared squatty and low.

"We are looking through a slit in the lips of the idol! One that wasn't visible from below," I said, discovering the meaning. "A priest could come here, after fasting himself until he thought he was inspired, and be the voice of the god."

"Stay here and I'll get back and yell through the contraption," said Wardy, and soon after I could hear through the slit the bellowing echoes of his voice magnified by mechanism and resounding with tempestuous roars from the interior of the temple. I am sorry to say that the words were inappropriate, being akin to those which are attributed to the governors of North and South Carolina on their first august meeting and suggesting that it was time to "have something!"

When it was my time to yell for Wardy's edification, I was fortunate enough to recall a few lines from the "immortal bard," for which I am thankful because in them was no desecration.

Our attention was now turned to the rod that climbed upward and to more narrow steps by which the top was reached. For a time we could not fathom its working, but at last Wardy stood below and catching the rod with his hands swung his weight upon it. Suddenly the darkness disappeared and the little cell was brilliant with light. It was then that we solved the mystery of the eyes.

The levers acted upon a huge tilting plate of burnished metal, a reflector that for skillful shaping, and knowledge of optical laws, could scarcely be bettered in our own times. Neither Wardy nor I could be certain of its composition, but were agreed that quicksilver entered into it, even as it does in the construction of a modern reflector. The tilting of this slid backward a carefully constructed cover above in a huge circular opening in the head of the image, that when closed protected the re-



flector from dust, or rain, or exposure from the opening in the roof of the temple that was now directly above us. This opening, from the floor of the Great Temple, had appeared small; but now, when immediately beneath it, we saw that it was at least eight feet in diameter.

We had observed the effect of the sole protected reflector cast through the eyes of the image. What, then, must have been their brilliance in those dead days when priests carefully polished and maintained the reflectors from above? The eyes of the image must have been terrifying in their concentrated light, when glowering upon those already and previously prepared through superstition to gaze upon a miracle. Doubtless the eyes could be made to glare only when the sun was at its meridian. Once it passed the effect diminished until, in late afternoon, those fearsome eyes would never have responded to the priestly touch beneath. And now we remembered that this image was a god of the sun, speaking or issuing edicts at noon only, when the sun was in the maximum of glory and light.

"I suppose we should go down and tell the doctor about this," I said, feeling that we were cutting him out of our discovery.

"But should we tell him about these?" said Wardy, indicating the numerous glyphs inscribed about the wall of the little cell. "He's likely to break his neck getting up here to study them. It seems like—like cruelty to animals!"

But that point was decided for us unexpectedly; for when we descended and climbed out of the hole like jacks in a box, we found the doctor there waiting, and vastly pleased with himself.

"I was right! I was right! The reading was characteristic of an adroit and ingenious as well as superstitious people," he declared. And then before I could ask if he had the directions to find the treasure he went on: "It puts the curse of the sun god on any who walk across this pavement save those of the higher priesthood. It declares that none but those who are able to decipher it unaided are entitled to know the secrets concealed beneath."

"But I tell you that there is no treasure under this big dummy!" I interrupted, hot and wearied by physical effort, and in no mood to listen to one of his interminable lectures. "All we have found is the machinery by which this image was given a

pretense of life, and a lot of carvings that were undoubtedly directions how it is to be kept oiled, and in working condition, and cautioning the hands about paying attention to time and secrecy."

"Carvings?" blandly inquired the doctor. "Carvings? Where are they?" And then I saw that I had made a mistake.

"They are up in a top chamber," said Wardy, "but you will find them difficult and dangerous to reach. You had best——"

But there was no need for him to finish his advice, for the archæologist had dropped down into the pit and was striking wax tapers to find his way up the steps. We succeeded in calling him back and giving him a torch which he fairly snatched from my hand.

When we returned to the temple the doctor had learned the way to close the trap-door in the pavement and had done so, and was sweeping the dust into the crevices to hide them from casual discovery.

"Expecting competition?" asked Wardy dryly.

"One never can tell," replied the doctor. "I may wish to come here again and—the secret might be useful. I shall preserve it for the time being. Oddly enough, the inscriptions above puzzle me. They are a variation of the customary glyphs. I can't be quite certain of their meaning—probably some secret form known to the high priests only."

So absorbed was he in thought that he almost ran away from us, and when we returned that night he was still working over his problem in the little room he had adopted for his own use. Once, hours later, when momentarily awakening from my sleep, I saw that his light was still burning and I could descry his shadow, hawk-nosed, high-forheaded, with ruffled hair, appearing like a caricature on the wall as if to exaggerate all his peculiarities.

He was at it again the next forenoon while Wardy and I took an inventory of our remaining supplies and reached the sad conclusion that now our time was limited to but a day or two longer. We were discussing the possibility of sending Ixtual and Juan out through the mountain with the pack mules to obtain food, and depending upon our rifles to supply us with meat until their return, when the doctor came hurrying out to us, caught himself when he saw that Benny and Ixtual were within hearing,

and motioned to us to follow him. His air was one of triumphant exultation and mystery as he conducted us back to the temple. He looked around as if to make certain that the place was not crowded. Perhaps it was—with ghosts! He pulled us close to him and mumbled his pæan of victory:

"I have discovered it! Learned the lost secrets of their religion! Learned the very tenets of their creed. Ah, those marvelous inscriptions up there in that sacred and secret cell—in that holy of holies. Magnificent religion! Austere, noble, lofty, beneficent, and benevolent! I tell you that in its simplicity and grandeur it deserved perpetuity. While in a sense it was patriarchal and socialistic, it yet permitted advancement and distinction to those individuals who soberly worked and studied, and became worthy of reward and emolument. Think of it. I have brought it to light again an actual religious creed. One that will benefit our fellow men, and all—my dear friends!—through your instrumentality."

He turned and led us silently out toward the front of the temple, where he paused and swept his eyes over that wonderful collection of buildings, the great plaza, and then onward to the blue lake and far-lying shores. They came to rest at last on the towering twin peaks in the distance through whose foundations we had found our way. The sight of them standing there, majestic, unchanged, appeared to recall something forgotten, for he turned to me and said:

"By the way, Hallewell, I have also learned the secret of their treasury chambers and how to open them. They are—over there, underneath those hills. I made you a promise a long, long time ago, it now seems to me—back there in Paris—and tomorrow shall endeavor to pay my debt."

"Doctor," said I with marvelous restraint, "I shall be glad; because our supplies are nearly at end. Our time is short."

## CHAPTER XII.

I confess that when we made ready to leave the island on the following morning, I did so with something not unlike regret. Wardy, too, must have felt the same, for he suggested that we take a last look at that stolid image into whose secrets we had blundered. As for the others, Benny

seemed glad to go, Ixtual was unfathomable, perhaps imbued with confidence that he would return after we outlanders were banished forever, and Juan was as imperturbable as any mule he ever packed.

We stowed our belongings, now so much smaller in bulk, on the raft and made our way back to the mainland, where without waste of time we recovered our beasts and despite their protests loaded them with their burdens. We took a final look at the esplanade, and headed out into the great highway that, notwithstanding its very gradual rise, was trying and hot and hard as it lay in all its whiteness under the morning sun. The poor burros sweated and panted as with dogged steps they thrust themselves forward upon their absurdly delicate legs while their tiny hoofs clattered on the stone. Higher and higher we climbed. Hotter and hotter shone the sun. The city, drowned by verdure, lost shape beneath us and became a sea of green, the distant island in its lake a mere dot. Memory was invoked to define the details of the great temple in which we had lived; for now it became but a blotch of white piled in tiers. But steadily the great twin peaks grew until at last we halted in the black and yawning opening that like the distended mouth of a dragon waited for us to enter.

"Hadn't we better make a camp here in one of the guardhouses?" I suggested; but for the first time in our strange adventure Doctor Morgano became the emphatic dictator.

"No, no!" he said and in the same Spanish tongue that I had almost inadvertently used. "We must not. We are still in the land that was once sacred to a great race, and—please let us pass through without halt. No, we shall not rest until we are on the other side. It is more sensible that we stop there than here, before we—let us proceed."

I saw that Ixtual appeared inordinately grateful to him. I knew it from the strange look in his eyes—a look of great relief and, I think, of reverence. Of this I am certain, that it was Ixtual who shouted to the mules, gave an order to Juan to advance, and then himself ran ahead as if eager to lead us, or compel us to leave that shrine of his ancestors.

So we opened the gateways from that land which we had been the first human beings to enter for centuries, took a final

look at all it had disclosed and that we were leaving behind, and plunged into the darkness. I admit that a vague and totally inexplicable sorrow invaded my mind at the thought that I should never see it again.

Once more we emerged from the heart of the mountain and looked out across the great jungle barrier that separated us from men of our times and habits. Once more we installed ourselves in the guardhouses we had occupied while striving to learn the way through the high hills. The tins thrown about that told of provisions used were like reminders of some past period in which we had lived, camped, and eaten as hungry explorers. We made our beds in the same spots. Again, Wardy took out and caressed his rifles, and stared downward at that dense and impenetrable jungle in which crept other black jaguars like the one he had slain and dressed for a trophy.

"By Jove! By Jove!" he muttered to me. "I had forgotten that I came out here for some shooting and—I'd forgotten all about it, I tell you! Funny, isn't it?"

To tell the truth, I didn't think it was. I have but little imagination; but living there behind those great, impassable hills in the midst of a deserted city builded by a race long dead had somehow made me forget many old habits and desires, although I felt like an intruder adventuring into an unknown world when invading it.

"I came after treasure," I insisted stolidly. "If we find it I shall be quite well satisfied."

Wardy looked at me curiously.

"I wonder! I wonder if you will," was all he said as he moved away to give some instructions to Benny. And now, after years, I too wonder, but understand what he meant. It takes time for certain things to force their way through some men's heads, but in time they usually do. Is that recompense or punishment?

I never learned what the doctor said to Ixtual on the following morning when, rested by a good night in a good camp, we were ready to begin our last exploration. I do know that he called him outside and talked earnestly to him, gesticulating now and then, and evidently overcoming some objection that the taciturn Maya had against us. I shall always believe that Ixtual regretted having guided us, but, having pledged his word, remained true to us, and accepted us. But evidently the doctor influenced the Indian

to his own views. Indeed the doctor became suddenly the actual commander of our expedition and evidenced it by his attitude. He said that inasmuch as we had been so long without fresh meat of any kind he thought it wise for Ixtual and Benny to take the rifles and try to kill one of the small deer that were to be found in the foothills, and that Juan must remain behind and guard the animals and the entrance. He next observed that besides an emergency supply of food and water, Wardy and I should carry each an empty pack bag because if anything of archæological interest were found he might ask us to carry them out.

Both Wardy and I understood, from the fact that the doctor spoke in Spanish, that his words were meant for the ears of Ixtual, Juan, and Benny as well as our own, and made no comment. Our little outfit was made up, and we entered the great secret way after closing its stone gate behind us.

We had walked some distance before the doctor stopped and, as if apologizing for having assumed an air of authority, said: "It was necessary, more than you two dream, perhaps, to keep from the others, and especially Ixtual, the knowledge that we are now seeking treasure. I have never told you my full impressions of the Maya Indians through whose settlements we must pass before the coast can be reached; but of this be sure: Our lives would not be worth a centime if they knew that we had either found treasure, sought treasure, or carried treasure with us from here."

"You had to take some sort of outlandish oaths that time Ixtual took you away to——" I began interrogatively, and he silenced me.

"You must ask no questions concerning that night, my friend, either now or ever. I did pledge myself." There was dry emphasis on the pronoun. "But—neither of you were compelled to take an oath. I pledged myself in your behalf and am answerable for your conduct. Further than that I can answer nothing. Evasion, you may call it, but not exactly a perjury. The scientific results, however, would have justified, in my conscience, even the latter. But this remember for the sake of our lives, that no one must know that we have sought treasure. You have been with me merely as assistants in a great research which I

was permitted to undertake because the superstition of an all-but-dead race made it see in me a new messiah and—but I forget! I can speak no more," he concluded with an unmistakable show of mental harassment, which Wardy and I respected. "Come!" said the doctor, and again plunged ahead.

We came to the point where the secret roadway was cut by the opening through which Wardy and I had first entered it from beneath when in considerable more distress of mind than now, and through it Morgano turned.

"This will merely lead us down to that hole beneath the shelf of rock where I first landed; the place above the chasm," I said, thinking that our leader might have made a mistake.

"I know," he replied quietly, still advancing. "We must go to that very spot."

We came to it at last and turned to the place where the two flights of steps branched upward, each, as we had learned, leading to the great stone pillars that had once supported the suspended bridge, and stopped.

"This must be the place," he said, and took from his pocket a leaf torn from his notebook which he consulted under the light of his torch. He read it slowly to himself, and then flared his light about him as if his eyes were seeking some certain mark.

"Ah," he said softly, "this is it!" and pointed at a small tablet apparently carved into the face of the living rock. "According to the key tablets in the temple it required the presence and efforts of three high priests to either enter or emerge from the secret passages leading downward."

"Admirable plan!" said Wardy. "Kept any one man from looting the company vaults. Sort of a safe-deposit system, eh? Shows they didn't thoroughly trust one another when it was built."

"Perhaps," was all the response the doctor made regarding that particular, and again consulted his paper as if to make certain that he had made no mistake. "Hallelwell, you go up the right-hand flight of steps and stand on the fifth from the bottom. Wardrop, you go up the left-hand flight and stand on the seventh from the bottom. Neither of you must leave there until I call. Now, we shall see if my interpretation was correct."

I felt the stone give slightly beneath my feet, and would have leaped from it had it lowered an inch more, but was restrained from removing my weight by the thought that past experience of antique mechanisms had invariably proved that they were based on counterbalances. Wardy afterward told me that his experience and thoughts were the same. Beneath us, where Doctor Morgano was stationed, we heard a dull, grating noise, as of long-unused levers shifting, then there was a sharp click, and his voice called us downward. The apex containing the tablet, that mass of seemingly undisturbed and natural rock in place, a mass that must have weighed many tons, had shifted upward, exposing an opening fully the size of an ordinary commodious doorway. Steps led downward from it and on either side was a huge chambered recess filled with great levers and carefully adjusted weights, some of which swung slightly like great pendulums barely disturbed. Beams of stone that in themselves weighed many hundredweight crossed in intricate but orderly array, all designed by some ancient master engineer who must have been a genius of equilibration.

Before venturing farther Wardy asked: "Hadn't we better make certain that we can get out by blocking this door open?"

"I doubt if it could be done with anything at hand," replied the doctor, "and, furthermore, I think I have correctly interpreted the directions for opening it if it did close. No, I think we can safely risk its remaining open. Come, let us go downward."

We descended at least a hundred steps, then entered a natural rift or cavern that steeply inclined for a considerable distance the foot of this incline we came to a tunnel made by man, a second flight of a hundred steps, then to another turning that led into a second cleft whose floor was steeply inclined for a considerable distance before it reached a level where the character of the walls on one side altered. It was as if there had originally been an arched groove made by nature that had on its outer, or open side, been walled in with enormous blocks of carefully cut stone. It ran nearly a half circle and was ventilated by narrow slits. Looking into these with our electric torches we saw that the wall must have been at least ten feet in thickness, and we surmised that on the other side was the floor of the chasm, fully four

hundred feet below the place where the bridge had been suspended.

Another door barred our way, but it was left half open. We wondered why, for it also was supplied with a locking mechanism. We pulled it open without difficulty, entered, and paused in astonishment.

We stood in a great chamber whose floor, sides, and arched roofs were actually made of bricks of gold, shining dully and reflecting the rays of our electric torches. In the center of this chamber, seated in state, was an exact replica in gold of the god Icopan, resting, as did the god of the temple, with its hands on its knees and its head bent slightly forward as if scrutinizing any who entered. The sole difference was that this image was but fifteen feet in height, and its eyes and ornaments were of roughly cut gems. Yet its eyes, a pair of rose-cut diamonds of large size, flashed reflections from the light of our torches and here again the effect was malignant, or accusing, as one might imagine. Wardy and I had been staring upward as if fascinated by those eyes, when we heard the doctor's voice.

"This explains why the door was left open," he said, and we saw that he was stopping above something at the foot of the statue.

We advanced to his side and saw that, chained with a chain of gold that had evidently been welded about its waist was the skeleton of a man. Engraved deeply into a tablet attached to the chain was the record of the man's misdeed, which the doctor was deciphering.

"It gives the man's name and the date when he was brought here for punishment," he said, then paused and read some more and again spoke aloud. "He was one of the keepers of the treasure, and this temple, and evidently betrayed his trust, for the last sentence is: 'Here, chained to the feet of the great god Icopan, with food and water for but one period of the moon, he is left to meditate over his sacrilegious sin of theft.'"

"Ugh! Nice sort of death," said Wardy. "Probably the poor devil couldn't stand association with so much wealth without wanting some of it. But why the open door?"

"To prevent him from smothering to death. This place is doubtless airtight. Moreover, this date is important, as it is—let me think—ummmh—it would be just about three months before the last priest died

of the plague there in the Great Temple, and they were too occupied with death to ever return and lock the door to this place."

I'm not, as I have said, at all imaginative, but I stood there for a moment trying to conjecture this poor wretch's temptations, crime, and slow and suffering end. I could fancy his being in a panic of fear when on every hand the Mayas, young and old, were dropping dead, preparations for deserting the Sacred City under way, and some opportunity thrusting itself upon him for at least providing for his own future in case he, too, fled with the others. Alone he probably could never regain entrance to this underground storehouse, being but a sharer of the secret and but part possessor thereof. What had he stolen? It could not have been gold, for that would have been too heavy to carry, and again it was probably of far less value to the ancient Maya than jewels, which must have been rare. It stimulated my thoughts in a new direction.

"We might dig out this idol's eyes and that necklace he has set in his chest, and get away with at least a few bricks," I said, determined that I would not leave that entire store of wealth behind and go forth empty handed. "What do you suggest, doctor?" I asked, turning my light toward the savant.

He was leaning against the base of the image and, with his electric torch held under his arm, studying his notebook. He did not immediately answer, but now turned and walked to the door. He bent over and counted the rows of golden tile from the bottom upward until his hand stopped at the twelfth row. Then he carefully counted along that until he had reached what must have been about the thirtieth in that line, and putting the heel of his hand against it threw his weight forward. Nothing happened. By the light of his torch I could see that he was nonplused.

"It should move," he said. "Perhaps I counted incorrectly."

Again he repeated his count, beginning at the door, and again he achieved no result. He pressed all the surrounding bricks, while Wardy and I stood solicitously behind him. He again consulted his notes and said: "Twelfth row from the bottom, the thirtieth from the door on the side of the sun. That would mean the left-hand side according to the Maya term. Perhaps it's the opposite side in this case."



Hopefully we went to the opposite side and repeated the performance, and again accomplished nothing.

"Dear me!" said the doctor, suddenly sitting down on the lower step of the pedestal bearing the image, and removing his hat and scratching his head, while Wardy proceeded phlegmatically to trim the wick of the lantern he carried. "Dear me! I must have been careless in copying the tablet up in the head of the great effigy, or else careless in copying down the translation from my memoranda. You see—I was so much more interested in the other tablets than in those pertaining to treasure that I— How stupid of me!"

### CHAPTER XIII.

What I could have said at that moment could scarcely be written or spoken by any one with a regard for the proprieties. And all I could have said would have been inadequate through lack of vocabulary. I stood there too heavily charged to speak a single word. Wardy broke the spell by a roar of inordinate laughter.

"Well," said I hopefully, "if the worst comes to worst, we can go back to the island temple and get it correctly, can't we?"

"I—I—I daren't take you back!" exclaimed the doctor helplessly. "Ixtual would desert, rally his people, and we should all be killed! You don't know how difficult it was to—to——"

There was something so pitiable in his dejection, and disappointment, and self-accusation that I hadn't the heart to be angry with him.

"I wouldn't care for myself," he blurted, "but I promised you two men that I would do my best to see that you were reimbursed, and, but for your help, I could never have come here! And I am afraid that you, Hallewell, spent all you had, and—damn it!—I hoped to make you rich because you have been so decent, and kind, and considerate to me! Now I have bungled the whole affair and you will——"

"Don't you mind it at all, old chap!" I interrupted. "You did your best. It isn't your fault it all. Besides, we can get enough out of here, without attracting any attention at all, to more than pay the expenses of all of us and—I think I ought to climb up and dig out this thing's eyes. They look like diamonds to me. But if they're

only cut crystals, we can at least get away with a few gold bricks, and mind you, a hundredweight of gold is worth about twenty thousand dollars. So we shall play even, or better, anyhow."

"And you don't need to worry about my part of it at all," declared Wardy generously. "I've got enough to get along as it is without an ounce of gold from here. Not too much, but enough. Besides—I did get some shooting, after all! That black jaguar's pelt is very rare. Very rare! Now for his eyes, Hallewell. Dig 'em out, and if they prove to be diamonds, they can be recut and—— Here, if I climb up on the top step could you stand on my shoulders and reach them?"

And then there happened something that I have never clearly understood. Doctor Morgano laid beseeching hands on our arms and implored us to give him one more chance.

"It is desecration!" he declared. "It is, in its way, a sacrilege! Don't do it—yet! It mustn't be done until all other measures have failed. Let me try again. I am positive that there is another chamber somewhere. The glyphs told me so. I tell you that there is something here that hurts at the thought of your proposed action!" And he thumped his heart with both hands as if to emphasize his appeal.

It all seemed very foolish, but both Wardy and I, after one interchanged look, acceded to Morgano's wish. He fell to making other counts and other pressures. One after another failed, then we all tried.

"It's a certain tablet of gold that must be pressed," said the doctor desperately. "Of that I am positive. That was invariably their construction for secret locking devices. Just one tablet in this case."

"Then suppose we do it methodically," I suggested. "Let's start at the bottom row and press each one completely around the room."

"That should get it sooner or later," agreed Wardy, and now we fell to work, one behind the other, I on my knees attacking the lower layer, Wardy on his testing the next, and the doctor following in similar bent posture. It was back-breaking and tedious work. The chamber was inordinately large under such measurements. We were glad when we were able to stand on our feet, but the heels of my palms were getting sore and bruised by the continued

thrusting of my weight against them. Hours of the unending count and pressure, and movement went on, and we were glad to stop for luncheon. We sat on the lower step and ate from our tins of sardines and drank water, and said but little. Wearily we resumed our task, like laborers whose muscles are overfatigued by protracted physical effort. Long before this we had laid our electric torches aside and depended solely upon the light of the lantern and our sense of feeling in that gloomy chamber. We had made the complete round of that circular chamber so many times that I was rendered giddy by trying to recall the count. We had worked from our knees upward to a crouching position on our feet, then to one of less restraint, and then to rounds where we had stood erect. Now we reached upward for round after round and our bruised palms were a source of more thought than anything else, and then we came to a time where, owing to his short stature, the doctor could no longer reach and press. Wardy and I continued alone. The packs were under my feet in the last round I made, and then for a time the giant alone laboriously counted and pressed while the doctor and I, seated on the lower step, watched him. He got to the limit of his reach and now in turn he stood upon the folded packs.

Long before this we had all fallen to silence. So the place was very still when he said, with characteristic lack of exuberance: "Here it is. I've got it, I think. Thirty-second from the bottom. Fifty-eighth from the end. The doctor made a mistake; but—it gives! By Jove, it gives! Here goes!"

And he put both bruised hands against the slab of gold and thrust his full weight forward. The savant and I were on our feet, eager with expectance. We had seized our electric torches and the place was now bright with light. A whole section of golden brick, regularly outlined in jagged detail, swung inward, slowly, ponderously, and stopped, exposing an opening leading into another blackness beyond. All three of us rushed toward it and through it. We had entered the treasure house of a race.

A great cavern opened before us. Tier on tier in huge squares and slabs, like mere pigs of iron, ingots of gold were stacked about us. Stacked higher than our fingers might reach. We could not compute their

depths, for they were as computable from where we stood as rows of wood in a wood vender's warehouse. Unconvinced by sight, we rushed forward and felt them to assure ourselves by the sense of touch that all was real in this dull-yellow amassment of metal. Each bore its stamp—a mere glyph, as the doctor told us, testifying the name of the minter and the weight of the bar. Likewise each bore the impress of a stamp in the likeness of the god whom the Maya nation worshiped, as if to say "his gold."

We halted, standing together as if for companionship, we three in the center of the great treasure vault, and flashing our torches here and there like three men in the center of a great wine cellar of old striving to appraise the depth of our visible surroundings.

"Good Lord! What a lot of it!" exclaimed Wardy in a strangely subdued voice. "Enough to upset the world."

"The accumulation of an entire people, an entire race, for centuries," said the archaeologist, his voice sounding awed and hushed.

"But something we can't carry out under surrounding conditions," I added hopelessly. "The biggest store of gold in the world, and quite useless to us! Is that another doorway through there?"

I had discovered that down at the far end of this treasure vault was another narrow, black slit.

We moved toward it, still for some unaccountable reason keeping close together as if for mutual protection against that golden god outside whom we were defying. We entered a smaller chamber where again were great slabs of metal which we inspected.

"This is silver, I think," said Wardy, after scratching one with his penknife. "Strange that there's so little of it compared with the gold!"

"Silver was a more precious metal than gold to the Maya," said the doctor. "It was by far the rarest of the two metals to them. There's another chamber beyond this, I think. Isn't that a doorway at the end?"

Again we advanced like three conspirators and again we entered another chamber. So complex and yet so defined is the human estimate of valuation that for a moment we stood disappointed when we saw no tiers of metal; nothing but rows of square stone caskets. The doctor rushed to one of these,

stopped, flashed his light, and shouted, almost exultantly: "These are sarcophagi! The tombs of generations of dynasties and in the very burial chamber of those who ruled for thousands and thousands of years. The discoveries in Egypt are nothing at all by comparison. I know it! Each one has his tablet telling the history of his reign, I am fairly certain."

In an ecstasy of discovery he dropped his torch from his trembling fingers and its glass tinkled in fragments on that ancient floor. He did not seem aware of his loss. He rhapsodized in a voice that was shrill and high, a voice that screamed and rebounded from the walls above as it was thrown back upon our ears.

"Egypt? Egypt was young—perhaps unknown—when these kings were brought to rest in this place! The blank history of civilization—of the globe—is here before us. We have opened the gates of missing knowledge! If there ever existed an Atlantis here is the proof. If civilization advanced eastward instead of westward, now we may know. If the fabled Garden of Eden, where the human race began to lift its intelligence above that of mere beasts, ever was, here we may find proof of its location. Tablets! Glyphs! On each sarcophagus. Records in imperishable stone."

Wardy and I saw that he was staring at what was undoubtedly a mummy in a sitting posture, swathed, wrapped, dried, and hideous.

"If there's another chamber beyond this," whispered Wardy, "we ought to be going into it. I'm not and never have been fond of graveyards of this sort. Shall we drag him on, or go back?"

"Let's see it through," I protested, and we led rather than seduced the doctor forward in our unusual enterprise.

It was again easy. No door with ingenious secret mechanism barred our way. Indeed, there was no door at all, but merely an opening leading to the final chamber of this series of sacred Maya vaults. We saw that it was nearly square, small by comparison with those we had traversed, and that its floor was covered with small stone chests, each in an exact place, each with its carefully carved stone lid, each sealed with some royal emblem.

"Well, here goes!" said Wardy, as he laid his fingers on the first and gave a herculean tug that brought the lid away.

We craned our necks forward, Wardy from sheer curiosity, and I in the hope of finding portable treasure. All that we saw was merely a collection of plain golden cups with a figure of the god worked thereon in silver.

"What? What is it? What have you found?" cried the doctor, rushing to us and picking up the larger cup. "Was there no inscription anywhere?"

"On the lid, I think," replied Wardy, turning it over for the doctor's inspection, and the latter fell on his knees before it.

"Very interesting," he said with enthusiasm. "Very interesting, indeed. This was a ceremonial service used by a certain high priest of the temple during his life, thereby rendered sacred, and unused by any of his followers. What is in these other caskets?"

He went to the next and read the hieroglyphics on the lid.

"This contains the service used by his predecessor," he said, and when Wardy pulled off this top there was another and even less pretentious set of cups. We went from one to another, Wardy opening each in turn by the savant's request, and all the time my spirits and hopes were falling like mercury influenced by a blizzard. It began to seem that the great treasure of the Mayas consisted solely of gold and silver, all of which, under the circumstances, was about as useless to me as so much lead. We made the entire round without finding other than similar services in the caskets. We examined the walls of the chamber, seeking other doors, and convinced ourselves there was none. Finally we returned to the other chamber, or temple, and I stood staring upward at the sole jewels we had discovered, those in the eyes and on the breast of the image.

"It seems a pity," said the doctor as if he had read my thoughts. "It is like sacrilege to injure such a priceless antiquity!" He spoke with such profound sadness that I knew he would never be reconciled to my vandalism, although he might submit to it, knowing my financial needs.

"It does that," agreed Wardy, readjusting his monocle and standing on tiptoes to better view the head of the image above him. Suddenly he exclaimed: "Look! If I'm not mistaken the pavement at the base of his nob's here is identical, but on a smaller scale"

than that one we went for at the foot of the big stone chap over on the island."

The doctor, as if imbued with a great hope, fairly jumped forward.

"You are right! You are right! It is!" he exclaimed, and, brushing us aside, stepped onto the pavement and began to move his feet over the pattern. He hesitated, and then soliloquized: "The ixtón sign was one we stepped on, and the lower sector of the Acona and——" He bent over and closely studied the pavement, and then muttered: "Ah, here they are! Not quite in the same positions as those in the Great Temple. We will try them."

Both Wardy and I leaned forward in a state bordering on suspense as the savant carefully planted his feet on two marks and rested his weight on them. They gave slightly, and we heard a noise that sounded as if it came from the back of the image. I ran hastily around it, but to my extreme disappointment discovered nothing. The doctor left his place and joined me. Wardy sauntered after him, and we stood there turning our lights upon the walls. They were unchanged.

"Something must have gone wrong with it—and yet the characters moved under my feet," insisted the doctor.

"And I was certain I heard a noise of some sort behind here," Wardy insisted. "Let me step on them. Perhaps your weight was not sufficient."

He put his suggestion into execution; but the stones did not move farther, nor did they recede to place. There was no further noise.

"Well, all we can do is to return here with axes and demolish this pavement and learn what's gone wrong," I said desperately and at the same time remembering how short we were of food, the difficulties that might ensue through Ixtual's superstition, and a dozen other annoyances to be met.

"It seems so," said the savant with greater dejection than ever. "But at least let us consider that before picking the stones out of this marvelous effigy. If I can but influence Ixtual——" And I knew then that he, too, had thought of the dangers of our position. Then he brightened as if all thought of treasure had vanished, and after raving about the lids of the stone caskets in the inner vault, pleaded with us to give him time to make quick notes from those lids before departing.

"Think of it," he said, "we have opened a full and complete treasure house of history. What matters it if we find nothing more than that and——"

Wardy looked at me and shrugged his huge shoulders.

"Well, if you wish to make notes, I think you should begin quickly. The oil in the lantern won't last forever, and in addition we shall probably exhaust our batteries before we reach camp again. I doubt if we have more than half an hour to spare for further notes. Let's get at it!"

And then with a shout that echoed and reechoed throughout those grimly silent chambers, Doctor Morgano began running forward toward the rear wall of the inner vault. Running behind him we saw that a narrow door that had been so adeptly concealed as to defy detection, had swung inward, exposing another chamber. We hastily pushed it farther open, and an astonishing sight met our eyes.

One side of this long, narrow chamber was hung with royal or priestly vestments that had been there through all the ages in this hermetically sealed wardrobe, and these, bit by bit, were crumbling into dust and falling, leaving nothing but their masses of metallic embroideries; withering away before our eyes under the invisible touch of the air. The doctor brushed his hat off, clutched his hair with frantic fingers, and broke into a stream of invective.

"Oh, that I might have got here in time to see them. The priceless vestments! All that was needed to complete our knowledge of the very garments they wore! Dust—dust—crumbling to dust they are."

I think that Wardy feared our companion might lose his reason, for now he put his hand on the doctor's shoulder and said soothingly: "But it's not as bad as it might have been. Man, you had a chance to see approximately how they were shaped and what they looked like! Between us we can make pretty fair drawings of them from memory. Of course you'll not be able to reproduce details, which I suppose is a pity; but you got some of the outlines, didn't you?"

The doctor ceased his lamentations but said regretfully: "That is true! But think how much more I could have seen had I been here on the instant the door opened and the free air began to enter. It's a pity! Almost a calamity that I, who am now the

greatest living authority on Maya history and customs, could not have seen these also."

But my interest in vestments had been of scant duration and my eyes were scanning the room. I pushed past my companions and across it to the end, for there I had seen what looked like a stone door in the wall, covered with seals. Before the doctor could see what I was doing and utter one of his interminable protests, I caught the stone handle and jerked violently. A door opened, exposing a cabinet, and it was my turn to shout with exultation. Under the white light of my electric torch there glittered and scintillated in infinite variety of flashing color—the collected jewels of the Maya treasury! Undreamed-of riches lay beneath my hands. They lay in great and orderly array, as if deposited there in those past dead centuries by trained, careful, and reverent hands. Great girdles and crowns, bracelets and anklets, chains of state and priestly scepters fashioned at the tops like rays of the sun—all the priestly paraphernalia that had lent the glory of pomp and display to the long lines of autocrats who in those far-off days had ruled the destinies of that ancient civilization. Heavily and crudely fashioned, but seeming in its very solidity an expression of power and undisputed sway, the collection lay there ready for the touch of human hands after ages of rest.

"Great Scott!" muttered Wardy. "I've seen several lots of crown jewels, but this is more worth looking at than any of them!" He ended with a long-drawn whistle.

The doctor appeared speechless and acted as if apprehensive lest these, too, might crumble like the robes on the wall.

I bent forward and looked at a shelf beneath and there beheld unmounted gems, diamonds undoubtedly. Beneath that was still another containing a miscellaneous collection of rubies, emeralds, sapphires, and opals. Carefully we took them out and spread them on the floor. An appraisal disclosed the fact that the ancients had very primitive ideas of cutting facets, but nearly all the stones were of sufficient size to bear recutting by modern methods. There were but two very large diamonds, but all were of that singular blue-white quality which were for so many years mined in Brazil. None of us was expert in jewels, but any of us had sufficient knowledge to know that

the unmounted gems alone represented a fortune, measured by even modern standards of wealth.

"Those," said the doctor, pointing at the unmounted stones, "we can, of course, take; but it is an outrage if these others are ever broken up. Such destruction of incomparable specimens of ancient handiwork would be nothing less than abominable!"

"In any event we must hurry out of this!" exclaimed Wardy. "The lantern is beginning to flicker. Wish we could have found a tin of oil."

I hastily tore one of the bags to shreds and wrapped the mounted jewels in them lest they get marred by rubbing, and placed them in a bag, then collected all the uncut stones into the other, protecting the larger ones as best I could in separate wrappings. We hastily closed the cabinet door, went outside, and pushed the door leading into the treasure chamber shut and heard a dull snap.

"One could never by accident guess that it was there," said Wardy, taking a last glance at it, and then we moved rapidly outward into the temple. The god glared at me as if angry that I had ever contemplated robbing him of his eyes. We saw that the stones that operated the secret door behind had resumed their places in the pavement. And then we almost ran from the chamber, stumbling through the long passages and panting up the flights of stairs with but one torch to light our way. One battery gave out, and then the other. We stopped and inserted the only spare one we had to restore the dimming light, and hastened ahead. It was defective and began to flare yellow before we reached the great levers opening the outer door. It expired just as Wardy found the end of the huge beam and threw his weight upon it, and for a trembling moment we were in darkness. Then the door slowly opened and we looked out to discover that the sun had set and we were in the twilight of the outer world.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

I cannot look back on the days that followed our find of the Maya treasure without a mental shudder. It was as if the gods had put a curse upon us that was executed by nature herself. We started at dawn and had not reached the first edge of the jungle before one of the pack mules

was bitten by a snake so venomous that within an hour the poor beast died despite all our efforts to save it. A case of tinned meats upon which we had depended for at least half rations, was found to have been spoiled by the heat and had to be thrown away. The game that we knew must exist in the jungle fled from us as if from a scourge, and not even the monkeys came within rifle shot. The very birds seemed to fly beyond gun range.

Twice we lost our way, once so seriously that we found ourselves in the borders of a swamp we could not cross, and had to retrace our steps through that steaming pestilential jungle behind, where we were tortured by venomous insects, and in constant fear of deadly snakes. We were lost for an entire day before we found the blazings of the trail we had made when entering, and the trail itself had become overgrown and tangled again with that marvelous and malignant rapidity which nothing save such a jungle can manifest. It was as if the jungle itself had become a huge enveloping, serpent leisurely enfolding us, certain of crushing us in its embrace and leering at our puny, frantic efforts to escape. For unending hours at a stretch we struggled onward in silence, speaking never a word, irritable, weak, desperate. Sometimes thirst was added to our sufferings and starvation was ever gnawing us with sharpened fangs. A pony fell and could not rise, and had to be put out of its misery. A second pack burro succumbed through weakness, fell across a log, broke its leg, and had to be shot. Long before this we had abandoned every spare ounce of weight, and I shall not forget Wardy's sigh when he considered which weapon he would keep, hesitated between a sporting rifle and a beautiful Gruener gun, chose the former, and left his prized gun case standing against a tree beside the trail.

"Good-by, old friends," he murmured. "You have been with me through Africa, India, Ceylon, and around the world, but now we part!" And then, as if he could not bear a second's delay, trudged ahead without a single backward look.

I began to be tortured by hallucinations. I could not sleep, save fitfully, and my rest was then broken by nightmares. I fancied that Ixtual had somehow discovered that we carried treasure in the packs upon our backs, and was becoming murderous.

I'm not certain but that he did in reality suspect something after all! Benny began to croon in Arabic interminable and melancholy songs of the desert. The doctor took to muttering strange gibberish about glyphs, talking monotonously in a dead undertone for hours at a stretch. Only Juan, unimaginative, stolid, perhaps hardened to starvation, plodded doggedly on without ever a murmur of complaint or sign of wavering sanity.

And so, at last, ragged, staggering scarecrows of men, with scarred and scratched skeleton beasts, we emerged from that horrible jungle that seemed sullen and angry because we had escaped. I cannot to this day look at a brilliant orchid without hating it for the memories of those million orchids sometimes screening snakes that we saw in that hellish belt through which we survived.

There, almost within sight of a native farm, Ixtual added to our torture by obstinately, almost angrily insisting that we must take cover until nightfall, and add more miles to our travel before appealing to any one for succor. Wardy and I sought to influence him against his decision. Benny cursed him in frenzied, murderous Arabic, and the little doctor appealed and implored him; but he remained steadfastly obdurate and inflexible.

"The señores do not understand!" he said to me in hoarse, dry-throated Spanish. "We must not be seen here! We must not! Is it well to die after all we have endured, rather than be safe by suffering but a few hours more? Is it just to me to have been your friend and servant that I be killed for my follies of faithfulness?"

"Not by a damned sight!" croaked Wardy. "What say you, Hallewell? I vote we stick it out and do as Ixtual says."

"And so do I," I agreed; but Heaven only knows what that exertion of my last remaining resolution cost me; for I was at my limit of fortitude and did not care much whether I lived or died.

We lay, sweltering and weak, in cover for the three hours intervening between daylight and close darkness, and then wearily dragged ourselves onward again until nearly midnight, when we came to a clearing where we found a well; also a hut filled with maize with which we fed our starved animals, and ourselves munched with them. And so remarkable is human vitality that when we



moved forward after two hours' rest, life had begun to resume its strength. We were still in a land of unknown and perhaps deadly perils, practically unarmed, and yet no longer afraid. Our progress through un-frequented yet very passable roads was far more steady and rapid. We put miles behind us, rather than tens of yards as had been the case but a day previous. The packs on our backs, while still heavy, no longer felt unendurable. At dawn Ixtual led us to a place where he said we must camp, and himself disappeared. Within an hour he returned with food that was like the sweets of Paradise to our famished bodies, and after that wonderful meal we slept.

We crawled out and went to a pail of water thoughtfully provided by Juan, who grinned cheerfully and gave us his polite, "Buenos dias, señores," as he began preparations for the evening meal.

"Where are Ixtual and Doctor Morgano?" I asked him.

"They have been gone more than three hours. Whither, I know not," he answered with no sign of interest. "That Indian, Ixtual—who is but a bad Catholic—may the Holy Mother have pity on him in purgatory!—awoke the great doctor and whispered something to him. I am a light sleeper and was disturbed. Then the doctor got up quietly, as if to avoid awakening you other señores, and together they left, like this." And he mimicked a man walking cautiously on tiptoes.

"Oh, there they are! Seem to have a lot to talk about."

They came slowly through the old roadway, stopping now and then as if involved in some discussion; but even then I noted a peculiar difference in Ixtual's attitude toward the doctor that was unusually marked.

By gradual stages we made our way back to the coast, Wardy, the doctor, and I taking turns in keeping jealous guard over the treasure we had won from the subterranean chambers beneath the sacred peaks. And Wardy and I when alone on the long trails frequently spoke of the chamber filled with gold that was corded up in tiers—the gold we had left behind. And there on the coast we stopped in the hotel waiting for the steamer that would take us northward to New Orleans.

We had presented Juan with the animals that had suffered with us, knowing that he would care for them.

Ixtual puzzled us somewhat by his behavior, and with great dignity declined a peso more than the wage he had stipulated. I am not certain that we were sorry to part with him. No, I qualify that by saying that in some ways I was; for I respected him as being something vastly above the peons of that country, or any native I ever met. We carried our belongings aboard the steamer and locked them in our state-rooms, and felt that our great adventure had come to its close.

The little steamship was to sail in the early hours of the morning. She seemed clean and elegant to us after all we had endured. It was like entering into the heart of luxury once more. Only Doctor Morgano seemed silent and absorbed on that evening when, after dinner, we sat on the after deck beneath the awnings with the electric lights shining dully on the table where again we could have long-forgotten drinks and idly stir the cracked ice in the tall glasses. Off on the shore we could see the lamps of the town. Under the lights of the wharf the stevedores were bringing aboard the last of the cargo. A dark, lithe figure flitted across the wharf, stared at us for a moment, and sauntered slowly shoreward.

"Ixtual, as surely as I'm alive!" exclaimed Wardy, half rising from his chair and peering at the retreating shape. "Well, here's luck to him, even if he was a rum sort!"

But I noticed that the doctor seemed unaware of our toast and still sat hunched up in his deck chair with his legs sprawled before him and his hands in his pockets, his chin on his breast and his eyes fixed absently toward the west as if still visioning all the great secrets he had so regretfully left behind. He was in the same mood when we bade one another good night and separated for our cabins.

I was but vaguely disturbed when the steamer sailed, and heard the mellow notes of the ship's bell telling me that it was two o'clock in the morning. Lulled by the slow, cradling swing of the open sea, I slept heavily, delightfully, dreamlessly, and awoke with a sense of profound well-being. Through the thin deal partition I could hear Wardy singing as he made his morning toilet, and Benny's voice in English: "I have gotten out your white linen suit, sair." I was

the first at breakfast and had nearly finished when Wardy entered, breezy, fresh, and well groomed.

"Where's our little encyclopedia?" he asked. "Hope he's not found more of those blamed glyphs. I'm going to decoy him to the engine room and see if he can read the manufacturers' names on the engines. Ha!"

One of the stewards came in and said: "Pardon, gentlemen; but which of you is Mr. Hallewell? I have a note for him."

My dear Hallwell—and Wardrop—for this letter is for you both. Much as I regret parting from you with no more formal and customary leave-taking than this, I think it best; for did you know of my purpose, you would both endeavor to dissuade me—uselessly so, I may add. But the truth is that I, a scientist, cannot bear to leave such a promising field for research as we have together visited without further and possibly prolonged study of it and its peculiarities. Its possibilities are of a magnitude that neither of you who are but slightly interested in archaeology or the dead histories of nations can comprehend. To me these are the sole pleasures in life. I cannot withstand the temptation. I should be unhappy ever until I returned. I should far rather commit suicide than let such marvelous opportunities go by as are now offered me through certain understandings, which I am not permitted to explain, arrived at between the remnants of the Maya race and myself. I owe an eternal debt of gratitude to that hereditary high priest of his tribe, Ixtual, with whom by an interchange of sacred rites and ceremonies I have become a blood brother with the rank of priesthood in the Maya race, of which I have become an adopted and fully accepted member. I am no longer Italian. I am Maya henceforth. I entreat you by the memories of a friendship which I shall always fondly cherish not to betray the secrets which we have learned together to any living man. I implore you to make no effort to find, or to recall me; for I shall be safe, honored, and happy in that environment which I have chosen. If not asking too much of your friendship, will you please pay my room rent in Paris for five years, see that safer locks are put on the door, and leave the keys with the custodian at the Assyrian Exploration Society's offices. I ask no share in the proceeds from the sale of the jewels you have, and desire nothing from it. I shall have no need of it. Furthermore, although its fulfillment is uncertain and perhaps may never be, I wish that sometime I may see you both again when I can find time for a vacation from the great, noble, and distinguished task which I, undoubtedly the most widely and best informed archaeologist of this century, have undertaken for the sheer love of knowledge.

Again regretting that circumstances made it wise for me to forego a personal good-by, I am, ever your devoted friend, PAOLO MORGANO.

P. S.—I am taking all the sacred jewels with

me, for to break them up would be sacrilege unspeakable, and irreparable."

We were so astounded by this communication that for a full moment we sat with our mouths open and eyes equally wide, staring at each other, then as if actuated by a single motor center we hurried to the doctor's cabin. It was in a peculiar state of confusion. Thrown carelessly on the floor were all his spare shirts, linen, underwear, and clothing, and his sole piece of luggage, a suit case, was missing. A worn, stained, slightly frayed canvas sack lying limp and empty on the floor told the tale. He had emptied out his suit case and thrown away such mere superfluities as changes of linen and underwear and placed the crown jewels of the Maya tribe therein.

Wardy and I again stared at each other and then, despite the loss of the loot and our estimable and beloved partner, burst into laughter.

"I'm at least glad that you and I acted as custodians for the unmounted stones, Wardy," I said.

He picked up from the floor the rusty old sack that had for so many days contained wealth sufficient to ransom a prince and now felt inside it tentatively. He found down in one corner a wad of torn canvas, unrolled it, and disclosed a single ring mounting a unique seal cut in some semiprecious stone. He slipped it on one of his fingers as if to test its size, learned that it fitted, and then said, quite cheerfully and with his habitual generosity:

"If you don't mind, old man, I'll keep this. If you will pay back the thousand pounds I advanced for Juan, and give Beni Hassan a similar amount, all the rest is yours. I've all the money I can ever use, without it. The dear old doctor has his. And I fancy the sale of the other stuff will provide more than you can ever use."

And despite my protests it was thus settled, and as far as the final profit was concerned, his prediction proved true.

We went out to the deck, where we learned from the chief officer that Doctor Morgano had quietly informed him at midnight that he had decided not to sail with us, and had gone down the gangway, where he was met by one the mate believed to be an Indian servant, to whom the doctor handed the suit case to carry, and that they had leisurely walked from sight, talking in some strangely barbaric tongue.

# The Lion of the Mountains

By H. H. Knibbs

*Author of "For Three Burros and a Song," etc.*

As you have discovered in the former stories about Benito, he is altogether different from the ordinary Mexican peon. Contrary to most of his kind, he is direct and simple, and his sense of gratitude and loyalty astonishes his "white" brothers.

IT was an old trail, overgrown and dim. Benito had known it when it was a fair trail and open—a short cut across the Pine Flat country in the southern Sierras. Benito was afoot and in haste to get back to his cabin. He had heard that there were two men who wanted a guide into the Buckhorn country and he had arrived at the mountain hotel near San Gabriel to find that these men had already engaged a guide. Benito had not seen the men nor the guide. He had simply inquired of the management and had received a curt answer. He had taken nothing in the way of equipment with him, surmising that the campers would have more than enough equipment and that they would rent their saddle animals at the hotel.

Benito chuckled as he stooped and examined the mountain-lion tracks in the unused trail. "Of the same name—and we go in the same way, swiftly, that we may not be seen by men."

When his compatriots of Chilao called Benito the "Lion of the Mountains," they did so in compliment to his woodcraft, his ability to travel great distances swiftly, because of his intimate knowledge of the hills wherein he dwelt. He was a great hunter, a capable guide, and a silent man. He always went quietly because he disliked noise. His own people, the Mexicans, thought there was some mystery connected with his manner of life. There was none. The mountain lion's stealth is called fear—his discretion, cowardice by men who judge animals by the man standard. Contrary to most of his kind, Benito was direct and simple—and this puzzled his friends. Nor could they understand why he preferred the silence of the great pine-shadowed flats and the peace of the sunlit spaces of the desert to town and companionship.

Something warned him the instant he stepped into the open space halfway down

the mountain. Perhaps it was the freshly broken branch of a manzanita from which the withered leaves dangled in the still air. Perhaps it was that sense of danger that so often oppresses the wild things of the earth when there is no visible cause. Benito stepped back, glancing quickly from side to side as though a rattler had buzzed in the brush. He felt the trap as his foot barely touched the pan, but he was not quick enough to escape. With a dull click the offset jaws clenched on his ankle. As he stumbled and fell, the chain jerked up, showing the drag, cleverly concealed in the brush.

Benito clenched his teeth and, twisting round, sat down. He had his knife, but that would be of no use. If he had taken his rifle with him he might have pried the jaws apart and released himself. But he had not taken his rifle. It was the summer season and the men at the hotel would not be going in to hunt.

Slowly he drew back until the chain was slack. It was fastened to the trap and drag by baling wire. Benito untwisted the wire and, reaching up, grasped a branch of the manzanita. He raised himself and set his foot on the spring. It gave slowly. It cost him all his fortitude to stoop and wind the wire around the flattened spring. But there was the other spring which still held the jaws tight. If he could but press that spring down—but to do so he would have to twist round in a most awkward way. He tried and lost his balance. As he got up again the sun danced before him, and cold sweat stood out on his face. This time he would be more careful. He felt that he was growing weak. The air on the hillside was stagnant hot. He twisted round and stood on the spring. He could almost move his imprisoned foot. He must be careful! To fail again—

He hardly realized that he was free. His leg did not pain him so much, now. But the distant hills danced queerly. Benito sat down and wiped his sweating face. Suddenly the dancing hills grew black. With a supreme effort to gather himself together, he half rose, staggered dizzily and sank down.

With the lengthening of the shadows a cool breeze crept over the hillside. Benito saw a clear patch of sky directly above him. Instantly he remembered what had happened, and he wondered if he would be able to walk. If not, then he would stay where he was until morning. The ranger trail was but a few hundred yards below, and some one would be passing that way—perhaps the men from the hotel with their guide.

Benito thought of his three burros and he was glad that he had turned them into the large pasture where they could get to water. They would come to the line fence and demand their evening tortilla apiece. Benito sat up and examined his injured ankle. The steel teeth had bitten in just above his shoetop. He unlaced his shoe and pulled off his heavy woolen sock. *Por Dios*, but it was not so bad! He would cut a stick, after he had bandaged his ankle. By going carefully, he could reach the ranger trail below, an open trail and easy to travel. But almost immediately Benito realized that he had made a mistake in taking off his shoe. The support of the lacing had kept the blood from swelling his foot. Now he could not get his shoe on again. He told himself that he was old enough to have known better.

Hobbling down the dim trail, ducking under the brush or breasting his way through when he could, he finally arrived at the used trail. He went drunkenly because of his weakness and the lack of his shoe, which he had tied to his belt. Below, the cañon was beautiful in the diminishing glow of sunset. Above him the peak of El Oro was red gold.

"*Madre de Dios!* But it is beautiful, this country of mine!" And he turned and limped along the open trail, heading straight into the sunset.

Long before they appeared he heard them. Perhaps they were rangers—or the men from the hotel hastening to the water below to make the evening camp. It was characteristic of him that he did not wait, but

kept doggedly along, helping himself with the stick. Nor did he ask help when the foremost rider appeared, a man who wore a wide Stetson with a horsehair hatband, and who glanced casually at Benito as he passed. Behind this rider came another, whose chief embellishment was an expression of deep concern for his own physical welfare. He watched the trail ahead as though fearful that it might suddenly disappear, or do something dreadful. Benito stood in the brush that the rider might pass. Presently he heard a voice, the voice of the foremost rider say something which sounded like "Just a drunken Mexican." But Benito was too anxious at the moment to pay much attention. Then the third rider approached, a man who rode easily, looking far ahead and whistling a mild tune to the rhythm of his pony's feet. His Stetson was old and unembellished. His hair was red, his eyes cool blue and his weathered face keen but exceedingly pleasant of expression. Abreast of Benito he reined in.

"*Buenos tardes!*"

Then he glanced sharply at Benito's stockinged foot—neither of the others had noticed that—and at the boot dangling from Benito's belt. Then he glanced at Benito's face. Benito shrugged his shoulders as one who would say, "It is nothing." But this rider would not have it that way. He slipped from the saddle.

"Turn your ankle, *hombre?*"

"The trap," said Benito succinctly. The other understood.

"You're Benny Benito, aren't you?"

"Si."

"Well, just get on this horse here. Any bones busted?"

"I think no. But the trap she chew him up pretty bad."

"Lion trap, eh? Well, come on. Those two shorthorns down there are like to get lost if I don't keep 'em in sight."

"It is not that I shall ride and the señor shall walk?"

"That's the idea. Mebby you'll catch me afoot some day."

Benito led the horse alongside a rock from which he scrambled into the saddle. They jogged on down the trail, the sagebrush Samaritan whistling, and Benito easing himself to the jolt of descending some of the steeper pitches.

In the bottom, where the Tejunga ripples over the rounded rocks, they drew up.

Benito gazed about. The campers were not in sight.

The guide stood gazing across the valley bottom toward the opposite slope. Presently he gestured toward the distant hillside.

"Them two shorthorns has gone on, like I figured they would, and I got to stop 'em. You wait here."

"It is that you show those hombre the way?"

"That's what they're payin' me for. But dinged if I can ride behind 'em and in front of 'em at the same time. Now if they was just regular tenderfeet and willin' to say so, I wouldn't say a word. But one of 'em claims to know the game account of his father runnin' a tourist hotel back there near San Gabriel peak. And that one, he is showin' this country to his Eastern friend. Me, I'm to wrangle stock and cook and put 'em to bed. There they go, up the Chilao grade—and ten miles to the next grass and water!"

Benito's chance friend strode across the ford and raised a long-drawn haloo that caused the others to rein up. They did not seem anxious to turn back but sat their horses, and one of these aspirants to altitude shouted unintelligible questions that the guide ignored. Slowly they reined round and started back. They reached the river level and splashed across the ford at a trot.

"What's the idea?" queried the one who wore the horsehair hatband.

"This man is hurt. Got caught in a lion trap. That's one idea. The other is that we camp here. It's ten miles to the next water—and it'll be dark in an hour."

"But you told us we could make Chilao to-night," argued Hatband.

"Sure we could, if we had to. But there's no sense in pushin' them horses over the hill to-night. Then, as I was tellin' you, this man is hurt. He can't walk, and it's a right good ride to his place."

"It isn't our fault that he's hurt," said Hatband. "I guess he can get along all right."

"I go," said Benito.

"You set right on that hoss!" And the guide stepped close to the others. "See here, old-timer," and his tone was ragged with sarcasm, "we can't take this man along with us. And if he camps here, like

as not his leg'll be so stiff he can't walk in the morning. Now I'm game to see you into the Buckhorn country and show you some of the diggin's, and get you out again. But first I aim to see Benito, here, to his cabin."

Benito, who saw that his presence was apt to make trouble between the guide and his charges, asserted his willingness to go, but the guide would not listen to him.

"After I get these folks bedded down, I aim to trail over your way and see that you get home comf'able. If you're wishful, you can drift along ahead. I'll come after my hoss later."

"But see here!" exclaimed Hatband. "When we hired you to make this trip with us, we didn't hire you to tell us where to camp. And we didn't figure on having to cook and take care of the horses, either."

"No? Well, just throw them saddles off and hobble them hosses while I do the cookin'. If you recollect, I told you a pack hoss would be all right on this trip—but you was dyin' to go light—so now is your chance to try out that vest-pocket cookin' outfit. You got a blanket apiece, and they ain't no law in these hills against sleepin' out."

"I don't object to sleeping out, but I do object to being dictated to by my guide."

"So do I," asserted Hatband's Eastern friend.

"All right! You turn the hosses out and I'll feed you. Get goin', Benito."

"But it is that you would not find my cabin alone," said Benito. "Me, I'm wait."

"Suits me just as well. Reckon a little coffee won't hurt you any." And the guide began gathering wood for a fire while the campers led their horses toward the river, Benito dismounted and, limping down to the stream, drank, and then rebandaged his ankle. Meanwhile the guide made a fire, fried bacon, boiled the water for coffee, and made a bannock at a time which he proffered to the campers. They did not invite Benito to share their meal, but the guide did. Benito drank some coffee, but he would not eat.

It was dark when Benito and the guide set out along the river trail toward the west. Back in camp, Van and his friend discussed their guide's "independence," as they termed it.

"He would have ditched us—for that tramp," asserted Hatband. "That is, if I

handn't handled him just right. You have to know how to handle these roughnecks. But I've a good mind to call him down in the morning."

"Don't be too severe with him," pleaded Van's friend. "He seems to be rather pleasant when one leaves him alone."

"I'll talk to him!" asserted Van impressively.

"I wouldn't antagonize him, though."

"You afraid to travel without him?"

"Oh, of course you know the mountains. You said you did. But if we should get lost——"

"Lost nothing! I only brought him along to do the rough work—look after the horses and cook—and I can do that, if I want to."

"I don't see our horses," said Van's friend, peering toward the river. "Did you tie yours?"

"Tie nothing! Why, you never tie a horse out in the hills. You just hobble them and turn them loose. They'll stay around all right, especially if they know you."

"Well, mine just walked right off when I unfastened his bridle."

"Didn't you hobble him?"

"Why—you mean fasten those leather things around his ankles? I thought those were some kind of bandages in case his legs got sore."

"Great Scott! You've done it!"

"Done what, Van?"

"Why, you've turned old Molly loose, and she'll start right back for father's."

"But you hobbled yours, didn't you?"

"Of course! But Nester'll follow her as sure as shooting! "Ferd, you're a peach of a mountain man."

"What will happen if they get lost?" queried Ferd.

"We'll have to hunt them—and lose perhaps a day. And it's Gale's fault. If he hadn't picked up that Mexican——"

Ferd hunched close to the fire and blinked. From somewhere up in the Chilao hills came the quick, sharp call of a coyote. Ferd hunched closer to the fire.

"What was that?"

"Nothing but a coyote."

"Hadn't we better go to bed?"

"Say, Ferd, you don't say 'go to bed' when you're out like this. You just roll in your blankets."

"I don't care what you call it, I'm going to cover up with mine. It's cold."

When their guide, who was known to his friends as "Jim" but never "James," and whose family name had been forgotten by most of them—when Jimmy Gale returned at midnight, he came whistling, not because he felt specially joyous, but because he did not want to be shot by a suddenly awakened camper. Ferd and Van grumbled at being awakened, until Ferd let it slip that he had heard Jimmy whistling for at least ten minutes before he struck camp. Van immediately began argument that their guide had been whistling ever since he topped the range, a mile away. And Jimmy, unsaddling his horse, casually mentioned the fact that sound carried far in the high country, and that incidentally he had heard Van and Ferd talking quite a while before he struck camp—and so had felt at liberty to whistle.

Van grunted as he turned over and pulled his blanket about his ears, and in so doing uncovered his feet. Neither of the campers had asked about Benito, nor had they shown the slightest interest in Jimmy's charitable action. Jim said nothing. He knew the breed. But he wasted a good hour arguing with himself whether or not he would continue to escort these two young gentlemen farther than the river, next morning.

And in the morning Jimmy was up early, whistling as he prepared breakfast. His whistling annoyed Van, who had suffered from cold feet and a consequent lack of sleep. From his attitude it was evident to Jimmy that something would happen before the sun set again—and Jimmy wished that it would happen soon. He was not disappointed. From a brief prospect to the river, Van returned to say that the horses had strayed. Jimmy nodded casually and pointed to where his own horse grazed in the morning sun.

"Didn't you hebble 'em?" he queried.

"I hobbled mine. But the other one was loose."

"The mare?"

"Yes—the mare."

Jimmy continued to whistle as he picked up his rope. "I'll catch up Skyrocket and trail 'em."

"And we will have to sit here and wait till you get back before we have breakfast?"



Jimmy paused in his stride and pushed back his hat. "Yes. Or you can get your own breakfast while I look for 'em. Or you can start right off, afoot—and get lost, while I set here and eat. You got your choice."

"See here, Gale! You can't talk to me like that! First, you delay us by wasting time over that Mexican. Then you keep us awake half the night wait—whistling. Then you stand there chewing the rag——"

"You go ahead and chew her," interrupted Jimmy, and he grinned. "Or go ahead and find 'em. I'll wait."

"What do you think we're hiring you for, anyway!" stormed Van.

"You ain't."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, just this. I done quit wet-nursin' you two tough old-timers long about last night when you said it was none of your business that Benito was hurt. It warn't none of mine, either, but I made it mine. 'Course I had to feed you, not bein' wishful to get up in the night and warm milk for you. And I'm willin' to catch up your hosses this mornin' and get you started right. But you won't give me a chanct."

Ferd, who was gazing round-eyed at his companion, mildly suggested that they allow Mr. Gale to find the horses. But Van, who was playing up to Ferd as an experienced hillman, waved his suggestion aside brusquely, and immediately adopted it.

"I'll handle this," he told Ferd. Then he turned to Jimmy: "If you'll catch up our horses, Mister Gale, we'll break camp and hit the trail for Chilao."

"Sure! But, honest, you could 'a' said that half an hour ago without hurtin' my feelin's any." And Jimmy flicked away his half-smoked cigarette and picked up his rope again. He tracked round until he got the direction the strays had taken. Then he saddled up and started back along the trail down which they had come to camp. Van and his friend held further discussion and agreed—as the sun warmed them to better nature—that it might be just as well to retain the services of their guide.

It was noon when Jimmy returned with the strays. Van was for saddling up and starting at once. Jimmy made no objection, merely stating that he had been riding since early morning and that he was going to rest for an hour and allow his horse to graze. Van fumed and fretted,

finally giving way to his ill nature by charging Jimmy with mismanagement, deliberate delay, and insolence, concluding with the insinuation that it was an easy job to kill time at five dollars a day.

Jimmy flushed but kept his hands out of mischief. "You didn't need to say that to show you was yellow. Ever since you passed up Benny Benito back there I had your number. No man with sand will ride by a man—or even a dog or a hoss—that is hurt, and not try to help some. You ain't big enough to insult me, which means you are too small to lick without insultin' myself. I ain't hatin' you a little bit, but I'll eat heartier when you are out of sight. Now I reckon I got my five dollars' worth in tellin' you what I think of you. Yonder is the trail to Chilao, and here are your ponies. I'm wishin' you luck."

"You mean to say that you are going to deliberately quit us, right here?"

"Right where I'm standin'. But I done quit last night. Anyhow, you was tellin' me you knowed these hills like a book. You didn't say what *kind* of a book. I reckon I ain't big enough to handle this job."

"Well, you don't get a cent of our money!" spluttered Van. "And I guess father will have something to say when he hears about it."

"If you're referrin' to the money I owe your dad for board last winter, why go right ahead and tell him I quit—and why I quit. 'Course I could collect, right now. But if I was to make you shell out my day's pay for yesterday, then I would 'a' accepted cash on contract and I'd have to see it through. But I was born some spell back. As I was sayin', we're square." And Jimmy, who had unsaddled Skyrocket during the argument, led him across the river to where the spring grasses were waving in the warm breeze. He seemed quite good-natured when he returned, even offering to saddle the horses for the campers, but they declined his offer, without thanks. Jimmy watched them ride up the Chilao grade. He shook his head and grinned. "It's mighty hard for some folks to be just human. Now if they knew how much I was really needin' that money—it would 'a' been all of three weeks at five a day—I wonder how much harder they would 'a' rode me durin' our lovin' and trustful little pasear into them hills? *Quién sabe?* Here I be, broke and owin' three months' board—and this my

first job this summer. I could 'a' grub-staked and got back to my little old hole in the ground on that money. It's a sure thing I don't eat up to the hotel no longer, now. And Skyrocket, he's got to eat, likewise. Now, one time I could 'a' licked Van this mornin'. But Ferdie might 'a' got hurt durin' the openin' exercises. He might 'a' pulled that gun of his and started shootin'. Can't tell about them kind when they git scared."

Jimmy seemed relieved by this soliloquy.

"I done throwed away a chanct, Sky. But I'm sure glad I didn't throw either of them shorthorns away. You comin' along with me? All *right*. Then I won't have to lead you across. What are we goin' to do next? You can search me. But what do you say if we mosey over to that Benny Benito's cabin and see how he's gettin' along?"

Jimmy touched Skyrocket gently with the spurs, as a reminder that they had originally started to go somewhere. And that good horse, who might have gone in any one of four directions on the ridge, as the reins were slack, plodded down the long grade toward Benito's cabin as though he thoroughly understood his master's intent. It was but one of the many instances of that finely balanced understanding between horse and rider, yet it caused Jimmy to smile.

"Folks say that hosses are awful wise or awful foolish," commented Jimmy. "Now I wonder what hosses say to each other about folks?"

Benito had been busy that morning concocting a backwoods remedy for his inflamed and swollen ankle. With an infusion of sage leaves, the root of the scapweed, and the inner bark of a tree somewhat like the Eastern slippery elm, he had made a poultice and bound it round his leg. He had also cut a handy crutch from a sapling back of the cabin, and after hobbling round until his morning tasks were performed, he had settled himself in a comfortable old chair made of four unbarked saplings and a long strip of canvas. He sat in front of the cabin in the sun and watched his three burros as they stood stolidly waiting for the full warmth of the morning to stir them to grazing. Benito talked to his big black burro, who raised one long, lazy ear to listen and then let it sag again, but imme-

diately raised the other ear as Benito continued to address him.

"First, Señor Burro, you listen with the one ear till that is full—then you listen with the other ear till that is full—but me, I think nothing go in your head, yes? I think I make you listen with two ears when I say 'tortilla,' eh? I think perhaps you sing for me when I say that word."

But before Benito had induced the burro to "sing" the animal's long ears shot forward stiffly toward the hill trail back of the cabin. Benito turned his head. Far up on the switchbacks of the slope he saw a rider, tiny in the distance. Benito gazed long and intently. Presently he smiled.

"It is Señor Jim of the red hair, and his of the very wise horse what he call the Fireworks, and they come to see how Benito is make it this morning. Truly he is of the good heart. Is it that those whom he would keep from losing themselves have become lost again? It is not strange that it should be so. But perhaps it is that the Jim hombre does not go with them any more, being of the red hair and the quick talk. I think it is that he come to see if Benito can make the leg go. Those hombre he call the shorthorn did not like it that he help me. They did not give me to eat, or of the coffee. But the Señor Jim, he ask me. He is a good man. Now he rides like one who is thinking much. He go with his head nod, so—and not with the whistle, like yesterday. My leg she is pretty good, yes? But she is very bad if that Jim hombre he lose his job with them shorthorn, so that he may stay here and help Benito till he get some more job to guide. But he shall not know that Benito think like that. I fix the leg straight like she stiff and don't go. Then I wait for what that Jim hombre he say."

Benito "fixed" his leg, and settled back in his chair. Halfway down the hillside Jimmy's long-drawn "Hello the house!" brought a sonorous answer from the black burro, who pumped up a profound cadence that rolled along the hillsides. Benito smiled, but did not change his position. He would await developments—see what brought Jimmy to the cabin.

Not until he had unfastened the little gate to the cabin yard did Jimmy discover Benito, stretched out in the home-made chair, and apparently unable to move about much. Jimmy swung down and strode up,

his hat pushed back, and his face untroubled.

"How's the leg?"

"Oh, she swell up, and she pretty sore. You lose them shorthorn again?"

Jimmy laughed. "Not just that. They lost me, this trip. They've gone on up to Chilao."

"Si? And you go there, after you come down to see how Benito he is make it?"

"Reckon I'll go somewhere."

"But not to the beautiful Chilao, no?"

"Well, seein' you asked me, no."

"They go alone?"

"Yes. I got 'em headed right."

"That is good. You get tire of listen to what they talk, eh?"

Jimmy laughed heartily. "Kind of like that. I thought I'd drop down and see how you were. You got a right neat place here. I couldn't see it all last night."

Benito studied Jimmy's lean, weather-beaten face. He saw nothing there to indicate worry, but he did see a shade of indecision in the blue eyes—and indecision was foreign to a man of Jimmy's type, as Benito knew. Benito also surmised that a direct invitation to share food and shelter would be immediately declined. In fact, Benito was not yet sure that Jimmy was looking for a place to stay. Still, Benito, who talked little and listened much, had heard it rumored in town that Jimmy Gale had spent all his hard-earned wages as guide on a prospect hole back in the Buckhorn country—that he was usually broke and would be, so long as he toyed with the prospecting game. Well, if Jimmy needed a place to stay, there could be no harm in making it plain that he was welcome to stay right where he was. Benito knew that one of the campers was the son of the manager of the mountain hotel—and that Jimmy had boarded there that winter. If there had been a misunderstanding between the campers and Jimmy, Benito thought he knew why. And had they not spoken of him—Benito—as "a drunken Mexican?"

"There is the good feed in the cañon," said Benito, gesturing to where the burros stood looking at the strange horse and rider.

"Yes, pretty good," concurred Jimmy non-committally.

"And my leg—she is go bad," continued Benito, as a gentle hint that he was incapable of doing much for himself.

"Reckon it's the first time the Lion of the Mountains got caught in that kind of a trap, eh?"

"Si. But once I get caught for kill the deer, yes? Five years in the prison—and for one small deer! That is more bad than the lion trap."

"Well, some! Anything I can do for you before I drift along?"

"You have do much—last night. And today you come to see how Benito is make it. It is Benito that should do something for such a friend."

"Oh, shucks! that's nothing. Anybody would 'a' done that."

Benito shook his head. "Those what you say, shorthorn don't do that."

"Oh, hell, I was talkin' of humans. Them two is just warts on the scenery."

Skyrocket nosed Jimmy as a mild reminder that there was good grazing just beyond the fence.

"I open the gate," said Benito, half rising, but he sank back and a shade of pain swept over his face.

"Don't you bother, Benny. I'll turn him into your pasture till I go. He might as well eat, seein' you got plenty feed here."

"He make fight with them burro?" queried Benito.

"Shucks, no. Sky tends to his own business when there's somethin' to eat handy, same as me."

"When you don' eat you make fight, eh?" And Benito chuckled.

"Well, I ain't scrappin' with you this mornin', anyhow."

Benito realized that Jimmy was too much for him in this style of fencing, so he decided on another method. Jimmy himself opened the way. When he came back from the pasture he mentioned the burros.

"Mighty fine-lookin' animals," he commented.

Benito was pleased. His three burros meant more to him than anything in the world. "Si! Those burro they know most everything. She know more than what you call those shorthorn, yes?"

"They wouldn't have to know a whole lot, at that. Use 'em much? They're right fat and sleek."

"Oh, sometime I pack the grub in to this cabin. Sometime I make pasear over the mountains—six months I go, sometime. *Por Dios!* But I had not thought. It is that I should have the beans and the coffee and

the flour—and I may not go! If the señor had not done so much, I would ask that he go for me. But perhaps the leg she go good next week.”

Jimmy, who had noticed no apparent shortage of supplies the night before when in Benito's cabin, wondered what Benito was up to. But Benito seemed quite in earnest as he gravely gazed at his bandaged ankle.

“Oh, it is that I have enough for a little while. But perhaps my leg she don't go good for long time. If I put the foot down, so, she bite, just like the trap is on him, yes?” And Benito shook his head.

“Well, I got plenty time. Just tell me what you want and I'll drift over the range and get it.”

Benito was not in reality overstocked with provisions, and his excuse to find occupation for Jimmy was that two would eat more than one—and Jimmy might be there for some time. While Jimmy caught up the big black burro, Benito made a package of jerky and tortillas, as Jimmy would be gone all day and perhaps until late in the night. Jimmy thought of saddling Skyrocket, as he heartily disliked going afoot, but he knew how a live saddle animal fretted behind the slow-paced burros, so he decided to haze them along and walk. Benito said nothing about money for the supplies—and Jimmy was broke.

“The trail she is over there,” said Benito, gesturing toward the west.

“All right. Do you want me to charge this stuff at the store? I ain't hooked up to buy much grub this mornin'.”

“Santa Maria! But I was forget! I was think of the leg. Here is the money.”

With Skyrocket in the cañon pasture and the little cavalcade winding up the distant hillside, Benito relaxed and grinned. “I have the right think on that, you bet! The Señor Jim of the red hair she is broke. It is Benito that will be his friend. My leg she will not go good for long time. Then he stay here and help. But the leg she is not so bad. Even now I can walk him a little some. And I can stand on him a little some. But Señor Jim he do not see that. I guess I too smart for him, yes? It is that I will chop the wood when he is gone long time. *Por Dios*, but it is to laugh at some hombre. A Mexican hombre he come to me and he say, ‘Benito, I broke; I hungry. I got no place where to

sleep.’ Then I say, ‘Compadre, you stay here. You eat here.’ And he say, ‘Gracias! Benito is the good friend.’ But the Americano he is not like that. They want to make think they not broke and they not hungry. You say, ‘Amigo, you broke; you hungry?’ And he say, ‘No! I just come along to say how is the good morning—and then I go.’” Benito chuckled as he hobbled down to the spring. He busied himself about the cabin until he thought Jimmy was far enough away to permit of chopping wood without being seen. Then he took his ax and went to work. The fact that he was able to repay Jimmy for his kindness pleased Benito exceedingly. But that did not please him more than the game itself. Just how soon Jimmy would find work—how long he would be a guest at the cabin—was a question that Benito left to as many to-morrows as would be necessary to establish an answer. Meanwhile he chopped wood, slowly and awkwardly because of his injured ankle. Suddenly he paused and chuckled.

“Me, I am think that Jim hombre he say something when he get to that store, and he think why he bring three burros for make pack of things that go on one. I fool him all right!”

And Jimmy Gale, plodding along behind the burros and whistling, paused occasionally to turn and glance down at the half-hidden cabin below. At the last bend, where the trail leaves the rim and dives down into the valley beyond, Jimmy stopped, rolled a smoke, and stood surveying the valleys on both sides of the ridge. The noon sun was hot and Jimmy felt indolent. He pulled his sombrero brim down, stared, blinked, and stared again. Far below, near the cabin, he saw the occasional glitter of bright metal. After each flicker of metal came the faint “chug” of an ax stroke.

“The son of a gun! If he ain't choppin' wood! And he's sure got to stand on two legs to do that! His leg can't be so awful bad. Now I wonder if that Benny boy was puttin' one over on me, pertendin' he was crippled up so bad he had to get me to help him out? Folks say he is a wise one. I wonder if he caught on that I had a high-chin talk with them campers, and quit 'cause they didn't like my helpin' him out yesterday? They say Benny Benito is

always helpin' pore folks out—but mostly Mexicans. Well, anyhow, he's a good scout. But he can't feed this child when I can't pay for the chuck. Me, packin' in grub for a Mexican! But, whoa, sister! I reckon he'd do the same for me."

Jimmy caught up with the burros and hazed them along until suddenly it occurred to him that one burro could pack twice as much in supplies as he had been asked to purchase. He stopped in the trail, pushed back his hat, and scratched his head.

"Guess that Benito boy has got a spell on me. Here I been packin' 'in and out of these hills most of my life, and I'm hazin' three fat burros down to town to get a halfload of stuff which one burro could handle on three feet. Now Benny he let me go with the three of 'em, and never said a word. I sure aim to ask him what the joke is—and, mebby, if he chopped that wood standin' on one leg. Things is gettin' thick. But mebby it's only my head."

There are lucky and unlucky days. Jimmy, who considered himself out of luck just then, was on the verge of discovering that the luckiest day he had ever known was the day on which he had given his horse to Benito to ride—and had quarreled with his campers.

Dusty and hot, he breezed into the desert town of Acton, and tied his burros at the rail in front of the general store. There were six burros already tied there—a fact that Jimmy noticed casually until he realized that the six burros belonged to one train. Then he became cautiously curious. Three men were bobbing in and out of the store with bundles and packages. Two of the men were strangers to Jimmy, but he knew the third, an old prospector whose front name was "Hank"—and he looked it—and whose hind name had been lost in the oft-mentioned mists of antiquity. Hank was a weazened individual whose most noticeable garnishments were a ragged beard of no special color, and a solitary front tooth that was stained a beautiful mahogany brown—a typical desert rat with a perennial grouch that began in the cradle and gave no promise of ending anywhere this side of the Great Beyond. Jimmy greeted Hank with a friendly salutation, to which he received no reply.

"What's the excitement?" continued

Jimmy, determined to pry some sort of recognition out of the other.

"Hain't seen none," mumbled Hank, and he emphasized his attitude of intolerance with mankind by spitting viciously at a stone in the road.

"You missed it," said Jimmy earnestly. "Try her again."

"I ain't missed it so durned bad," mumbled Hank mysteriously.

"I was meanin' that stone—not your breakfast, old-timer."

"I hain't missed that, nuther."

"Now that's right strange! I never feel ornery when I've had a good meal."

Hank mumbled his cud as he moved about sorting the loads for the packs. Jimmy saw that he could learn nothing from him, so he drifted into the store and stood about casually watching the evident preparations for a long trip into the desert. When the train had been packed Jimmy gave his order for provisions and strolled to the doorway while the storekeeper made up the order. Johnson, who ran the store, also wore an air of mystery, and so obviously that Jimmy surmised that garrulous individual would have to talk to some one soon or explode. So Jimmy wisely asked no questions. Johnson followed Jimmy to the doorway and watched him pack.

"Goin' in?" he queried, although it would have been obvious to a schoolboy that Jimmy was not going out.

"Yep! And I got somethin' worth goin' in for, this trip."

"Beats all how you fellas are strikin' it, recent."

"Fellas? I'm workin' this alone." And Jimmy walked round the black burro, pretending to inspect the balance of the pack.

"I wasn't referrin' to just you. There are others."

Jimmy whistled as he reached for the cinch hook, and he continued to whistle as he caught the rope in the first turn. Johnson came a little nearer.

"I see you're only packin' one animal."

"Only one."

"Well, Hank and his pardners took in six."

"So I noticed. He took in six burros and two shorthorns——"

"Nope. Them two is Los Angeles minin' experts."

Jimmy nodded, but his face expressed a mild contempt for Johnson's statement.

"That's right! They telephoned from Los Angeles for Hank to meet 'em here. They're goin' in to buy his mine."

"Then they get stung," was Jimmy's comment as he pulled the hitch down and fastened it. He knew where Hank had been prospecting, not far from his own stamping ground in the Buckhorn country. He was not surprised at the news. He knew there was gold there although he had never found it in paying quantities. Just his luck, to be out of funds and far from the Buckhorn hills when there was a small gold stampede in process. He nodded to Johnson and drifted out of town. It was almost dusk when he unpacked and turned the burros in Benito's pasture. Benito was hobbling about getting supper. Jimmy asked him why he had sent him to town with three burros when one would have answered the purpose. Benito chuckled.

"Si! But it was for what you say the company. Those burro she always go like that—three. If one he go, the others they sing for that they are lonesome, yes?"

"They sing, eh? Well, you got a funny idea of music. Guess you think a whole lot of them animals."

"Si, señor. I call them my brother. Some mans say that the burro is a fool. No. It is the man what say that, is a fool. Señor Burro he don' say all he know."

"Then Señor Burro is not like Johnson, down to Acton. He don't know much, but he tells all of it. Mr. Burro is a wise bird, in his own line."

"And not all hombre is wise in his own line, eh?"

"Somethin' to that, Benito. I'm thinkin' of myself, right now. I heard, down to Acton, that old Hank had struck it rich, back in the Buckhorn country. I saw him and two other guys packin' in an amazin' lot of plunder, this afternoon."

"Si. They go by—up there on the ridge. I see them but I do not know who they are. I see six burro and three mans."

"Yes. And two of the men are minin' men from Los, goin' in to look over Hank's prospect. I guess I ought to stuck to prospectin' instead of hirin' out to guide shorthorns in this green and lovely land."

"You make fight with them shorthorn?"

"How's your leg?" queried Jimmy. "You tell *me* straight, and I'll tell *you* straight."

"Oh," and Benito shrugged his shoulders. "She is work pretty good."

"Well, I'll say so, judgin' by the wood you got up since I left."

"It is the medicine. I make him."

"Uhuh? Well, I wish you'd make me some to rub on my head. My brains are gettin' kind of stiff, I guess."

"Your head she ache?"

"Clean down to my boots. Here I been prospectin' this country goin' on five years, and I never struck enough to more'n pay for my grub. Then old Hank ambles acrost from the desert and gets to pokin' around and finds somethin' good enough to get two minin' men from Los started out. Wish I knowed just where he struck it. I been all over that country before he came in. Dinged if I can figure out where he lit onto his luck."

"You was say last night that you go back there some day and find something, yes? Perhaps it is that the Señor Hank he find what you leave when you go out."

"Well, gosh! But that would be one on me! Things were lookin' mighty promisin' when I left my hole in the ground last fall. Say, seein' we're talkin' politics, how would you like to stake me to a little grub, and take a long chanct on my findin' out somethin'?"

"The Señor Jim is my friend. Of the flour and the beans and the coffee he may have what he want. But them burro she don' go without Benito."

"You mean you never lend 'em?"

"Si."

"Well, I don't blame you."

"You use them burro right, I know that it is so. That is not the why. I see you bein' good to the horse. It is that one time I lose them burro—and then I find him—over there"—and Benito gestured toward the desert. "Then it is that I say, them burros bein' my good friend long time. So I be good friend to them burro, long time while I live."

At Benito's invitation Jimmy pulled up a chair and sat down to the evening meal. But the thought of Hank leading some real buyers into the hills bothered him. After supper he moved about restlessly. Presently he turned to Benito.

"Benny, I got a hunch. She's a big one, and I aim to play her. I guess I'll saddle up and drift over to the Buckhorn country and see what's goin' on. If you want to let me have a little grub, I'll sure pay you when I get hooked up."



"Then it is that you go to-night?"

"Right now. I can get in ahead of those folks. Skyrocket can beat 'em to it easy."

"Then you go to-night?"

"Reckon I'll go."

"I fix the grub." And Benito hobbled about the cabin while Jimmy caught up his horse and saddled him. When Jimmy came to the door, leading Skyrocket, Benito was busy stuffing packages in a pair of kyacks. Jimmy noticed that Benito had laid out blankets, a rifle, an ax, two canteens—and that he had taken down three pack saddles from their pegs on the cabin wall. He watched Benito arrange the things for packing. Presently Benito glanced up.

"You catch them burro, yes?"

"Why, no! I thought you said——"

"Benito he say that the Señor Jim is his friend. My leg she don' go so bad, yes? But she don' go good for catch them burro."

"Oh, all *right!* I'll catch 'em up."

Benito made no explanation as he helped saddle and pack the three burros in the moonlight. He seemed to get along without the aid of his home-made crutch. Jimmy noticed this, but said nothing. Packed and ready for the trail, the burros stood solemnly waiting. Skyrocket, with ears pricked forward, watched them curiously.

"You make them stirrup short for me?" queried Benito.

"You mean that you're goin' in! With that lame ankle!"

"It is that I ride. I pack them burro what you say light, that she go quick. The horse he go quick. And you have the long leg, and go quick. It is the good plan, yes?"

"She's a peach! But say, Benito, we can't make it in and beat those guys if we take the burros, can we?"

"Them burro go fast. And she don' talk, eh?"

"Oh, all *right.* I reckon I'm just learnin how to *spell.*"

"We be there to shake the hand and say how is the good morning when they come," asserted Benito.

Jimmy shook his head. But he had heard strange tales of the Lion of the Mountains—of his endurance, his knowledge of the country, his ability to travel fast. If there was the least chance of old Hank's having taken possession of Jimmy's claim, or rather

prospect, for Jimmy had not filed on the land, it would not be a bad idea to be there when Hank arrived.

Unlike most burros, Benito's three animals knew him so well that they would follow as fast as they could be driven. Benito, astride Skyrocket, called to them. They wagged their ears and plodded out of the inclosure, followed by Jimmy, who rubbed his eyes once or twice to assure himself that he was awake. Benito had said that they would be in the Buckhorn country ahead of the other outfit. Shortly after they left the cañon Jimmy had good reason to believe that it might be so. Leaving the cañon trail, Benito led the cavalcade up a hillside, and dropped into a wooded valley which they crossed in an almost direct line. Benito reined Skyrocket through the brush and picked a careful way for the burros to follow. Jimmy, familiar as he was with the country was puzzled as to how Benito could find his way so well in the dark. They were traveling north, but on no regular trail. In fact, Benito avoided the regular trails as they crossed them on the ridges. Jimmy plodded along behind the burros, occasionally glancing up at the stars. Just ahead of him he could see the wagging ears of the three burros and, still farther ahead, the dim form of Benito riding bent forward and peering intently into each opening in the brush.

"They named him right!" Jimmy told himself.

All night long they wound through the brush, crossed streams, ascended ragged hillsides, topped ridges unknown to Jimmy, and descended into night-black valleys, always working north and never stopping until they had been going seven hours. Then came the first pale hint of dawn. Suddenly range after range of the Buckhorn hills lay below them and far and away to the north stretched the desert, flattening out to nothing in the dim light. They dropped down the last slope. In the valley Benito reined up.

"My leg she go pretty good, but now she work stiff, I think. Big Buckhorn he is there. Now it is that you find something, yes?"

"I got my bearings all right, since the light came. Guess we can throw off the packs and let the animals graze a spell. My prospect ain't far from here."

"Then it is that you go in the front and

I ride behind them burro. So it will be that Benito did not make the lie to his friend when he say we come here to shake the hand of those mans when they come."

Jimmy was about ready to quit, but he saw the wisdom of Benito's suggestion. Jimmy knew that possession meant even more in mining country than in a court of law. He heaved himself up from the rock on which he had squatted and flung his arms aloft as he stretched and yawned.

"That wide draw, over there," he mumbled sleepily.

And striding ahead he forced himself to a pace that brought them to the mouth of the draw in something less than an hour. Benito immediately unpacked the burros and made coffee while Jimmy visited the monuments of his claim to make sure that they had not been tampered with. Benito incidentally inspected his rifle, assuring himself that the magazine was filled. When Jimmy returned, heavy-eyed and footsore, Benito had made a neat camp, using one of the tarps for a tent in which he had stowed the provisions and packsaddles. The burros strayed up the draw looking for grass. Skyrocket followed at a distance. Jimmy finished his breakfast of coffee and bacon, and dragging his saddle to the rear of the tent where he would be in the shade when the sun got higher, he stretched out, fumbled for tobacco and papers, and in the act of rolling a cigarette fell asleep. Benito washed the few pans and cups and tilted them against a rock toward the sun. He examined his ankle and found that it was somewhat swollen from the long ride, although he had favored it all he could by sitting a bit to one side in the saddle. He bathed his ankle in the cold water of the draw, bound it up, and taking his rifle, limped to the tent and crawled in among the kyacks and bundles.

The morning sunlight reached out and flickered on the ridge of the tent, slid along it, and finally touched the stream. A little, bronze-hued lizard scurried up the side of the tent, perched himself on the ridge, and basked in the warmth, working his slender body up and down as though practicing deep-breathing exercises.

Benito slept until the noon sun awakened him. He was about to crawl out of the tent when he happened to glance down the draw. He saw a burro's head bobbing up and down, a half mile away, and beyond

it another and another. He counted six animals. They were toiling up the valley leading to the draw. Presently, on a rise, three men appeared, following the burros. Benito hesitated, but decided not to awaken Jimmy. He crawled back among the provisions and drew his rifle to his side. He did not anticipate trouble, but he felt happier with his rifle close to hand. It occurred to him that it would be a good plan to make himself entirely invisible until the approaching men had made their business plain. He drew the kyacks to the opening of the tent and piled them there. Then he pinned the flaps of the tarp together with a nail. He laid with his head close to the narrow opening, that he might see—and breathe, for the air in the tent was close and hot. Finally he recognized one of the advancing party to be Hank. The other two he did not know. Meanwhile, Jimmy snored peacefully. The little lizard on the tent ridge continued his deep-breathing exercises. The noon sun bored down and struck through the tarp. Benito wiped the sweat from his face.

The leading burro jerked his head up and stopped. The burro next him crowded up and stopped. The entire train halted. Benito could hear Hank urging them on with much profanity. The men following the burros did not see the tent until they were within fifty or sixty yards or it. Then they stopped. Hank gestured to them.

"This is her. But somebody's campin' here."

Benito smiled. He had learned just what he had wanted to know. The Señor Jim's hunch had been correct. These men had come in to take possession of Jimmy Gale's claim. There would be argument, perhaps worse. Benito curled down behind his rifle and waited.

Hank slouched up and called out. Jimmy answered drowsily from the back of the tent. Hank stepped round to where Jimmy lay. Jimmy opened sleep-heavy eyes and gazed up at him.

"Mornin', Hank!"

"Takin' it kind of easy, ain't you?" mumbled Hank, displaying his lone tooth in a decidedly unfriendly grin.

"Sure! What's the excitement?"

"Ain't seen any."

"No? Well, you made quite a drag since I seen you last."

"You been travelin' yourself, ain't you?"

"Yep. For my health."

"Well, you come to the wrong place. When you git through gapin' and stretchin' you can move your stuff offen my claim."

"I will, when I get through. *You* ain't in a hurry, be you?"

"I'll give you till I git my burros unpacked. Then you can take your stuff and fly."

"Too hot to fly," drawled Jimmy.

"Well, it'll git hotter, the longer you stay."

"Then what's the matter with *you* lookin' for shade? I ain't kickin' about the heat."

"You needn't to git sassy. Me and my pardners is here, and we mean business."

"Mebby I don't look it, but so do I," drawled Jimmy. "Plenty room for you to camp on up the draw."

Jimmy wondered what had become of Benito. It would be easier to answer Hank if Benito were somewhere within call—and not, perhaps, up the draw looking after the burros. Jimmy stretched and rose.

"You might introduce me to your friends, seein' as they're standin' there in my front yard. They look like they wanted to meet some one." And Jimmy grinned.

"I'm runnin' this!" stated Hank, and his little, desert-beared eyes smiled evilly as he noticed that Jimmy was unarmed. Jimmy saw, and understood. What had become of Benito? Had he seen the strangers, and become frightened off? Jimmy disliked to think so. Jimmy hesitated to call out, surmising that Benito might have a plan of his own—and it would be foolish to call for trumps at the beginning of the game. As the two strangers approached, Jimmy noticed that they both packed automatics. Yet he was rather glad that they were there, under the present circumstances. Their mere presence would serve to restrain Hank, should he contemplate restoring to such an insignificant detail as bumping some one off the map—Jimmy Gale preferred. So Jimmy smiled and nodded.

"Glad to meet you. I ast Hank here to introduce me, but he's bashful this mornin'. Me, I'm Jimmy Gale, owner of this here claim. And this"—and Jimmy gestured toward Hank—"is Hank the Sidewinder, who bites without givin' warnin'. If you look clost you can see his fangs."

Hank did not feel at all flattered, but he kept his temper. He had bigger fish to fry than Jimmy Gale.

"He gits them spells frequent," asserted Hank. "First thing he'll git to thinkin' he owns this claim. But he's harmless. He don't bite."

"I can make more'n a pinhole in a piece of pie, at that," asserted Jimmy.

Hank worked his jaws, as he chewed hard on his perenial cud. It helped him to concentrate on business, and not on Jimmy.

"This here red-headed hill-hopper is loco, gents. He's goin' to move off right now."

"Can't," said Jimmy.

"I'll help you, then," stated Hank.

"Seein' I'm alone—that's right friendly. But this ain't my movin' day."

"Say, when you two get through arguing we'll look over this claim," said one of the mining men.

"I never get through," said Jimmy. "But you're welcome to look her over, any time. Only you better chain Hank up, or he'll scare all the game out of the country."

Hank spat and wiped his whiskers with the back of his hand, and Jimmy wondered whether the whiskers or the hand got the worst of it. Jimmy wished that he had had his gun handy. He did not like the expression of Hank's eye. Jimmy had purposely stirred the old prospector up, hoping to get him to entangle himself in some reference to the claim that would set the mining men to thinking. But Hank had been too wily for that. The year before he had stumbled upon Jimmy's temporarily abandoned claim and had worked it, striking the vein that Jimmy had been following up for many months. And the vein had shown up well. Hank's little plan was to let these men see it, offer to sell, and in the interim, hasten to Los Angeles and file on it. He had heard that Jimmy Gale had given up working it and had taken to guiding. But it seemed that Jimmy Gale had other ideas. Hank saw his chance slipping.

"I'm givin' you till I git my burros unpacked, to git off." And he shuffled back to the train and began to throw off the ropes. Jimmy seated himself on a bowlder in front of the tent and politely invited the strangers to choose a bowlder apiece and sit down. One of them decided to do so. The other strolled back to Hank and talked with him. The little lizard on the tent ridge perked his head sideways and blinked at the intruders.

"Not on your life!" Jimmy was saying as Hank and his companion returned. "I located her, worked on her, filed on her, and she's mine. Your friend Hank jumped me—that's all. If you want to talk business, you can talk to me. He can listen if he wants to."

"He's loco. I been workin' this prospect goin' on a year."

"That ain't all you been workin'," stated Jimmy.

"You git!" snorted Hank.

"Oh, shucks!"

"I got them burros unpacked—and it's your move."

"S-s-h! Don't talk so loud or you'll wake the baby," said Jimmy, gesturing with his thumb toward the tent, although he had no idea that Benito was there. Hank's frowsy beard twitched as he jerked out his gun and threw a shot between Jimmy's feet. The slug splattered on the rock and a fragment caromed off and nicked the ear of one of the Los Angeles men.

"What in hell are you trying to do!" he stormed as he jumped to his feet.

"I told you he'd bite without givin' warnin'," said Jimmy. Then Jimmy jumped as a rifle snarled so close to the group that the report all but stunned them. Hank's old sombrero jumped from his head, spun round, and settled gently on the ground. Hank did not stop to pick it up, as he started down the back trail. Again came that deafening snarl, and the hat of one of the mining men jumped from his head as if twitched off by an unseen hand. Jimmy was on his feet glancing wildly round to discover the whereabouts of the unseen rifleman. Hank was cached down behind the burros. The Los Angeles man had crawled behind a boulder, and his companion had started for Los Angeles, when the rifle spoke the third time. It was a neat shot, at running game, but the sprinter did not know that he had also lost his hat until later. Hank pulled him down behind a rock.

"He must 'a' had comp'ny," he said weakly.

The Los Angeles man was feeling of his head. There was a new and strange part in his hair that he could not account for.

Jimmy pulled himself together enough to realize that the Lion of the Mountains was cached in the tent—and that he was a mighty good marksman.

"Seen' that you all got your hats off,"

drawled Jimmy, "why, gentlemen, I'm liftin' mine. I was sure glad to meet you. I'm just as glad to see you go. You know the way back. I wasn't expectin' you'd leave so quick—but you recollect' I told you if you wa'n't careful you'd wake the baby. You done it. And he's right cross when he's waked up sudden."

"I'll have you pinched for this!" said one of the mining men, as he rose from behind his rock and pointed a trembling finger at Jimmy.

"Have me pinched? Tut, tut, sister! I didn't move a finger. I set still and let old Hank bombard me, and a hunk of rock nicks you in the ear—and you say you're goin' to have me pinched! Say, do you call that friendly?"

"How about that!" exclaimed the other as he showed two nice little round holes in his hat.

"Shucks! You can show that to your friends in town, which you sure will. But first, just lay that there automatic on this rock. That's the idea!" Jimmy picked up the gun and stepped over to where Hank and his companion knelt in a devout attitude which was somewhat modified, however, by their language. "Step up and put your guns on that rock," drawled Jimmy. "I'm collectin' relics. What's that, Hank? You say you won't! You better step lively. The baby is cross this afternoon—and likewise he's a hell of a good shot—for a kid."

Hank and his companion fumed and cursed, but got up and deposited their guns on the rock in front of the tent. Jimmy picked them up and tossed them into the narrow tent opening.

"Now step along—no, this way! I've said you could look over my claim and I'm keepin' my word. I'll tell you where to go and when to stop. After you have looked her over you can make me a offer, or beat it for home."

There was nothing else to do under the circumstances, as Jimmy gestured quite freely with the automatic, acknowledging that he was unfamiliar with the weapon but that he knew enough to keep pulling the trigger, if it became necessary.

He showed them the mine, and was surprised himself at the work Hank had done on the tunnel. The mining men forgot their immediate circumstances in examining the vein and taking samples of the ore. Jimmy allowed them all the time they wanted, merely

keeping guard at the mouth of the tunnel while they palavered inside in the candle-light. When they filed out, Jimmy escorted them back to their burro train and superintended the packing. All this while Benito had not shown himself, and Jimmy grinned. That hidden something in the tent, that could shoot fast and accurately, yet never so much as showed a hair, was a mighty factor in keeping the peace.

But instead of going down the draw, toward the south, they hazed the burros past the tent and went up the draw, lured by Hank's promise to show them another of his holdings quite as rich as the claim under dispute. When they had disappeared Jimmy called to Benito who appeared, his face dripping with sweat, and his rifle clutched in his hand. Benito glanced about and then limped to the stream, where he drank deep. It had been a hot and trying session.

"I stay in there, yes? *Muy caliente!* But they do not see the Lion of the Mountains, no?"

The following day as Jimmy was exploring his tunnel and remarking to himself that while Hank was a decidedly poor citizen, he was not the worst miner in the world, he was startled by a voice—and it was not the voice of Benito. He blew out his candle and stepped cautiously to the mouth of the tunnel. The two Los Angeles men were standing on the dump below. They were unaccompanied by Hank. They looked decidedly forlorn.

"We saw you go in there, as we were coming down the draw," explained one.

"Goin' out?" queried Jimmy.

"If we can get enough grub to see us through. That old rattlesnake pulled out last night, when we were asleep. He took all the grub and all the animals. We tracked him over the first range, but concluded that we'd stand a poor show of finding him in this country. We didn't even have a gun, if we had found him."

"Hank is a charitable cuss, sure enough. He's desert rat, clean through. This country round here is too good for him. He saw that the game was up—and thought he'd pull out with a big grubstake and some good burros. He's probably headed back into the desert where he belongs with the rest of the horn toads and lizards. Come right on down to the tent and we'll have chuck."

"How about that—er—baby?"

Jimmy grinned. "Oh, he's gone. He left when my reg'lar pardner came in, last night, with some grub. My pardner he traveled all night to get here. But shucks! He wouldn't hurt a fly."

"We'd like to look over your claim again, after we eat," suggested one of the men.

"Well, it won't cost you a cent to look."

They found Benito smoking in front of the tent. He was also carefully cleaning a high-power rifle.

"This here is Benny Benito, my pardner. Benny, these folks are hungry. I forgot to tell you they come in with old Hank yesterday, and it seems Hank lit out last night without leavin' his address. Can we have some chuck?"

"I fix him," Benny assured them. And he straightway set about getting breakfast. The men ate heartily.

"Those your burros up the draw?" queried one after breakfast.

"Yes, mine," said Jimmy quickly.

"Of course you've filed on this?" asked one of the Los Angeles men.

"Sure thing! What do you think I am? You ain't talkin' to you' old friend Hank."

"Well, if you can show a clear title, we'll talk business."

"If we do, it'll be at the Trader's Bank, in Los Angeles," stated Jimmy who had never been in the Trader's, but had heard the name.

"When could you meet us there?"

"I dunno. We kind of hate to leave this dump without somebody around. Just wait till I talk to my pardner."

Benito and Jimmy conferred at a distance and in the Mexican tongue. It was agreed that Benito was to go out with the strangers, and take as long to the trip as he could without exciting suspicion. Jimmy would wait until they had been on the trail an hour or so, and then go out the short way, across the ranges. Skyrocket had been over that country once and could back track easily. To make sure of filing on the claim in time to have the necessary papers with which to do business, Jimmy decided to give himself three days leeway, before meeting the mining men. He explained all this to Benito carefully.

The first thing Jimmy did when he arrived in Los Angeles was to engage a lawyer, to whom he stated his case, giving the names of the mining men he was to meet,

and the data necessary to file on the claim. Jimmy told the lawyer that he would have to wait for his fee until the deal was closed. The lawyer mentally doubled his fee and mentioned it. Jimmy whistled—but that was about all he could do. There was necessity for speed—and the lawyer made good time. He knew the firm that the mining men represented and knew that they were solid. Jimmy also had his legal adviser introduce him at the Trader's Bank, as a prospective customer.

The next afternoon, when Jimmy stepped out of an office building on Spring Street, he had a check in his possession that was good for more money than he had ever dreamed of having at one time. Now he could pay his debts and buy some much-needed raiment. He could also "see the town" without straining any financial rivets seriously. The trouble was, he did not know just where to begin. He walked south down Spring Street until he grew tired of that street. He crossed over and walked north on Main until he arrived at the Plaza. That suited him better. But somehow or other he did not feel especially elated. He was in town, with plenty of money. But over there, just visible down a side street were the hills, smoky blue in the distance. And somewhere over there was Benito, puttering about his cabin, or talking to his burros. It was quiet over there—and the air was clean. Jimmy turned and hastened to the Trader's Bank. It was five minutes to three when he arrived there. He deposited just one-half of the proceeds of the check to his credit and tucked the other half in his money belt. Then he made straight for the station and bought a ticket to Acton. He sighed heavily as he pocketed the ticket. Selling mines was thirsty work.

Where the trail leaves the rim and works down into Oro Cañon, Jimmy gave the long yell, reining in and listening for an answer. Presently he saw a tiny flicker of light far below. Benito had opened the cabin door. Then came an answer, faint in the distance. Skyrocket pricked his ears. The cañon pasture was a good home.

Benito was standing in the cabin doorway when Jimmy reined up.

"You come quick, amigo. You don' like them town, eh?"

"Not so much. I closed that deal, Benny. I got the cash."

"That is good. But it is more good that you come back. Some hombre they spend all that money quick, eh?"

"Yes. I know *how*."

"Si. But you come back and don' spend him. You sure funny hombre for good time."

"Where did you get that lion trap!"

Benito turned at Jimmy's question. Above the cabin door hung a rusted lion trap, its offset teeth clenched as though it had the lockjaw. Attached to it was a drag chain.

"That trap, she is the good luck—like the horseshoe. I find him when I come back from take those hombres to Acton, yes?"

"So that's the one?"

"Si. But she don' catch the Lion of the Mountains again, no."

Shortly after that they had supper, or at least Jimmy had supper while Benito smoked and listened to Jimmy's recount of the sale of the mine. When Jimmy had finished he pushed back his chair and rose. He fumbled in his shirt and drew out his money belt. Then, shoving the dishes aside he tilted the belt and shot a stream of gold pieces halfway across the table.

"That's your share, Benito."

"Bueno! I was think perhaps you say that."

"Well, you don't seem swelled up a whole lot about it."

"I don' make to swell up about anything, amigo. You was good friend to Benito—and I make to be good friend to you. Then what is that money? She is good perhaps when I get old mans. But that money she can wait. If you say I keep him, bueno! Perhaps it is some time you go the broke—and you say 'Benito, I wish I had little grubstake,' yes? Then it is that I give you that money. Me, I don' want him so much." And Benito chuckled. "Amigo, I got big much, right now. All those mountains, and those cañon, and this whole country. And this casa, and much of the grub, and one good friend, you bet!"

"I'll let you say it!"

"And I got those three burro. That money she can wait." And Benito smiled.

*Another story of Benito is on the way. It will appear in an early issue of POPULAR.*



# Maru

## A DREAM OF THE SEA

By H. de Vere Stacpoole

*Author of "The Beach of Dreams," Etc.*

THE night was filled with vanilla and frangipanni odors and the endless sound of the rollers on the reef.

Somewhere away back amid the trees a woman was singing, the tide was out, and from the veranda of Lygon's house, across the star-shot waters of the lagoon, moving yellow points of light caught the eye. They were spearing fish by torchlight in the reef pools.

It had been a shell lagoon once, and in the old days men had come to Tokahoe for sandalwood, now there was only copra to be had and just enough for one man to deal with. Tokahoe is only a little island where one cannot make a fortune, but where you may live fortunately enough if your tastes are simple and beyond the lure of whisky and civilization.

"The last trader had died in this paradise, of whisky—or gin—I forget which, and his ghost was supposed to walk the beach on moonlit nights, and it was apropos of this that Lygon suddenly put the question to me:

"Do you believe in ghosts?"

"Do you?" replied I.

"I don't know," said Lygon. "I almost think I do, because every one does—oh, I know, a handful of hard-headed supercivilized people say they don't, but the mass of humanity does. The Polynesians and Micronesians do. Go to Japan, go to Iceland, go anywhere and everywhere you will find ghost believers."

"Lombroso has written something like that," said I.

"Has he? Well, it's a fact, but all the same it's not evidence, the universality of a belief seems to hint at reality in the thing believed in—yet what is more wanting in real reason than tabu. Yet tabu is universal. You find men here who daren't touch an artu tree because artu trees are tabu to them, or eat turtle or touch a dead body. Well, look at the Jews, a dead body is tabu to a Cohen, India is riddled with the business,

so's English society—it's all the same thing under different disguises.

"Funny that talking of ghosts we should have touched on this, for when I asked you did you believe in ghosts I had a ghost story in mind and tabu comes into it. This is it."

And this is the story somewhat as told by Lygon:

Some fifty years back when Pease was a pirate bold and Hayes in his bloom and the topsails of the *Leonora* a terror to all dusky beholders, Maru was a young man of twenty. He was son of Malemake, King of Fukariva, a kingdom the size of a soup plate, nearly as round and without a middle, an atoll island in short; just a ring of coral, sea-beaten and circling, like a bezel, a sapphire lagoon.

Fukariva lies in the Paumotus or Dangerous Archipelago where the currents run every way and the trades are unaccountable. The underwriters to this day fight shy of a Paumotus trader, and in the '60's few ships came here, and the few that came were on questionable business. Maru, up to the time he was twenty years of age, only remembered three.

There was the Spanish ship that came into the lagoon when he was only seven. The picture of her remained with him, burning and brilliant, yet tinged with the atmosphere of nightmare, a big topsail schooner that lay for a week mirroring herself on the lagoon water while she refitted, fellows with red handkerchiefs tied round their heads crawling aloft and laying out on the spars. They came ashore for water and what they could find in the way of taro and nuts, and made hay on the beach, insulting the island women till the men drove them off. Then, when she was clearing the lagoon, a brass gun was run out and fired, leaving a score of dead and wounded on that salt, white beach.

That was the Spaniard. Then came a whaler, who took what she wanted and cut

down trees for fuel and departed leaving behind the smell of her as an enduring recollection, and lastly, when Maru was about eighteen, a little old schooner slung in one early morning.

She lay in the lagoon like a mangy dog, a humble ship, very unlike the Spaniard or the blustering whale man—she only wanted water and a few vegetables and her men gave no trouble; then, one evening, she slunk out again with the ebb, but she left something behind her—smallpox. It cleared the island, and of the hundred and fifty subjects of King Malemake only ten were left—twelve people in all, counting the king and Maru.

The king died of a broken heart and age, and of the eleven people left three were women, widows of men who had died of the smallpox.

Maru was unmarried, and as king of the community he might have collected the women for his own household. But he had no thought of anything but grief—grief for his father and the people who were gone. He drew apart from the others and the seven widowers began to arrange matters as to the distribution of the three widows. They began with arguments and ended with clubs, three men were killed and one of the women killed another man because he had brained the man of her fancy.

Then the dead were buried in the lagoon—Maru refusing to help because of his tabu—and the three newly married couples settled down to live their lives, leaving Maru out in the cold. He was no longer king. The women despised him because he hadn't fought for one of them and the men because he had failed in brutality and leadership. They were a hard lot, true survivals of the fittest, and Maru, straight as a palm tree, dark-eyed, gentle, and a dreamer, seemed, among them, like a man of another tribe and time.

He lived alone, and sometimes in the sun blaze on that great ring of coral he fancied he saw the spirits of the departed walking as they had walked in life, and sometimes at night he thought he heard the voice of his father chiding him.

When the old man died Maru had refused to touch the body or help in its burial. Filial love, his own salvation, nothing would have induced Maru to break his tabu.

It was part of him, an iron reef in his character beyond the touch of will.

## II.

One morning, some six weeks after all this marrying and settling down, a brig came into the lagoon. She was a blackbirder, the *Portsoy*, owned and captained by Colin Robertson, a Banffshire man, hence the name of his brig. Robertson and his men landed, took off water, coconuts, bananas, and everything else they could find worth taking. Then they turned their attention to the population. Four men were not a great find, but Robertson was not above trifles. He recruited them, that is to say, he kicked them into his boat and took them on board the *Portsoy*, leaving the three widows, grass widows now—wailing on the shore. He had no finer feelings about the marriage tie, and he reckoned they would make out somehow. They were no use to him as labor and they were ill-favored. All the same, being a man of gallantry and some humor, he dipped his flag to them as the *Portsoy* cleared the lagoon and breasted the tumble at the break.

Maru, standing aft, saw the island with the white foam fighting the coral and the gulls thrashing around the break, saw the palms cut against the pale aqua-marine of the sky line that swept up into the burning blue of noon, heard the long rumble and boom of the surf on the following wind and watched and listened till the sound of the surf died to nothingness, and of the island nothing remained but the palm tops, like pin heads above the sea dazzle.

He felt no grief. But there came to him a new and strange thing, a silence that the shipboard sounds could not break. Since birth the eternal boom of the waves on coral had been in his ears, night and day and day and night, louder in storms but always there. It was gone. That was why, despite the sound of the bow wash and boost of the waves and the creak of cordage and block, the brig seemed to have carried Maru into the silence of a new world.

They worked free of the Paumotus into the region of settled winds and accountable currents, passing atolls and reefs that showed like the thrashing of a shark's tail in the blue, heading northwest in a world of wind and waves and sky, desolate of life, and, for Maru, the land of Nowhere.

So it went on from week to week, and, as far as he was concerned, so it might have gone on forever. He knew nothing of the world into which he had been suddenly

snatched, and land, which was not a ring of coral surrounding a lagoon, was for him unthinkable.

He knew nothing of navigation, and the brass-bound wheel at which a sailor was always standing with his hands on the spokes, now twirling it this way, now that, had for him a fascination beyond words, the fascination of a strange toy for a little child, and something more. It was the first wheel he had ever seen and its movements about its axis seemed magical, and it was never left without some one to hold it and move it—why? The mystery of the binnacle into which the wheel-mover was always staring, as a man stares into a rock pool after fish, was almost as fascinating.

Maru peeped into the binnacle one day and saw the fish, something like a star fish that still moved and trembled. Then some one kicked him away, and he ran forward and hid, feeling that he had pried into the secrets of the white men's gods and fearing the consequences.

But the white men's gods were not confined to the wheel and binnacle. Down below they had a god that could warm them of the weather, for that day at noon, and for no apparent reason, the sailors began to strip the brig of her canvas. Then the sea rose, and two hours later the cyclone seized them. It blew everything away and then took them into its calm heart where, dancing like giants in dead, still air and with the sea for a ballroom floor, the hundred-foot high waves broke the *Portsoy* to pieces.

Maru alone was saved, clinging to a piece of hatch cover, half stunned, confused, yet unafraid and feeling vaguely that the magic wheel and little trembling fish god had somehow betrayed the white men. He knew that he was not to die, because this strange world that had taken him from his island had not done with him yet, and the sea, in touch with him like this and half washing over him at times, had no terror for him, for he had learned to swim before he had learned to walk. Also his stomach was full, he had been eating biscuits while the *Portsoy's* canvas was being stripped away, and though the wind was strong enough almost to whip the food from his hands.

The peaceful swell that followed the cyclone was a thing enough to have driven an ordinary man mad with terror. Now lifted hill high on a glassy slope the whole wheel

of the horizon came to view under the breezing wind and blazing sun, then gently down—sliding the hatch cover would sink to a valley bottom only to climb again a glassy slope and rise again hill high into the wind and sun. Foam flecks passed on the surface, and in the green sun-dazzled crystal of the valley floors he glimpsed strips of fucus floating far down, torn by the storm from their rock attachments, and through the sloping wall of glass up which the hatch cover was climbing he once glimpsed a shark, lifted and cradled in a ridge of the great swell, strange to see as a fly in amber or a fish in ice.

The hatch cover was sweeping with a four-knot current, moving with a whole world of things concealed or half seen or hinted at. A sea current is a street, it is more, it is an escalator—a moving pavement for the people of the sea. Jellyfish were being carried with Maru on the great swell running with the current, a turtle broke the water close to him and plunged again, and once a white, roaring reef passed by only a few cable lengths. He could see the rock exposed for a moment and the water closing on it in a tumble of foam.

### III.

For a day and a night and a day and a night the voyage continued, the swell falling to a gentle heave, and then in the dawn came a sail, the mat sail of a canoe like a brown wing cut against the haliotis-shell colored sky.

In the canoe was a girl, naked as the new moon. Paddle in hand and half crouching, she drove the canoe toward him, the sail loose and flapping in the wind. Then he was on board the canoe, but how he got there he scarcely knew, the whole thing was like a dream within a dream.

In the canoe there was nothing, neither food nor water, only some fishing lines, and as he lay exhausted, consumed with thirst and faint with hunger, he saw the girl resetting the sail. She had been fishing last evening from an island up north and blown out to sea by a squall, had failed to make the land again, but she had sighted an island in the sou'west and was making for it when she saw the hatch cover and the brown, clinging form of Maru.

As he lay half dead in the bottom of the canoe he watched her as she crouched with paddle in hand.

But before they could reach it a squall took them, half filling the canoe with rain water, and Maru drank and drank till his ribs stood out, and then, renewed, half rose as the canoe, steered by the girl, rushed past tumbling green seas and a broken reef to a beach white as salt, toward which the great trees came down with the bread fruits dripping with the new fallen rain and the palms bending like whips in the wind.

#### IV.

Talia, that was her name, and though her language was different from the tongue of Maru, it had a likeness of a sort. In those days that little island was uncharted and entirely desolate but for the gulls of the reef and the birds of the woods, and it was a wonderland to Maru, whose idea of land as a sea-beaten ring of coral was shattered by woods that bloomed green as a sea cave to the moonlight, high ground where rivulets danced amid the ferns and a beach protected from the outer seas by a far flung line of reefs. Talia to him was as wonderful as the island, she had come to him out of the sea, she had saved his life, she was as different from the women of the Paumotus as day from night. A European would have called her beautiful, but Maru had no thought of her beauty or her sex. She was just a being, beneficent, almost divorced from earth, the strangest thing in the strange world that Fate had seized him into, part with the great heaving swell he had ridden so long, the turtle that had broken up to look at him, the spouting reef, the sunsets over wastes of water and the stars spread over wastes of sky.

He worshiped her, in his way, and he might have worshiped her at a greater distance only for the common bond of youth between them and the incessant call of the world around them. Talia was practical. She seemed to have forgotten her people and that island up north and to live entirely in the moment. They made two shacks in the bushes, and she taught him island woodcraft and the uses of berries and fruit that he had never seen before, also when to fish in the lagoon; for, a month after they reached the island, the poisonous season arrived and Talia knew it; how, who can tell? She knew many things by instinct, the approach of storms, and, when the poisonous season had passed, the times for fishing, and

little by little their tongues, that had almost been divided at first, became almost one, so that they could chatter together on all sorts of things and she could tell him that her name was Talia, the daughter of Tepairu, that her island was named Makea, that her people had twenty canoes, big ones, and many little ones, and that Tepairu was not the name of a man but a woman. That Tepairu was queen or chief woman of her people, now that her husband was dead.

And Maru was able to tell her by degrees of what he could remember, of the old Spanish ship, and how she spouted smoke and thunder and killed the beach people, of his island and its shape—he drew it on the sand, and Talia, who knew nothing of atolls, at first refused to believe in it thinking he was jesting—of his father who was chief man or King of Fukariva, and of the destruction of the tribe. Then he told of the ship with the little wheel—he drew it on the sand—and the little fish-god; of the center of the cyclone where the waves were like white dancing men, and of his journey on the hatch cover across the blue heaving sea.

They would swim in the lagoon together right out to the reefs where the great rollers were always breaking, and out there Talia always seemed to remember her island, pointing north with her eyes fixed across the sea dazzle as though she could see it and her people and the twenty canoes beached on the spume white beach beneath the palms.

"Some day they will come," said Talia. She knew her people, those sea rovers, inconsequent as the gulls. Some day for some reason or none one of the fishing canoes would fish as far as this island or be blown there by some squall. She would take Maru back with her. She told him this.

The thought began to trouble Maru. Then he grew gloomy. He was in love. Love had hit him suddenly. Somehow and in some mysterious manner she had changed to a girl of flesh and blood. She knew it, and at the same moment he turned for her into a man.

Up to this she had had no thought of him except as an individual, for all her dreams about him he might as well have been a palm tree, but now it was different, and in a flash he was everything. The surf on the reef said "Maru," and the wind in the trees, "Maru," and the gulls fishing and crying at the break had one word—"Maru! Maru! Maru!"

Then one day, swimming out near the bigger break in the reefs, a current drove them together, their shoulders touched and Maru's arm went round her, and amid the blue laughing sea and the shouting of the gulls he told her that the whole world was Talia, and as he told her and as she listened the current of the ebb like a treacherous hand was drawing them through the break toward the devouring sea.

They had to fight their way back, the ebb just beginning would soon be a mill race, and they knew, and neither could help the other. It was a hard struggle for love and life against the enmity against life and love that hides in all things from the heart of man to the heart of the sea, but they won. They had reached calm waters and were within twenty strokes of the beach when Talia cried out suddenly and sank.

Maru, who was slightly in front, turned and found her gone, she had been seized with cramp, the cramp that comes from overexertion, but he did not know that; the lagoon was free of sharks, but, despite that he fancied for one fearful moment that a shark had taken her.

Then he saw her below, a dusky form on the coral floor, and he dived.

He brought her to the surface, reached the sandy beach, and carrying her in his arms, ran with her to the higher level of the sands and placed her beneath the shade of the trees. She moved in his arms as he carried her, and when he laid her down her breast heaved in one great sigh, water ran from her mouth, her limbs stiffened, and she moved no more.

Then all the world became black for Maru. He knew nothing of the art of resuscitating the drowned. Talia was dead.

He ran among the trees crying out that Talia was dead, he struck himself against tree boles and was tripped by ground lianas. The things of the forest seemed trying to kill him, too. Then he hid among the ferns lying on his face and telling the earth that Talia was dead. Then came sundown and after that the green moonlight of the woods, and suddenly sleep, with a vision of blue, laughing sea and Talia swimming beside him, and then day again and with the day the vision of Talia lying dead beneath the trees. He could not bury her. He could not touch her. The iron reef of his tabu held firm, indestructible, unalterable as the main currents of the sea.

He picked fruits and ate them like an animal and without knowing that he ate, torn toward the beach by the passionate desire to embrace once more the form that he loved, but held from the act by a grip ten thousand years old and immutable as gravity or the spirit that lives in religions.

He must not handle the dead. Through all his grief came a weird touch of comfort. She had not been dead when he carried her ashore. He had not touched the dead.

Then terrible thoughts came to him of what would happen to Talia if he left her lying there. Of what predatory gulls might do. He had some knowledge of these matters, and past visions of what had happened on Fukariva when the dead were too numerous for burial came to him, making him shiver like a whipped dog. He could, at all events, drive the birds away without touching her. Without even looking at her, his presence on the beach would keep the birds away. It was near noon when this thought came to him. He had been lying on the ground, but he sat up now as though listening to this thought. Then he rose up and came along cautiously among the trees. As he came the rumble of the reef grew louder and the sea wind began to reach him through the leaves, then the light of day grew stronger, and, slipping between the palm boles, he pushed a great breadfruit leaf aside and peeped, and there on the blinding beach under the forenoon sun more clearly even than he had seen the ghosts of men on Fukariva, he saw the ghost of Talia walking by the sea and wringing its hands.

Then the forest took him again, mad, this time, with terror.

Away, deep in the woods, hiding among the bushes, springing alive with alarm at the slightest sound, he debated this matter with himself and curiously, now, love did not move him at all or urge him. It was as though the ghost of Talia had stepped between him and his love for Talia, not destroying it but obscuring it. Talia for him had become two things, the body he had left lying on the sand under the trees and the ghost he had seen walking on the beach. The real Talia no longer existed for him except as the vaguest wraith. He lay in the bushes facing the fact that, so long as the body lay unburied, the ghost would walk. It might even leave the beach and come to him.

This thought brought him from his hiding place. He could not lie alone with it among the bushes, and then he found that he could not stand alone with it among the trees, for at any moment she might appear wringing her hands in one of the glades, or glide to his side from behind one of the tree boles. He made for the Southern beach.

He felt safe here. Even when Talia had been with him the woods had always seemed to him peopled with lurking things, unused as he was, to trees in great masses; and now released from them and touched again by the warmth of the sun he felt safe. It seemed to him that the ghost could not come here. The gulls said it to him, and the flashing water, and as he lay down on the sands the surf on the reef said it to him. It was too far away for the ghost to come. It seemed to him that he had traveled many thousand miles from a country remote as his extreme youth, losing everything on the way but a weariness greater than time could hold or thought take recognition of.

Then he fell asleep, and he slept while the sun went down into the west and the flood swept into the lagoon and the stars broke out above. That tremendous sleep, unstirred by the vaguest dream, lasted till the dawn was full.

Then he sat up, renewed as though God had remade him in mind and body.

A gull was strutting on the sands by the water's edge, its long shadow strutting after it, and the shadow of the gull flew straight as a javelin into the renewed mind of Maru. Talia was not dead. He had not seen her ghost. She had come to life and had been walking by the sea wringing her hands for him thinking him drowned. For the form he had seen walking on the sands had cast a shadow. He remembered that now. Ghosts do not cast shadows.

"Talia! Talia! Talia!"

He passed the bushes where he had hidden, and the ferns. He heard the sound of the surf coming to meet him, he saw the veils of the leaves divide and the blaze of light and morning splendor on the northern sands and lagoon and sea.

He ran to the place where he had laid her beneath the trees. There was still faintly visible the slight depression made by her

body, and close by, strangely and clearly cut, the imprint of a little foot.

Then he knew.

The sand was trodden up and on the sand, clear cut and fresh, lay the mark left by a beached canoe and the marks left by the feet of the men who had beached her and floated her again.

They had come—perhaps her own people—come, maybe, yesterday, while he was hiding from his fears debating with his tabu—come, and found her and taken her away.

He plunged into the lagoon, and, swimming like an otter and helped by the outgoing tide, reached the reef. Scrambling on to the rough coral, bleeding from cuts but feeling nothing of his wounds, he stood with wrinkled eyes facing the sea blaze and with the land breeze blowing past him out beyond the thundering foam of the reef to the blue and heaving sea.

Away to the north, like a brown wing tip, showed the sail of a canoe. He watched it. Tossed by the lilt of the swell it seemed beckoning to him. Now it vanished in the sea dazzle, now reappeared, dwindling to a point to vanish at last like a dream of the sea, gone, never to be recaptured.

"And Maru?" I asked of Lygon. "Did he ever—"

"Never," said Lygon. "The islands of the sea are many. Wait." He struck a gong that stood close to his chair, struck it three times, and the sounds passing into the night mixed with the voices of the canoe men returning from fishing on the reef.

Then a servant came on to the veranda, an old, old man half bent like a withered tree.

"Maru," said Lygon, "you can take away these glasses—but one moment, Maru, tell this gentleman your story."

"The islands of the sea are many," said Maru like a child repeating a lesson. He paused for a moment as though trying to remember some more, then he passed out of the lamplight with the glasses.

"A year ago he remembered the whole story," said Lygon.

But for me the whole story lay in those words, that voice, those trembling hands that seemed still searching for what the eyes could see no more.





# Fate and the Fighter

By Dane Coolidge

*Author of "The Wild Bunch," Etc.*

By a happy faculty, Coolidge is able to present to us a most vivid picture of the Southwest. He never fails. And his men are as real as ourselves. They are not sugar-coated heroes. "Wunpost" Calhoun, the chief character in the present novel, is far from being a *matinée* idol. He is rough in speech and manners, and his clothes are anything but Brummellian. Who cares a rap about that though, when once they get to know him? Wunpost has two assets of character which when combined always outweigh politeness and good grammar—honesty and fighting ability.

(A Four-Part Story—Part One)

## CHAPTER I.

### THE DEATH VALLEY TRAIL.

THE heat hung like smoke above Panamint Sink, it surged up against the hills like the waves of a great sea that boiled and seethed in the sun; and the mountains that walled it in gleamed and glistened like polished jet where the light was struck back from their sides. They rose up in solid ramparts, unbelievably steep, and combed clean by the sluicings of cloudbursts; and where the black cañons had belched forth their floods a broad wash spread out, writhing and twisting like a snake track, until at last it was lost in the Sink. For the Sink was the swallow-up of all that came from the hills, and whatever it sucked in it buried beneath its sands or poisoned on its alkali flats. Yet the Death Valley trail led across its level floor—thirty miles from Wild Rose Springs to Blackwater and its saloons—and while the heat danced and quivered there was a dust in the north pass and a pack train swung round the point.

It came on furiously, four burros with flat packs and an old man who ran cursing behind; and as he passed down into the Sink there was another dust in the north and a lone man followed as furiously after him. He was young and tall, a mountain of rude strength, and as he strode off down the trail

he brandished a piece of quartz and swung his hat in the air. But the pack train kept on, a column of swirling dust, a blotch of burro-gray in the heat; and as he emptied his canteen he hurled it to the ground and took after his partner on the run. He could see the twinkling feet, the heave of the white packs, the vindictive form dodging behind; and then his knees weakened, his throbbing brain seemed to burst, and he fell down cursing in the trail. But the pack train went on like a tireless automaton that no human power could stay, and when he raised his head it was a streamer of dust, a speck on the far horizon.

He rose up slowly and looked around—at the empty trail, the waterless flats, the barren hills all about—and then he raised his fist, which still clutched the chunk of quartz, and shook it at the pillar of dust. His throat was dry and no words came, to carry the burden of his hate, but as he stumbled along his eyes were on the dust cloud and he choked out gusty oaths. A demonic strength took possession of his limbs and once more he broke into a run, the muttered oaths grew louder and gave way to savage shouts and then to delirious babblings; and when he awoke he was groveling in a sand wash and the sun had sunk in the west.

Once more he rose up and looked down the empty trail and across the waterless flats; and then he raised his eyes to the east-

ern hills, burning red in the last rays of the sun. They were high, very high, with pines on their summits, and from the wash of a near cañon there lapped out a tongue of green, the promise of water beyond. But his strength had left him now and given place to a feverish weakness—the hills were far away, he could only sit and wait, and if help did not come he would perish. The solemn twilight turned to night, a star glowed in the east; and then, on the high point above the mouth of the cañon, there leaped up a brighter glow. It was a fire, and as he gazed he saw a form passing before it and feeding the ruddy blaze. He rose up all atremble, crushed down a brittle salt bush and touched it off with a match; and as the resinous wood flared up he snatched out a torch and carried the flame to another bush. It was the signal of the lost, two fires side by side, and he gave a hoarse cry when, from the point of the cañon, a second fire promised help. Then he sank down in the sand, feebly feeding his signal fire, until he was roused by galloping feet.

A half moon was in the sky, lighting the desert with ghostly radiance, and as he scrambled up to look he saw a boy on a white mule, riding in with a canteen held out. Not a word was spoken, but as he gurgled down the water he rolled his eyes and gazed at his rescuer. The boy was slim and vigorous, stripped down to sandals and bib overalls; and conspicuously on his hip he carried a heavy pistol which he suddenly hitched to the front.

"That's enough, now," he said, "you give me back that canteen." And when the man refused he snatched it from his lips and whipped out his ready gun. "Don't you grab me," he warned, "or I'll fill you full of lead. You've had enough, I tell you!"

For a moment the man faced him as if crouching for a spring; and then his legs failed him and he sank to the ground, at which the boy dropped down and stooped over him.

"Lie still," he said, "and I'll bathe your face—I was afraid you were crazy with the heat."

"That's all right, kid," muttered the man, "you're right on the job. Say, gimme another drink."

"In a minute—well, just a little one! Now, lie down here in the sand and try to go to sleep." He moistened a big handkerchief and sopped water on his head and over

his heaving chest, and after a few drinks the big frame relaxed and the man lay sleeping like a child. But in his dreams he was still lost and running across the desert; he started and twitched his arms; and then he began to mutter and fumble in the sand until at last he sat up with a jerk.

"Where's that rock?" he demanded. "By grab, she's half gold—I'm going to take it and bash out his brains!" He rose to his knees and scrambled about and the boy dropped his hand to his gun. "I'm going to kill him!" raved the man, "the danged old lizard-herder—he went off and left me to die!"

He felt about in the dirt and grabbed up the chunk of quartz, which he had lost in his last delirium.

"Look at that," he exclaimed, thrusting it out to the boy, "the richest danged quartz in the world! I've got a ledge of it, kid, enough to make us both rich—and John Calhoun never forgets a friend! No, and he never forgets an enemy—the son of a goat don't live that can put one over on me! You just wait, Mister Dusty Rhodes!"

"Oh, was that Dusty Rhodes?" the boy piped up eagerly. "I was watching from the point and I *thought* it was his outfit—but I don't think I've ever seen you. Were you glad when you saw my fire?"

"You bet I was, kid," the man answered gravely. "I reckon you saved my life. My name is John C. Calhoun."

He held out his hand, and, after a moment's hesitation, the boy reached out and took it.

"My name is Billy Campbell, and we live in Jail Cañon. My mother will be coming down soon—that is, if she can catch our other mule."

"Glad to meet her," replied Calhoun, still shaking his hand. "You're a good kid, Billy; I like you. And when your mother comes, if it's agreeable to her, I'd like to take you along for my pardner. How would that suit you, now—I've just made a big strike, and I'll put you right next to the discovery."

"I—I'd like it," stammered the boy, hastily drawing his hand away, "only—only I'm afraid my mother won't let me. You see, the boys are all gone, and there's lots of work to do, and—but I do get awful lonely!"

"I'll fix it!" announced Calhoun, pausing to take another drink, "and anything I've

got, it's yours. You've saved my life, Billy, and I never forget a kindness—any more than I forget an injury. Do you see that rock?" he demanded fiercely. "I'm going to follow Dusty Rhodes to the end of the world and bash out his rabbit brains with it! I stopped up at Black Point to look at that big dyke and what do you think he done? He went off and left me and never looked back until he struck them Blackwater sa- loons! And the first chunk of rock that I knocked off of that ledge would assay a thousand dollars—gold! I ran after that danged fool until I fell down like I was dead, and then I ran after him again, but he never so much as looked back—and all the time I was trying to make him rich and put him next to my strike!"

He stopped and mopped his brow, then took another drink and laughed, deep down in his chest.

"We were supposed to be prospecting," he said at last. "I threw in with him over at Furnace Creek and we never stopped hik- ing until we struck the upper water at Wild Rose. How's that for prospecting—never looked at a rock, except them he threwed at his burros—and this morning, when I stopped, he got all bowed up and went off and left me flat. All I had was one canteen and the makings for a smoke, everything else was on the jacks, and the first rock I knocked off was rotten with gold—he'd been going past it for years! Well, I stopped! Nothing to it; when you find a ledge like that you want to put up a notice. All my blanks were in the pack, but I located it, all the same—with some rocks and a ciga- rette paper. It'll hold, all right, according to law—it's got my name, and the date, and the name of the claim and how far I claim, both ways—but not a dog-goned cor- ner nor a pick mark on it; and there it is, right by the trail! The first jasper that comes by is going to jump it, sure—don't you know, boy, I've got to get back! What's the chances for borrowing your mule?"

"What—Tellurium?" faltered the boy, going over to the mule and rubbing his nose regretfully. "He's—he's a pet; I'd rather not."

"Aw, come on now, I'll pay you well—I'll stake you the claim next to mine. That ought to be worth lots of money."

"Nope," returned Billy. "Here's a lunch I brought along. I guess I'll be going home."

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He untied a sack of food from the back of his saddle and mounted as if to go, but the stranger took the mule by the bit.

"Now, listen, kid," he said. "Do you know who I am? Well, I'm John C. Cal- houn, the man that discovered the Wunpost Mine and put Southern Nevada on the map. I'm no crazy man; I'm a prospector, as good as the best, if I am playing to a little hard luck. Yes, sir, I located the Wunpost and started that first big rush—they came pour- ing into Keno by the thousands; but when I show 'em this rock there won't be any- body left—they'll come across Death Val- ley like a sandstorm. They'll come pouring down that wash like a cloud-burst in July and the whole dog-goned country will be located. Don't you want to be in on the strike? I'm giving you a chance, and you'll never have another one like it. All I ask is this mule, and your canteen and the grub, and I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll give you half my claim, and I'll bet it's worth mil- lions, and I'll bring back your mule to boot!"

"Oh, will you?" exclaimed the other, and was scrambling swiftly down and then he stopped with one hand on the horn. "Does—does it make any difference if I'm a girl?" Calhoun started back. He looked again and in the desert moonlight the boyish face seemed to soften and change. Tears sprang into the dark eyes, and, as she hung her head, a curl fell across her breast.

"Hell—no!" he burst out, hardly know- ing what he said, "not as long as I get the mule."

"Then write out that notice for Wilhel- mina Campbell—I guess that's my legal name."

"It's a right pretty name," conceded Cal- houn as he mounted, "but somehow I kinder liked Billy."

## CHAPTER II.

### THE GATEWAY OF DREAMS.

Standing alone in the desert, with her face bared to the moonlight and her curls shaken free to the wind, Wilhelmina smiled softly as she gazed after the stranger who already had won her heart. His language had been crude when he thought she was a boy, but that only proved the perfection of her dis- guise; and when she had asked if it made any difference, and confessed that she was a girl, he had bridged over the gap like a flash. "Hell—no!" he had said, as men oftentimes

do to express the heartiest accord; and then he had added, with the gallantry due a lady, that Wilhelmina was a right pretty name. And to-morrow, as soon as he had staked out his claim—their claim—he was coming back to the ranch!

She started back up the long wash that led down from Jail Cañon, still musing on his masterful ways, but as she rounded the lower point and saw a light in the house a sudden doubt assailed her. Tellurium was her mule, to give to whom she chose, but he was matched to pull with Bodie when they needed a team, and her father might not approve. And what would she say when she met her mother's eye and she questioned her about this strange man? Yet she knew as well as anything that he was going to make her rich—and to-morrow he would bring back the mule. All she needed was faith, and the patience to wait; and she took her scolding so meekly that her mother repented it and allowed her to sleep in the tunnel.

The Jail Cañon Ranch lay in a pocket among the hills, so shut in by high ridges and overhanging rim rock that it seemed like the bottom of a well; but where the point swung in that encircled the tiny farm a tunnel bored its way through the hill. It was the extension of a mine which in earlier days had gophered along the hillside after gold, but now it was closed down and abandoned to the rats. Wilhelmina had taken the tunnel for her own. It ran through the knife-blade ridge as straight as a die, and a trail led up to its mouth; and from the other side, where it broke out into the sun, there was a view of the outer world. Sitting within its cool portal she could look off across the Sink, to Blackwater and the Argus Range beyond; and by stepping outside she could see the whole valley, from South Pass to the Death Valley Trail.

It was from this tunnel that she had watched when Dusty Rhodes went past, a moving fleck of color plumed with dust; and when the sun sank low she had seen the form that followed, like a man and yet not like a man. She had seen it rise and fall, disappear and loom up again; until at last in the twilight she had challenged it with a fire and the answer had led her to—him. She had found him—lost on the desert and about to die, big and strong yet dependent upon her aid—and when she had allowed her long curls to escape he had stood silent in

the presence of her womanhood. She wanted to run back and sleep in her tunnel, where the air was always moving and cool; and then in the morning, when she looked to the north, she might see the first dust of his return. She might see his tall form, and the white sides of Tellurium as he took the shortest way home, and then she could run back and drag her mother to the portal and prove that her knight had been misjudged. For her mother had predicted that the prospector would not return, and that his mine was only a blind; but she, who had seen him and felt the clasp of his hand, she knew that he would never rob *her*. So she fled to her dream house, where there was nothing to check her fancies, and slept in the tunnel mouth till dawn.

The day came first in the west, galloping along the Argus Range and splashing its peaks with red; and then as the sun ascended it found gaps in the eastern rim and laid long bands of light across the Sink. It rose up higher and, as the desert stood forth bare, the dweller in the dream house stepped out through its portals and gazed long at the Death Valley Trail. From the far north pass, where it came down from Wild Rose, to where Blackwater sent up its thin smoke, the trail crept like a serpent among the sand hills and washes, a long tenuous line through the Sink. Where the ground was white the trail stood out darker, and where it crossed the sunburned mesas it was white; but from one end to the other it was vacant and nothing emerged from North Pass. Billy sighed and turned away, but when she came back there was a streak of dust to the south.

It came tearing along the trail from Blackwater, struck up by a galloping horseman, and at the spot where she had found the lost man the night before the flying rider stopped. He rode about in circles, started north, and came dashing back; and at last, still galloping, he turned up the wash and headed for the mouth of Jail Cañon. He was some searcher who had found her tracks in the sand, and the tracks of Tellurium going on; and, rather than follow the long trail to Wild Rose Springs, he was coming to interview her. Billy ran down to meet him with long, rangy strides, and at the point of the hill she stood waiting expectantly, for visitors were rare at the ranch. Three restless, lonely weeks had dragged away without bringing a single wanderer to their doors; and now here was a second man,

fully as exciting as the first, because he was coming up there to see *her*. Billy tucked up her curls beneath the brim of her man's hat as she watched the laboring horse, but when she made out who it was that was coming she gave up all thought of disguise.

"Hello, Dusty!" she called, running gayly down to meet him. "Are you looking for Mr. Calhoun?"

"Oh, it's mister, is it?" he yelled. "Well, have you seen the danged whelp? Whoo, boy—where is he, Billy?"

"He went back!" she cried, "I lent him my mule. He made a rich strike!"

"A rich *strike!*" repeated the man, and then he laughed and spurred his drooping mount. He was tall and bony with a thin, hawk nose and eyes sunk deep into his head. "A rich strike, eh?" he mimicked, and then he laughed again, until suddenly his face came straight. "What's that you said?" he shouted. "You didn't lend him your *mule!* Well, I'm afraid, my little girl, you've made a mistake—that feller is a regular horse thief. Is your mother up to the house? We'll go up and see her—I'm afraid he's gone and stole your mule!"

"Oh, no, he hasn't," protested Billy confidently, running along the trail beside him. "He went back to stake out his claim. He found some rich ore, right there at Black Point, and he's going to give me half of it."

"At Black P'int!" whooped Dusty Rhodes, doubling up in a knot to squeeze out the last atom of his mirth. "W'y, I've been past that p'int for twenty years—it's nothing but porphyry and burned laval He's crazy with the heat! Where's your father, my little girl? We'll have to go out and ketch him if we ever expect to git back that mule!"

"He's working, up the cañon," answered Billy sulkily, "but never you mind about my mule. He's mine, I guess, and I loaned him to that man in exchange for a half interest in his mine!"

"Oh, it's a *mine* now, is it?" mocked Dusty Rhodes, "next thing it'll be a mine and mill. And he borrowed your mule, eh, that your father give ye, and sent ye back home on foot?"

"I don't care!" pouted Billy. "I'll bet you change your tune when you see him coming back with my mule. You went off and left him, and if I hadn't gone down and helped him he would have died in the desert of thirst."

"Eh—eh! Went off and left him!" bleated Dusty in a fury. "The poor fool went off and left *me!* I picked him up at Furnace Crick, over in the middle of Death Valley, and jest took him along out of pity; and all the way over he was looking at every rock when a prospector woulda't spit on the place! He was eating my grub and packing his bed on my jacks; and then, by the gods, he wants me to stop at Black P'int while he looks at that hungry bull quartz! I warned him distinctly that I don't wait for no man—did he say I went off and left him?"

"Yes, he did," answered Billy, "and he says he's going to kill you, because you went off and took all his water!"

"Hoo, hoo!" jeered Dusty Rhodes, "that big bag of wind?" But he ignored what she said about the water.

They squattered through the creek, where it flowed out to sink in the sand, and passed around the point of the cañon; and then the green valley spread out before them until it was cut off by the gorge above. This was the treacherous Corkscrew Bend, where the fury of countless cloud-bursts had polished the granite walls like a tombstone; but Dusty Rhodes recalled the time when a fine stage road had threaded its curves and led on up the cañon to old Panamint. But the flood which had destroyed the road had left the town marooned and the inhabitants had gone out over the rocks; until now only Cole Campbell, the owner of the Homestake, stayed on to do the work on his claims. In this valley far below he had made his home for years, diverting the creek to water his scanty crops; while in season and out he labored on the road which was to connect up his mine with the world.

His house stood against the hill, around the point from Corkscrew Bend, old and rambling and overgrown with vines; and along the road that led up to it there were rows of peaches and figs, fenced off by stone walls from the creek. Dusty rode past the trees slowly, feasting his eyes on their lush greenness and the rank growth of alfalfa beyond; until from the house ahead a screen door slammed and a woman gazed anxiously down.

"Oh, is that you, Mr. Rhodes?" she called out at last. "I thought it was the man who got lost! Come up to the house and tell me about him—do you think he will bring back our mule?"

He dismounted with a flourish and

dropped his reins at the gate; then, while Billy hung back and petted the lathered horse, he strode up the flower-entangled walk.

"Don't think nothing, Mrs. Campbell," he announced with decision, "that boy has stole 'em before. He'll trade off that mule fer anything he can git and pull his freight fer Nevada."

He paced up to the porch and shook hands ceremoniously, after which he accepted a drink and a basketful of figs and proceeded to retail the news.

"Do you know who that feller is?" he inquired mysteriously, as Billy crept resentfully near. "He's the man that discovered the Wunpost mine and tried to keep it dark. Yes, that big mine over in Keno that they thought was worth millions, only it pinched right out at depth; but it showed up the nicest specimens of jewelry gold that has ever been seen in these parts. Well, this 'Wunpost,' as they call him, was working on a grubstake for a banker named Judson Eells. He'd been out for two years, just sitting around the water holes or playing coon-can with the Injuns, when he comes across this mine, or was led to it by some Injun, and he tries to cover it up. He puts up one post, to kinder hold it down in case some prospector should happen along; and then he writes his notice, *leaving out the date*—and everything else, you might say.

"'Wunpost Mine,' he writes, 'John C. Calhoun owner. I claim fifteen hundred feet on this vein.'

"And jest to show you, Mrs. Campbell, what an ignorant fool he is—he spelled *One Post, W-u-n!* That's where he got his name!"

"I think that's a *pretty* name!" spoke up Billy loyally, as her mother joined in on the laugh. "And anyhow, just because a man can't spell, that's no reason for calling him a fool!"

"Well, he *is* a fool!" burst out Dusty Rhodes spitefully, "and more than that, he's a crook! Now this is what he done—he covered up that find and went back to the man that had grubstaked him. But this banker was no sucker, if he did have the name of staking every bum in Nevada. He was generous with his men and he give 'em all they asked for, but before he planked down a dollar he made 'em sign a contract that a corporation lawyer couldn't break. Well, when Wunpost said he'd quit, Mr. Eells says all

right—no hard feeling—better luck next time. But when Wunpost went back and opened up this vein Mr. Eells was Johnny-on-the-spot. He steps up to that hole and shows his contract, giving him an equal share of whatever Wunpost finds—and then he reads a clause giving him the right to take possession and to work the mine according to his judgment. And the first thing Wunpost knowed the mine was worked out and he was left holding the sack. But served him right, sez I, for trying to beat his outfitter, after eating his grub for two years!"

"But didn't he receive *anything*?" inquired Mrs. Campbell.

She was a prim little woman, with honest blue eyes that sometimes made men think of their sins, and when Dusty Rhodes perceived that he had gone a bit too far he endeavored to justify his spleen.

"He received *some!*" he cried, "but what good did it do him? Eells give him five hundred dollars when he demanded an accounting and he blowed it all in in one night. He was buying the drinks for every man in camp—your money ~~was~~ all counterfeit with him—and the next morning he woke up without a shirt to his back, having had it torn off in a fight. What kind of a man is that to be managing a mine or to be partners with a big banker like Eells? No, he walked out of camp without a cent to his name and I picked him up Tuesday over at Furnace Crick. All he had was his bed and a couple of canteens and a little jerked beef in a sack, but to hear the poor boob talk you'd think he was a millionaire—he had the world by the tail. And then, at the end of it, he'd be borrying your tobacco—or anything else you'd got. But I never would've thought that he'd steal Billy's mule—that's gittin' pretty low, it strikes me."

"He never stole my mule!" burst out Wilhelmina angrily. "I expect him back here any time. And when he does come, and you hear about his mine, I'll bet you change your tune!"

"Ho! Ho!" shouted Rhodes, nodding and winking at Mrs. Campbell. "She's getting to be growed-up, ain't she? Last time I come through here she was a little girl in pigtails, but now it's done up in curls. And I can't say a word against this no-account Wunpost till she calls me a liar to my face!"

"Billy is almost nineteen," answered Mrs. Campbell quietly, "but I'm surprised to hear her contradict."



"Well, I didn't mean that," apologized Wilhelmina hastily, "but—well, anyhow, I know he's got a mine! Because he showed me a piece of quartz that he'd carried all the way, and he must have had a reason for that. It was just moonlight, of course, and I couldn't see the gold, but I know that it was quartz."

"Ah, Billy, my little girl," returned Dusty indulgently, "you don't know the boy like I do. And the world is full of quartz, but you don't find a mine right next to a well-worn trail. Have you got that piece of rock? Well, now you see the p'int—he took it away! Would he do that if his mine was on the square?"

"Well, I don't know why not," answered Billy at last, and then she bowed her head and turned away. They gazed after her pityingly as she ran along the ditch and up to the mouth of her tunnel, but Billy did not stop till she had threaded its murky passage-way and come out at her gate of dreams. It was from there that she had seen him when he was lost in the Sink, and she knew her dream of dreams would come true. He was going to come back, he was going to bring her mule, and make her his partner in the mine.

She looked out—and there was his dust!

### CHAPTER III.

#### DUSTY RHODES EATS DIRT.

Billy gazed away in ecstasy at the dust cloud in the distance, and at the white spot that was Tellurium, her mule; and when the rider came closer she skipped back through the tunnel and danced along the trail to the house. Dusty Rhodes was still there, describing in windy detail Wunpost's encounter with one "Pisen-face" Lynch, but as she stood before them smiling he sensed the mischief in her eye and interrupted himself with a question.

"He's coming," announced Billy, showing the dimples in both cheeks and Dusty Rhodes let his jaw drop.

"Who's coming?" he asked, but she dimpled enigmatically and jerked her curly head toward the road. They started up to look and as the white mule rounded the point Dusty Rhodes blinked his eyes uncertainly. After all his talk about the faithless and cowardly Wunpost, here he was, coming up the road; and the memory of a canteen which he had left strapped upon a pack,

rose up and left him cold. Talk as much as he would, he could never escape the fact that he had gone off with Wunpost's big canteen, and the one subject he had avoided—why he had not stopped to wait for him—was now likely to be thoroughly discussed. He glanced about furtively, but there was no avenue of escape and he started off down to the gate.

"Where you been all the time?" he shouted in accusing accents. "I've been looking for you everywhere."

"Yes, you have!" thundered Wunpost, dropping down off his mule and striding swiftly toward him. "You've been lapping up the booze over at Blackwater! I've a good mind to kill you, you old dastard!"

"Didn't I tell you not to stop?" yelled Rhodes in a feigned fury. "You brought 'it all on yourself! I thought you'd gone back to—"

"You did not!" shouted Wunpost, waving his fists in the air. "You saw me behind you all the time. And if I'd ever caught up with you I'd have bashed your danged brains out, but now I'm going to let you live! I'm going to let you live so I can have a good laugh every time I see you go by—old Dusty Rhodes, the Speed King, the Wild Ass of the Desert, the man that couldn't stop to get rich! I was running along behind you trying to make you a millionaire, but you wouldn't even give me a drink! Look at that, what I was trying to show you!"

He whipped out a rock and slapped it into Rhodes' hand, but Dusty was blinded with rage.

"No good!" he said, and chucked it in the dirt, at which Wunpost stooped down and picked it up.

"You're a peach of a prospector," he said with biting scorn, and stored it away in his pocket.

"Let me look at that again," spoke up Dusty Rhodes querulously, but Wunpost had spied the ladies. He advanced to the porch, his big black hat in one hand, while he smoothed his tousled hair with the other, and the smile which he flashed Billy made her flush and then go pale, for she had neglected to change back to skirts. Every Sunday morning, and when they had visitors, she was required to don the true habiliments of her sex; but her joy at his return had left no room for thoughts of dress and she found herself in the overalls of a boy. So she stepped behind her mother, and as Wunpost

observed her blushes he addressed his remarks to Mrs. Campbell.

"Glad to meet you," he exclaimed with a gallantry quite surprising in a man who could not even spell "one." "I hope you'll excuse my few words with Mr. Rhodes. It's been a long time since I've had the pleasure of meeting ladies and I forgot myself for the moment. I met your daughter yesterday—good morning, Miss Wilhelmina—and I formed a high opinion of you both; because a young lady of her breeding must have a mother to be proud of, and she certainly showed she was game. She saved my life with that water and lunch, and then she loaned me her mule!"

He paused and Dusty Rhodes brought his bushy eyebrows down and stabbed him to the heart with his stare.

"Lemme look at that rock!" he demanded importantly, and John C. Calhoun returned his glare.

"Mr. Rhodes," he said, "after the way you have treated me I don't feel that I owe you any courtesies. You have seen the rock once and that's enough. Please excuse me, I was talking with these ladies."

"Aw, you can't fool me," burst out Dusty Rhodes vindictively. "You ain't sech a winner as you think. I've jest give Mrs. Campbell a bird's-eye view of your career, so you're copped on that bet from the start."

"What do you mean?" demanded Wunpost, drawing himself up arrogantly while his beetle-browed eyes flashed fire; but the challenge in his voice did not ring absolutely true and Dusty Rhodes grinned at him wickedly.

"You better learn to spell, Wunpost," he said with a hectoring laugh, "before you put on any more dog with the ladies. But I asked you for that rock and I intend to git a look at it—I claim an interest in anything you've found."

"Oh, you do, eh?" returned Wunpost, now suddenly calm. "Well, let me tell you something, Mr. Rhodes. You wasn't in my company when I found this chunk of rock, so you haven't got any interest—see? But rather than have an argument in the presence of these ladies I'll show you the quartz again."

He drew out the piece of rock and handed it to Rhodes who stared at it with sun-blinded eyes—then suddenly he whipped out a case and focused a pair of magnifying glasses, meanwhile mumbling to himself.

"Where'd you git that rock?" he asked, looking up, and Wunpost threw out his chest.

"Right there at Black Point," he answered carelessly. "You've been chasing along by it for years."

"I don't believe it!" burst out Dusty, gazing wildly about and mumbling still louder in the interim. "It ain't possible—I've been right by there!"

"But perhaps you never stopped," suggested Wunpost sarcastically, and handed the piece of rock to Mrs. Campbell.

"Look in them holes," he directed. "They're full of fine gold." And then he turned to Dusty.

"No, Mr. Rhodes," he said, "you ain't treated me right, or I'd let you in on this strike. But you went off and left me and, therefore, you're out of it, and there ain't any extensions to stake. It's just a single big blow-out, an eroded volcanic cone, and I've covered it all with one claim."

"But you was *traveling* with me!" yelled Rhodes dancing about like a jay bird. "You gimme half or I'll have the law on ye!"

"Hop to it!" invited Wunpost. "Nothing would please me better than to air this whole case in court. And I'll bet, when I've finished, they'll take you out of court and hang you to the first tree they find. I'll just tell them the facts, how you went off and left me and refused to either stop or leave me water; and then I'll tell the judge how this little girl came down and saved my life with her mule. I'm not trying to play the hog—all I want is half the claim—but the other half goes to Billy. Here's the paper, Wilhelmina; I may not know how to spell, but you bet your life I know who's my friend!"

He handed over a piece of the paper bag which had been used to wrap up his lunch, and as Wilhelmina looked she beheld a copy of the notice that he had posted on his claim. No knight-errant of old could have excelled him in gallantry, for he had given her a full half of his claim; but her eyes filled with tears, for here, even as at Wunpost, he had betrayed his ineptitude with the pen. He had named the mine after her, but he had spelled it "Willie Meena," and she knew that his detractors would laugh. Yet she folded the precious paper and thanked him shyly as he told her how to have it recorded, and then she slipped away to gloat over it alone and look through the specimen for gold.

But Dusty Rhodes, though he had been

silenced for the moment, was not satisfied with the way things had gone; and while Billy was making a change to her Sunday clothes she heard his complaining voice from the corrals. He spoke as to the hilltops, after the manner of mountain men or those who address themselves to mules; and John Calhoun in turn had a truly mighty voice which wafted every word to her ears. But as she listened, half in awe at their savage repartee, a third but quieter voice broke in, and she leaped into her dress and went dashing down the hill, for her father had come back from the mine. He was deaf, and slightly crippled, as the result of an explosion when his drill had struck into a missed hole; but to lonely Wilhelmina he was the dearest of companions and she shouted into his ear by the hour. And, now that he had come home, the rival claimants were laying their case before him.

Dusty Rhodes was excited, for he saw the chance of a fortune slipping away through his impotent fingers; but when Wunpost made answer he was even more excited, for the memory of his desertion rankled deep. All the ethics of the desert had been violated by Dusty Rhodes and a human life put in jeopardy, and as Wunpost dwelt upon his sufferings the old thirst for revenge rose up till it quite overmastered him. He denounced Dusty's actions in no uncertain terms, holding him up to the scorn of mankind; but Dusty was just as vehement in his impassioned defense and in his claim to a half of the strike. There the ethics of the desert came in again; for it is a tradition in mining, not unsupported by sound law, that whoever is with a man at the time of a discovery is entitled to half the find. And the hold-over from his drinking bout of the evening before made Dusty unrestrained in his protests.

The battle was at its height when Wilhelmina arrived and gave her father a hug, and as the contestants beheld her suddenly transformed to a young lady, they ceased their accusations and stood dumb. She was a child no longer, as she had appeared in the bib overalls, but a woman and with all a woman's charm. Her eyes were very bright, her cheeks a ruddy pink, her curls a glorious halo for her head; and, standing beside her father, she took on a naive dignity that left the two fire eaters abashed. Cole Campbell himself was a man to be reckoned with—tall and straight as an arrow, with eyes that

never wavered and decision in every line of his face. His gray hair stood up straight above a brow furrowed with care and his mustache bristled out aggressively, but as he glanced down at his daughter his stern eyes suddenly softened and he acknowledged her presence with a smile.

"Are they telling you about the strike?" she called into his ear, and he nodded and smiled again. "Let's go up there!" she proposed, but he shook his head and turned to the expectant contestants.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "as near as I can make out Mr. Rhodes has a certain right in the property. Mr. Calhoun was traveling with him and eating his grub, and I believe a court of law would decide in his favor even if he did go off and leave him in the lurch. But since my daughter picked him up and supplied him with a mule to go back and stake out the claim it might be that she also has an equity in the property, although that is for you gentlemen to decide."

"That's decided already!" shouted Wunpost angrily, "the claim has been located in her name. She's entitled to one-half and no burro-chasing prospector is going to beat her out of any part of it."

"But perhaps," suggested Campbell with a quick glance at his daughter, "perhaps she could consent to take a third. And if you would do the same that would be giving up only one-sixth and yet it would obviate a law suit."

"Yes, and I'll sue him!" yammered Rhodes, "I'll fight him to a whisper! I'll engage the best lawyers in the country! And if I can't git it no other way——"

"That'll do!" commanded Campbell raising his hand for peace, "there's nothing to be gained by threats. This can all be arranged if you'll just keep your heads and try to consider it impartially. I'm surprised, Mr. Rhodes, that you abandoned your partner and left him without water on the desert. I've known you a long time and I've always respected you, but the fact would be against you in court. But on the other hand you can prove that you rode out this morning and made a diligent search, and that in itself would probably disprove abandonment, although I can't say it counts for much with me. But you've asked my opinion, gentlemen, and there it is; and my advice is to settle this matter right now without taking the case into court."

"Well, I'll give him half of my share,"

broke out Wunpost fretfully, "but I promised Billy half and she is going to get half—I gave her my word, and that goes."

"No, I'll give him half of mine," cried Billy to her father, "because all I did was lend him Tellurium. But before I agree to it Mr. Rhodes has got to apologize, because he said he'd steal my mule!"

"What's that?" inquired her father, holding his ear down closer, "I didn't quite get that last."

"Why, Dusty Rhodes came up here to look for Mr. Calhoun, and when I told him that I had loaned him my mule he said Mr. Calhoun would *steal* him! And then he went up and told mother all about it and said that Mr. Calhoun would do *anything*, and he said he'd probably take Tellurium to Wild Rose and trade him off to some *square*! And when I defended him he just whooped and laughed at me—and now he's got to *apologize*!"

She darted a hateful glance at the perspiring Dusty Rhodes, who was vainly trying to get Campbell's ear; and at the end of her recital there was a look in Wunpost's eye that spoke of reprisals to come. The fat was in the fire, as far as Rhodes was concerned, but he surprised them all by retracting. He apologized in haste, before Wunpost could make a reach for him, and then he recanted in detail, and when the tumult was over they had signed a joint agreement to give him one-third of the mine.

"All right, boys," he yelled, thrusting his copy into his pocket and making a dash for his horse, "One-third! It's all right with me! But if we'd gone to the courts I'd got half, sure as shooting! 'S'all right, but jest watch my dust!"

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE TREE OF LIFE.

As the evening came on they walked out together, Wunpost and the worshipful Wilhelmina, and from the portals of her House of Dreams they looked out over the Sink where they had met but the evening before. Less than a single day had passed since their stars had crossed, and already they were talking of life and eternal friendship and of all the great dreams that youth loves. Each had given of what they had without counting the cost or considering what others might say; and now they walked together like reunited lovers, though their friendship was

not twenty-four hours old. Yet in that single eventful day what a gamut they had run of the emotions which make up the soul's life—of dangers boldly met, of mutual sacrifice and trust and the joys of vindication and success. They had staked all they had in the greatest game in life, and, miracle of miracles, they had won. They had sought out each others' souls in the murk of death and doubt and each had been proven pure gold; yet even youth, for all its madness, has its moments of clairvoyance, and Billy sensed that her joy could not last. It was too great, too perfect, to endure forever, and as she gazed across the desert she sighed.

"What's the matter?" inquired Wunpost who, after a few hours' sleep, had awakened in a most expansive mood; but she only sighed again and shook her head and gazed off across the quivering Sink. It was a hell hole of torment to those who crossed its moods and yet in that waste she had found this man, who had changed her whole outlook on life. He had come up from the desert, a sun-bronzed young giant, volcanic in his loves and his hates; and on the morrow the desert would claim him again, for he was going back to his mine. And her father was going, too—Jail Cañon would be as empty as it had been for many a long year—and she who longed to live, to plunge into the swirl of life, would be left there alone, to dream.

But what would dreams be after she had tasted the bitter-sweet of living and learned what it was that she missed; the tug of strong emotions, the hopes and fears and heartaches that are the fruits on the great Tree of Life? She wanted to pluck the fruits, be they bitter or sweet, and drain the world's wine to the dregs; and then, if life went ill, she could return to her House with something about which to dream. But now she only sighed and Wunpost took her hand and drew her down beside him in the shade.

"Don't you worry about *him*, kid," he observed mysteriously, "I'll take care of him, all right. And don't you believe a word he said about me stealing horses and such. I'm a little rough sometimes when these jaspers try to rob me, but I never take advantage of a friend. I'm a Kentucky Calhoun, related to John Caldwell Calhoun, the great orator who debated with Webster; and a Kentucky Calhoun never forgets a kindness nor forgives an intentional injury. Dusty

Rhodes things he's smart, getting a third of our mine after he went off and left me flat; but I'll show that old walloper before I get through with him that he can't put one over on me. And there's a man over in Nevada that's going to learn the same as soon as I make my stake—he's another smart Aleck that thinks he can job me and get away with highway robbery."

"Oh, is that Judson Eells?" broke in Billy quickly, and Wunpost nodded his head.

"That's the hombra," he said, his voice waxing louder, "he's one of these grubstake sharks. He came to Nevada after the Tonopah excitement with a flunky they call Flip Flappum. That's another dirty dog that I'm going to put my mark on when I get him in the door—one of the most low-down, contemptible curs that I know of—he makes his living by selling bum life insurance. Phillip F. Lapham is his name, but we all call him Flip Flappum—he's the blackleg lawyer that drew up that contract that made me lose my mine. Did Dusty tell you about it—then he told you a lie—I never even read the cussed contract! I was broke, to tell you the truth, and I'd've signed my own death warrant to get the price of a plate of beans; and so I put my name in the place where he told me and never thought nothing about it.

"It was a grubstake, that's all I knew, giving him half of what I staked in exchange for what I could eat; but it turned out afterward it was like these fire-insurance policies, where a man never reads the fine print. There was more jokers in that contract than in a tinhorn gambler's deck of cards—he had me peoned for life—and after I'd given him half my strike he came out and claimed it all. Well, no man would stand for that, but when I went to make a kick there was a rat-faced guard there waiting for me. Pisenface Lynch they call him, and if he was half as bad as he looks he'd be the wild wolf of the world; but he ain't, not by a long shot; he just had the drop on me, and he run me off my own claim! I came back and they ganged me, and when I woke up I looked like I'd been through a barbed-wire fence.

"Well, after that, as the nigger says, I began to think they didn't want me around there, and so I pulled my freight; and it wasn't a month afterward that the ore all pinched out and left Judson Eells belly up. If he lost one dollar I'll bet he lost fifty

thousand, besides tipping his hand on that contract; and I walked clean back from the lower end of Death Valley just to see how his lip was hung. He's a big, fat slob, and when times are good he goes around with his lip pulled up, so! But this time he looked like an old muley cow that's come through a long, late spring—his lip was plumb down on his brisket. So I gave him the horse laugh, paid my regards to Flip and Lynch, and came away feeling fine. Because I'll tell you, Billy, sure as God made little fishes, there's a hereafter coming to them three men; and I'm the boy that's going to deal 'em the misery—you wait and watch my smoke!"

He smiled benevolently into Billy's startled eyes, and as the subject seemed to interest her he settled himself more comfortably and proceeded with his views on life.

"Yes, sir," he said, "I'll put a torch under them, that'll burn 'em off the face of the earth. Did you ever see a hanker that wasn't a regular robber—with special attention to widows and orphans? Well, take it from me, Billy, they're a bunch of crooks—I guess I ought to know. I was just eleven years old when they foreclosed the mortgage and turned my mother and us kids into the street; and since then I've done everything from punching cows to highway robbery, but I've never forgot those bankers. That's how-come I signed up with Judson Eells. I thought I was sticking him good; but he was playing a system, and they didn't anybody tumble to it until I discovered the Wunpost.

"W'y, there wasn't a prospector in the State of Nevada that hadn't worked old Eells for a grubstake. We thought he was easy, kind of bugs on mining like all the rest of these nuts, but the minute I struck the Wunpost—bing, he's there with his contract, and we find where we've all been stung. We're tied up, by grab, with more whereases and wherefores, and the parties of the first part, and so on, than you'd find in a book of law; and the boys all found out, from what he did to me, that he had us euchered at every turn. I thought I could fool him by covering up the hole——"

"Oh, did you do that!" burst out Billy reproachfully. "And I made Dusty Rhodes apologize!"

"Never mind," said Wunpost, "that was nothing but jaw bone. He just said it to get a share in our mine."

"No, but listen," protested Billy, "that isn't what I mean. Do you think it was right to deceive Eells?"

"Was it *right*, kid!" laughed Wunpost. "That ain't nothing to what I'm *going* to do if I ever get the chance. Didn't he hire that blackleg lawyer to draw up a cinch contract with the purpose of grabbing all I found? Well, then, that shows how honest *he* was—and now I'm out after his scalp. I've got to raise a stake, so I can fight him dollar for dollar; and then, sure as shooting, I'm going to bust his bank and make him walk out of camp. Was it right—say, that's a good one—you ain't been around much, have you? Well, that's all right, Billy; I like you, all the same."

He nodded approvingly and Billy sat staring, for her world had gone topsy-turvy again. She had wanted to leave Jail Cañon and go out into the world, but was it possible that there existed a state of society where there was no right and wrong? She sat thinking a minute, her head in a whirl, and then she came back again.

"But when you covered up this mine and tried to keep it for yourself, he—had Mr. Eells ever done you any harm?"

"Well, not yet, kid—that is, I didn't know it—but believe me, his intentions were good. The time hadn't come, that's all."

"He was your friend, then," contended Billy, "because Dusty Rhodes said——"

"Dusty Rhodes!" bellowed Wunpost, and then he paused. "Go on, let's get this off your chest."

"Well, he said," continued Billy, "that Mr. Eells gave you everything and that you lived off his grubstake for two years; so I don't think it was right, when you finally found a mine——"

"Say, listen," broke in Wunpost, leaning over and tapping her on the knee while he fixed her with intolerant eyes, "who's your friend, now—Dusty Rhodes or me?"

"Why—you are," faltered Billy, "but I don't see——"

"All right, then," pronounced Wunpost, "if I'm your friend, *stay with me*. Don't tell me what Dusty Rhodes said!"

"That's all right," she defended. "Didn't I make him apologize? But I'm *your* friend, too, and I don't think it was right to——"

"Right!" thundered Wunpost, "where do you get this 'right' stuff? Have you lived up this cañon all your life? Well, you wait until

to-morrow, when the rush is on, and I'll show you how much *right* there is in mining! You come down to the mine, and I'll show you a bunch of mugs that would rob you of your claim like *that*! I'm going to be there, myself, and I'm going to borrow that pistol that you stuck in my ribs the other night; and the first yap that touches a corner or crosses my line I'll make him hard to catch. And then will come the promoters, with their diamonds and certified checks, and they'll offer you millions and millions; but you stay with me, kid, if they offer you the subtreasury, because they'll clean you if you ever sign up. Don't sign nothing, see—and don't promise anything, either; and I'll tell you about *me*, I'll do anything for a friend—but that's as far as I go. They ain't no right and wrong, as far as I'm concerned. I'm like a danged Injun, I'll keep my word to a friend no matter how the cards fall; but if that friend turns against me, I'll scalp him like *that*, and hang his hide on the fence! So now you know right where you'll find me!"

"Well, all right," retorted Billy, whose Scotch blood was up, "and I'll tell you right where you'll find *me*. I'll stay with my friends, whether they're right or wrong, but I'll never do anything dishonest. And if you don't like that you can take back your claim because——"

"Sure I like it" cried Wunpost, laughing and patting her hand. "That's just the kind of friend I want. But all the same, Billy, this is no Sunday-school picnic—it's more like a dog fight we're going to—and the only way to stand off that bunch of burglars is to hit 'em with anything you've got. You've got to grab with both hands and kick with both feet if you want to *win* in this mining game; and when you try to fight honest you're tying one hand *behind* you, because some of 'em won't stop at murder. Eells and Flip Flap and their kind don't pretend to be honest, they just get by with the law; and if you give 'em the edge they'll soak you in the jaw the first time you turn your head."

"Well, I don't care," returned Billy, "my father is honest and nobody ever robbed him of his claim!"

"Hooh! Who wants it?" jeered Wunpost arrogantly. "I'm talking about a real mine. Your old man's claims are stuck up in a cañon where a flying machine couldn't hardly go, and about the time he gets his



road built another cloud-burst will come along and wash it away. Oh, don't talk to me, I *know*—I've been all along those peaks and right down past his mine—and I tell you it isn't worth stealing!"

"And I've been up there, too, and helped pack out the ore, and I tell you you don't know what you're talking about!"

Billy's eyes flashed dangerously as she sprang up to face him and for a minute they matched their wills; then Wunpost laughed shortly and stepped out into the open where the sun was just topping the mountains.

"Well, all right, kid," he said, "have your own way about it. It makes no difference to me."

"No, I guess not," retorted Billy, "or you'd find out what you were talking about before you said that my father was a fool. His mine is just as good as it ever was—all it needs is another road."

"Yes, and then *another* road," chimed in Wunpost mockingly, "as soon as the first cloud-burst comes by. And the price of silver is just half what it was when old Panamint was on the boom. But that makes no difference, of course?"

"Yes, it does," acknowledged Billy whose eyes were gray with rage, "but the flotation system is so much cheaper than milling that it more than evens things up. And there hasn't been a cloud-burst in thirteen years—but that makes no difference, of course!"

She spat it out spitefully, and Wunpost curbed his wit, for he saw where his jesting was leading to. When it came to her father this unsophisticated child would stand up and fight like a wild cat. And he began to perceive, too, that she was not such a child—she was a woman, with the experience of a child. In the ways of the world she was a mere babe in the woods, but in intellect and character she was far from being dwarfed and her honesty was positively embarrassing. It crowded him into corners that were hard to get out of and forced him to make excuses for himself, whereas at the moment he was all lit up with joy over the miracle of his second big strike. He had discovered the Wunpost, and lost it on a fluke; but the Willie Meena was different—if he kept the peace with her they would both come out with a fortune.

"Never mind now, kid," he said at last. "Your father is all right—I like him. And if he thinks he can get rich by building roads up the cañon, that's his privilege; it's noth-

ing to me. But you string along with me on our mine down below, and there'll be money and to spare for us both; and then you can take your share and build the old man a road that'll make 'em all take notice! About twenty thousand dollars ought to fix the matter up, but if we get to gee-hawing and Dusty Rhodes mixes in there won't be a dollar for any of us. We've got to stand together, see—you and me against old Dusty—and that will give us control."

"Well, I didn't start the quarrel," said Billy, beginning to blink, "but it makes me mad, just because father won't give up, to have everybody saying he's crazy. But he isn't—he knows just exactly what he's doing—and some day he'll be a rich man when these Blackwater pocket miners are destitute. The Homestake mine produced half a million dollars, the second time they opened it up, and if the road hadn't washed out it would be producing yet and my father would be rated a millionaire. If he would sell out his claims, or just organize a company and give outside capitalists control——"

"Don't you do it!" warned Wunpost, who made a very poor listener, "they'll skin you, every time. The party that has control can take over the property and exclude the minority stockholders from the ground, and all they can do is to sue for an accounting and demand a look at the books. But the books are nothing, it's what's underground that counts, and if you try to go down they can kill you. I learned that from Judson Eells when he put me out of Wunpost—and say, we can work that on Dusty! We'll treat him white at first, but the minute he gets gay we'll give him the gate!"

He pranced about joyously, vainly trying to make her smile, but Wilhelmina had lost her gayety.

"No," she said, "let's not do that—because I made him apologize, you know. But don't you think it's possible that Judson Eells will follow after you and claim this mine, too, under his contract?"

"He can't!" chuckled Wunpost starting to do a double shuffle. "I fooled him—this isn't Nevada. And when I found the Wunpost I was eating his grub, but this time I was strictly on my own. I came to a country where I'd never been before, so he couldn't say I'd covered it up; and that contract was made out in the State of Nevada, but this is clear over in California. Not a chance, kid. We're rich. Cheer up!"

He tried to grab her hand, but she drew it away from him and an anxious look crept into her eyes.

"No," she said, "let's not be foolish." Already the great dream had sped.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE WILLIE MEENA.

The morning had scarcely dawned when Wilhelmina dashed up the trail and looked down on the Sink below; and Wunpost had been right, where before all was empty, now the Death Valley Trail was alive. From Blackwater to Wild Rose Wash the dust rose up in clouds, each streamer boring on toward the north; and already the first stampeders had passed out of sight in their rush for the Black Point strike. It lay beyond North Pass, cut off from view by the shoulder of a long, low ridge; but there it was, and her claim and Wunpost's was already swarming with men. The whole town of Blackwater had risen up in the night and gone streaking across the Sink, and what was to keep those envious pocket miners from claiming the find for their own? And Dusty Rhodes—he must have led the stampede—had he respected his partners' rights? She gazed a long moment, then darted back through the tunnel and bore the news to her father and Wunpost.

He had slept in the hay, this hardy desert animal, this shabby, penniless man with the loud voice of a demagogue and the profile of a bronze Greek god; and he came forth boldly, like Odysseus of old when, cast ashore on a strange land, he roused from his sleep and beheld Nausicaa and her maidens at play. But as Nausicaa, the princess, withstood his advance when all her maidens had fled, so Wilhelmina faced him, for she knew full well now that he was not a god. He was a water-hole prospector who for two idle years had eaten the bread of Judson Eells; and then, when chance led him to a rich vein of ore, had covered up the hole and said nothing. Yet for all his human weaknesses he had one godlike quality—a regal disregard for wealth; for he had kept his plighted word and divided, half and half, this mine toward which all Blackwater now rushed. She looked at him again and her rosy lips parted—he had earned the meed of a smile.

The day had dawned auspiciously, as far as Billy was concerned, for she was back in her overalls and her father had consented to

take her along to the mine. The claim was part hers, and Wunpost had insisted that she accompany them back to the strike. Dusty Rhodes would be there, with his noisy demands and his hints at greater rights in the claim; and in the first wild rush complications might arise that would call for a speedy settlement. But with Billy at his side, and Cole Campbell as a witness, every detail of their agreement could be proved on the instant and the Willie Meena started off right. So Wunpost smiled back when he beheld the make-believe boy who had come to his aid on her mule; and as they rode off down the cañon, driving four burros, two packed with water, he looked her over approvingly.

In skirts she had something of the conventional reserve which had always made him scared of women; but as a boy, as Billy, she was one partner in a thousand, and as care-free as the wind. Upon the back of her saddle, neatly tied up in a bag, she carried the dress that she would wear at the mine; but riding across the mesa on the lonely Indian trail she clung to the garb of utility. In overalls she had ridden up and down the corkscrew cañon that led to her father's mine; she had gone out to hunt for burros, dragged in wood and carried up water and done the daily duties of a man. Both her brothers were gone off working in the mines, and their tasks descended to her; until in stride and manner and speech she was, by instinct, a man and only by thought a woman.

Billy sat on Tellurium and gazed with rapt wonder at the scene which stretched out below. Wagons and horses everywhere, and automobiles, too, and dejected-looking burros and mules; and in the rough hills beyond men were climbing like goats as they staked the lava-crowned buttes. A procession of Indian wagons was filing up the gulch to haul water from Wild Rose Spring, and already the first tent of what would soon be a city was set up opposite the point. In a few hours there would be twenty up, in a few days a hundred, in a few months it would be a town; and all named for her, who had been given a half by Wunpost and yet had hardly murmured her thanks. She turned to him smiling, but as she was about to speak her father caught her eye.

"Put on your dress," he said, and she retired, red with chagrin, to struggle into that accursed badge of servitude. It was hot, the sun boiled down as it does every day in that

land where the rocks are burned black; and, once she was dressed, she could not mount her mule without seeming to be immodest. So she followed along behind them, leading Tellurium by the rope, and entered her city of dreams unnoticed. Calhoun strode on before her, while Campbell rounded up the burros, and the men from Blackwater stared at him. He was a stranger to them all, but evidently not to boom camps, for he headed for the solitary tent.

"Good morning to you, gentlemen," he called out in his great voice. "Won't you join me—let's all have a drink!"

The crowd fell in behind him, another crowd opened up in front, and he stood against the bar, a board strewn thick with glasses and tottering bottles of whisky. An old man stood behind it, wagging his beard as he chewed tobacco, and as he set out the glasses he glanced up at Wunpost with a curious, embittered smile. He was white-faced and white-bearded, stooped and gnarled like a wind-tortured tree, and the crook to his nose made one think instinctively of pictures of the Wandering Jew. Or perhaps it was the black skull cap, set far back on his bent head, which gave him the Jewish cast; but his manner was that of the rough-and-ready barkeeper.

"Here's to her!" cried Wunpost, ignoring the hint to pay as he raised his glass to the crowd. "Here's to the Willie Meena—some mine!"

He tossed off the drink, but when he looked for the chaser the barkeeper shook his head.

"No chasers," he said, "water is too blasted scarce—that'll be three dollars and twenty-five cents."

"Charge it to ground rent!" grinned Wunpost. "I'm the man that owns this claim. See you later—where's Dusty Rhodes?"

"No—*cash!*" demanded the barkeeper, looking him coldly in the eye. "I'm in on this claim myself."

"Since when?" inquired Wunpost. "Maybe you don't know who I am? I am John C. Calhoun, the man that discovered Wunpost; and unless I'm greatly mistaken you're not in on anything—who gave you any title to this ground?"

"Dusty Rhodes," croaked the saloon keeper, and a curse slipped past Wunpost's lips, though he knew that a lady was near.

"Well, damn Dusty Rhodes!" he cried in a passion. "Where is the crazy fool?"

He burst from the crowd just as Dusty came hurrying across from where he had been digging out ore; and for a minute they stood clamoring, both shouting at once, until at last Wunpost seized him by the throat.

"Who's this old stiff with whiskers?" he yelled into his ear, "that thinks he owns the whole claim? Speak up, or I'll wring your neck!"

He released his hold, and Dusty Rhodes staggered back while the crowd looked on in alarm.

"W'y, that's 'Whiskers,'" explained Dusty, "the saloon keeper down in Blackwater. I guess I didn't tell you, but he give me a grubstake and so he gits half my claim."

"Your claim!" echoed Wunpost, "since when was this your claim? You doddering old tarrapin, you only own one-third of it—and that ain't yours, by rights. How much do you claim, I say?"

"W'y—I only claim one-third," responded Dusty weakly, "but Whiskers, he claims that I'm entitled to a half—"

"A half!" raged Wunpost, starting back toward the saloon. "I'll show the old billy-goat what he owns!"

He kicked over the bar with savage destructiveness, jerking up a tent peg with each brawny hand, and as the old man cowered he dragged the tent forward until it threatened every moment to come down.

"Git out of here!" he ordered. "Git off of my ground! I discovered this claim, and it's located in my name—now git, before I break you in two!"

"Here, here!" broke in Cole Campbell, laying a hand on Wunpost's arm as the saloon keeper began suddenly to beg. "Let's not have any violence. What's the trouble?"

"Why, this old spittoon-trammer," began Wunpost in a fury, "has got the nerve to claim half my ground. I've been beat out of one claim, but this time it's different—I'll show him who owns this ground!"

"I just claim a quarter of it!" snapped old Whiskers vindictively, "I claim half of Dusty Rhodes' share. He was working on my grubstake—and he was with you when you made your strike."

"He was not!" denied Wunpost. "He went off and left me. Did you find his name on the notice? No, you found John C. Calhoun and Williemeena Campbell, the girl that loaned me her mule. We're the

locators of this property, and, just to keep the peace, we agreed to give Dusty one-third; but that ain't a half, and if you say it is again, out you go—I'll throw you off my claim!"

"Well, a third then," screeched old Whiskers, holding his hands about his ears, "but for cripes' sake quit jerking that tent! Ain't a third enough to give me a right to put up my tent on the ground?"

"It is if I say so," replied Wunpost authoritatively, "and if Williemeena Campbell consents. But git it straight now—we're running this property and you and Dusty are *nothing*. You're the minority, see, and if you make a crooked move we'll put you both off the claim. Can you git that through your head?"

"Well, I guess so," grumbled Whiskers, stooping to straighten up his bar, and Wunpost winked at the crowd.

"Set 'em up again!" he commanded regally, and all Blackwater drank on the house.

## CHAPTER VI.

### CINCHED.

Having established his rights beyond the peradventure of a doubt, the imperious Wunpost left old Whiskers to recoup his losses and turned to the wide-eyed Wilhelmina. She had been standing, rooted to the earth, while he assaulted old Whiskers and Rhodes; and as she glanced up at him doubtfully he winked and grinned back at her and spoke from behind the cover of his hand.

"That's the system!" he said. "Git the jump on 'em—treat 'em rough! Come on, let's go look at our mine!"

He led the way to Black Point, where the bonanza vein of quartz came down and was buried in the sand; and while the crowd gazed from afar they looked over their property, though Billy moved like one in a dream. Her father was engaged in placating Dusty Rhodes and in explaining their agreement to the rest and she still felt surprised that she had ever consented to accompany so desperate a ruffian. Yet as he knocked off a chunk of ore and showed her the specks of gold, scattered through it with such prodigal richness, she felt her old sense of security return; for he had never been rough with her. It was only with old Whiskers, the grasping Blackwater saloon keeper, and with the equally avari-

cious Dusty Rhodes—who had been trying to steal more than their share of the prospect and to beat her out of her third. They had thought to ignore her, to brush her aside and usurp her share in the claim; but Wunpost had defended her and protected her rights and put them back where they belonged. And it was for this that he had seized Dusty Rhodes by the throat and kicked down the saloon keeper's bar. But she wondered what would happen if, at some future time, she should venture to oppose his will.

The vein of quartz which had caught Wunpost's eye was inclosed within another, not so rich, and a third mighty ledge of low-grade ore incased the two of them within its walls. This big dyke it was which formed the backbone of the point, thrusting up through the half-eroded porphyry; and as it ran up toward its apex it was swallowed and overcapped by the lava from the old volcanic cone.

"Look at that!" exclaimed Wunpost, knocking off chunk after chunk; and as a crowd began to gather he dug down on the richest streak, giving the specimens to the first person who asked. The heat beat down upon them, and Campbell called Wilhelmina to the shelter of his makeshift tent, but on the ledge Wunpost dug on untiringly while the pocket miners gathered about. They knew, if he did not, the value of those rocks which he dispensed like so much dirt, and when he was not looking they gathered up the leavings and even knocked off more for themselves. There had been hungry times in the Blackwater district and some of this quartz was half gold.

An Indian wood hauler came down from Wild Rose Spring with his wagon filled with casks of water, and as he peddled his load at two-bits a bucket the camp took on a new lease of life. Old Whiskers served a chaser with each drink of whisky, coffee was boiled and cooking begun; and all the drooping horses were banded together and driven up the cañon to the spring. It was only nine miles, and the Indians would keep on hauling, but already Wunpost had planned to put in a pipe line and make Willie Meena a town. He stood by Campbell's tent while the crowd gathered about and related the history of his strike, and then he went on with his plans for the mine and his predictions of boom times to come.

"Just you wait," he said, bulking big in-

the moonlight, "you wait till them Nevada boomers come. Things are dead over there, Keno and Wunpost are worked out, they'll hit for this camp to a man. And when they come, gentlemen, you want to be on your ground, because they'll jump anything that ain't held down. Just wait till they see this ore and then watch their dust—they'll stake the whole country for miles—but I've only got one claim, and I'm going to stay on it and the first man that jumps it will get this."

He slapped the big pistol that he had borrowed from Wilhelmina and nodded impressively to the crowd; and the next morning early he was over at the hole, getting ready for the rush that was to come. For the news of the strike had gone out from Blackwater on the stage of the evening before, and the moment it reached the railroad it would be wired to Keno, and to Tonopah and Goldfield beyond. Then the stampede would begin, over the hills and down into Death Valley and up Emigrant Wash to the springs; and from there the first automobiles would burn up the ground till they struck Wild Rose Cañon and came down. Wunpost got out a hammer and drill, and as he watched for the rush he dug out more specimens to show. Wilhelmina stood beside him, putting the best of them into an ore sack and piling the rest on the dump; and as he met her glad smile he laid down his tools and nodded at her wisely.

"Big doings, kid," he said. "There's some rock that'll make 'em scream. D'ye remember what I said about Dusty Rhodes? Well, maybe I didn't call the turn—he did just exactly what I said. When he got to Blackwater he claimed the strike was his and framed it up with Whiskers to freeze us out. They thought they had us jumped—somebody knocked down my monument and that's a State's prison offense—but I came back at 'em so quick they were whipped before they knew it. They acknowledged that the claim was mine. Well, all right, kid, let's keep it; you tag right along with me and back up any play that I make, and if any of these boomers from Nevada get funny we'll give 'em the gate, the gate!"

He did a little dance and Billy smiled back feebly, for it was all very bewildering to her. She had expected, of course, a certain amount of lawless conduct; but that Dusty Rhodes, an old friend of their family, should conspire to deprive her of her claim

was almost inconceivable. And that Wunpost should instantly seize him by the throat and force him to renounce his claims was even more surprising. But, of course, he had warned her, he had told her all about it and predicted even bolder attempts; and yet here he was, digging out the best of his ore to give to these same Nevada burglars.

"What do you give them all the ore for?" she asked at last. "Why don't you keep it, and we can pound out the gold?"

"We have to play the game, kid," he answered with a shrug. "That's the way they always do."

"Yes, but I should think it would only make them worse. When they see how rich it is maybe some one will try to jump us—do you think Judson Eells will come?"

"Sure he'll come," answered Wunpost, "he'll be one of the first."

"And will you give him a specimen?"

"Surest thing—I'll give him a good one. I believe that's a machine, up the wash."

He shaded his eyes, and as they gazed up the winding cañon a monster automobile swung around the curve. A flash and it was gone, only to rush into view a second time and come bubbling and thundering down the wash. It drew up before the point, and four men leaped out and headed straight for the hole—not a word was said, but they seemed to know by instinct just where to find the mine. Wunpost strode to meet them and greeted them by name, they came up and looked at the ground; and then, as another machine came around the point, they asked him his price, for cash.

"Nothing doing, gentlemen," answered Wunpost. "It's too good to sell. It'll pay from the first day it's worked."

He went down to meet the second car of stampedeers and his answer to them was the same. And each time he said it he turned to Wilhelmina, who gravely nodded her head. It was his mine, he had found it and only given her a share of it, and, of course, they must stand together; but as machine after machine came whirling down the cañon and the bids mounted higher and higher, a wistful look came into Wilhelmina's eye and she went down and sat with her father. It was for him that she wanted the money that was offered her—to help him finish the road he had been working on so long—but she did not speak, and he, too, sat silent, looking on with brooding eyes. Something seemed to tell them both that trouble was at hand

and when, after the first rush, a single auto rumbled in, Billy rose to her feet apprehensively. A big man with red cheeks, attired in a long linen duster, descended from the curtained machine and she flew to the side of Wunpost.

It was Judson Eells, she would know him anywhere from the description that Wunpost had given, and as he came toward the hole she took in every detail of this man who was predestined to be her enemy. He was big and fat, with a high George the Third nose and the florid smugness of a country squire, and as he returned Wunpost's greeting his pendulous lower lip was thrust up in arrogant scorn. He came on confidently and behind him like a shadow there followed a mysterious second person. His nose was high and thin, his cheeks gaunt and furrowed, and his eyes seemed brooding over some terrible wrong which had turned him against all mankind. At first glance his face was terrifying in its fierceness, and then the very badness of it gave the effect of a caricature. His eyebrows were too black, his lips too grim, his jaw too firmly set; and his haggard eyes looked like those of a woman who is about to burst into hysterical tears. It was Pisen-face Lynch, and as Wunpost caught his eye he gave why to a mocking smirk.

"Ah, good morning, Mr. Eells," he called out cordially, "good morning, good morning, Mr. Lynch! Well, well, glad to see you—how's the bad man from Bodie—meet my partner, Miss Wilhelmina Campbell!"

He presented her gallantly, and as Wilhelmina bowed she felt their hostile eyes upon her.

"Like to look at our mine?" rattled on Wunpost affably. "Well, here it is, and she's a world-beater. Take a squint at that rock—you won't need no glasses—how's that, Mr. Eells, for the pure quill?"

Eells looked at the specimen, then looked at it again and slipped it into his pocket.

"Yes, rich," he said in a deep bass voice, "very rich—it looks like a mine. But, er, did I understand you to say that Miss Campbell was your partner? Because, really, you know—"

"Yes, she's my partner," replied Wunpost. "We hold the controlling interest. Got a couple more partners that own a third."

"Because, really," protested Eells, "under the terms of our contract—"

"Oh, to hell with your contract!" burst

out Wunpost scornfully. "Do you think that will hold over here?"

"Why, undoubtedly!" exclaimed Eells. "I hope you didn't think—but no matter, I claim half of this mine."

"You won't get it," answered Wunpost. "This is over in California. Your contract was made for Nevada."

"It was made *in* Nevada," corrected Judson Eells promptly, "but it applied to all claims, *wherever found!* Would you like to see a copy of the contract?" He turned to the automobile and like a jack-in-the-box a little, lean man popped out.

"No!" roared Wunpost, and looked about wildly at which Cole Campbell stepped up beside him.

"What's the trouble?" he asked, and as Wunpost shouted into his ear Campbell shook his head and smiled dubiously.

"Let's look at the contract!" he suggested, and Wunpost, all unstrung, consented. Then he grabbed him back and yelled into his ear:

"*That's* no good now—he's used it once already!"

"How do you mean?" queried Campbell still reaching for the contract; and the jack-in-the-box thrust it into his hands.

"Why, he used that same paper to claim the Wunpost—he can't claim every mine I find!"

"Well, we'll see," returned Campbell, putting on his glasses, and Wunpost flew into a fury.

"Git out of here!" he yelled, making a kick at Pisen-face Lynch. "Git out, or I'll be the death of ye!"

But Pisen-face Lynch recoiled like a rattlesnake and stood set with a gun in each hand.

"Don't you think it," he rasped, and Wunpost turned away from him with a groan of mortal agony.

"What does it say?" he demanded of Campbell. "Can he claim this mine, too? But say, listen; I wasn't *working* for him! I was working for myself and furnishing my own grub—and I've never been through here before! He can't claim I found it when I was under his grubstake, because I've never been into this country!"

He stopped, all atremble, and looked on helplessly while Cole Campbell read on through the "fine print;" and, not being able to read the words, he watched the face of the deaf man like a criminal who hopes for a reprieve. But there was no reprieve



for Wunpost, for the paper he had signed made provision against every possible contingency; and the man who had drawn it stood there smiling triumphantly—the jack-in-the-box was none other than Lapham. Wunpost watched till he saw his last hope flicker out, then whirled on the gloating lawyer. Phillip F. Lapham was tall and thin, with the bloodless pallor of a lunger, but as Wunpost began to curse him a red spot mounted to each cheek bone and he pointed his lanky forefinger like a weapon.

"Don't you threaten me!" he cried out vindictively, "or I'll have you put under bond. The fault is your own if you failed to read this contract, or failed to understand its intent. But there it stands, a paper of record and unbeatable in any court in the land. I challenge you to break it—every provision is reciprocal—it is sound both in law and equity! And under clause seven my client, Mr. Eells, is entitled to one-half of this claim!"

"But I only own one-third of it!" protested Wunpost desperately. "I located it for myself and Wilhelmina Campbell, and then we gave Dusty Rhodes a third."

"That's beside the point," answered Lapham briefly. "If you were the original and sole discoverer, Mr. Eells is entitled to one-half, and any agreements which you have made with others will have to be modified accordingly."

"What do you mean?" yelled a voice, and Dusty Rhodes, who had been listening, now jumped into the center of the arena. "I'll have you to understand," he cried in a fury, "that I'm entitled to a full half in this claim. I was with this man Wunpost when he made the discovery, and according to mining law I'm entitled to one-half of it—I don't give *that* for you and your contract!"

He snapped his finger under the lawyer's nose and Lapham drew back, startled.

"Then in that case!" stated Wunpost, "I don't get *anything*—and I'm the man that discovered it! But I'll tell you, my merry men, there's another law yet, when a man is sure he's right!"

He tapped his six-shooter and even Lynch blanched, for the fighting light had come into his eyes.

"No," went on Wunpost, "you can't work that on me. I found this mine, and I'm going to have half of it or shoot it out the bunch of ye!"

"You can have my share," interposed Wilhelmina tremulously, and he flinched as if struck by a whip.

"I don't want it!" he snarled. "It's these highbinders I'm after. You, Dusty, you don't get anything now. If this big fat slob is going to claim half my mine, you can *law* us—he'll have to pay the bills. Now git, you old dastard, and if you horn in here again I'll show you where you head *out*!" He waved him away, and Dusty Rhodes slunk off, for a guilty conscience makes cowards of us all; but Judson Eells stood solid as adamant, though his lawyer was whispering in his ear.

"Go and see him," nodded Eells, and as Lapham followed Rhodes he turned to the excited Wunpost.

"Mr. Calhoun," he began, "I see no reason to withdraw from my position in regard to this claim. This contract is legal and was made in good faith, and moreover I can prove that I paid out two thousand dollars before you ever located a claim. But all that can be settled in court. If you have given Miss Campbell a third, her share is now a sixth, because only half of the mine was yours to give; and so on with the rest, though if Mr. Rhodes' claim is valid we will allow him his original one-third. Now, what would you say if I should allow *you* one-third, of which you can give Miss Campbell what you wish, and I will keep the other, allowing Mr. Rhodes the last—each one of us to hold a third interest?"

"I would say——" burst out Wunpost, and then he stopped, for Wilhelmina was tugging at his arm. She spoke quickly into his ear, he flared up and then subsided, and at last he turned sulkily to Eells.

"All right," he said, "I'll take the third. I see you've got me cinched."

TO BE CONTINUED.



# Classic Salvage

By Frederick J. Jackson

Author of "The Resurrection of the *Donegal*," Etc.

For eleven days the pride of the lumber-carrying fleet had been bar-bound at Westport, just within the entrance to Gray's Harbor. It was costing the owner fifteen hundred dollars a day demurrage. What was there to do?

ELWOOD PAGE, now sole owner of the shipping firm of Page & Erickson, sat ensconced behind the desk in his private office. A scowl contorted his usually benign countenance as he gazed absently through the windows at the waterfront-bound traffic rattling over the cobblestones of Stewart Street. On his desk lay a pile of radiograms, all of them from Captain Johnson, master of the steamship *Dorothy Page*, the recently launched pride of the Page fleet of lumber carriers.

No wonder he scowled, for this steamer, through the combined stress of weather and a timorous captain, had lain for eleven days bar-bound at Westport, just within the entrance to Gray's Harbor. With an empty hold, the steamer had been enabled to cross in over the bar without difficulty, but now, loaded with a million and a half feet of fir lumber, she drew well over twenty-two feet of water, rendering her outward passage possible only at high tide and with a fairly smooth bar. And Gray's Harbor bar had been far from tranquil. For two weeks over the south jetty great green combers had swept unceasingly, the impetus of a long-drawn-out southerly gale behind them. Therefore Captain Johnson, having with advancing age grown timid in emergencies, had sat in his cabin, figuratively twiddling his thumbs, and sending daily wireless reports to the San Francisco office.

"Confound the idiot!" the old shipping man exploded wrathfully, glaring at the messages. "Here he reports a two-day lull in the gale, and says the wind blew up again before he could get out. Suffering Hades! If I ever get blessed with a grandchild I'll try to land Johnson a job as governess."

A knock at the office door, and young Hugo Martin, temporary port captain, entered.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" grunted Page with an unconscious sigh of regret at the fact that Captain Martin offered no chance as a target for pent-up wrath. On the contrary, Martin ranked high on the old man's mental books, for he had saved the disabled steamer *Donegal* and brought her into port after she had been given up for lost. And the apple of Page's eye, his daughter Dorothy, had been a passenger on that memorable voyage.

"Martin, do you know Gray's Harbor bar?" The shipping man's voice held almost an accusation.

"Too well!" Martin grinned. "I ran up there on the *Svea* for a couple of winters. It's worse than Humboldt. I tried to get on a different run after the first season, for I'd got more than a skinful of experience, but it was just my luck to be unable to get another berth. I know what Captain Johnson is up against. You asked my advice about the *Dorothy*, and I cautioned against sending her on the Aberdeen run until late spring."

"Yes, hang it! But we were so short of bottoms, and Dingwell had tied us up with an iron-clad contract, so I figured the *Dorothy* could do the work of two smaller vessels. And here we've got our crack steamer shut up tight. We're falling behind on the delivery contract, which makes it worse. That blamed bar is now costing me a cold fifteen hundred dollars a day. And every day costs one hundred dollars more than the day before. A sweet demurrage clause!"

"Why not send another vessel to take off the *Dorothy's* deckload, or part of it. If she's lightened to draw not more than eighteen feet she can get to sea—with a towboat pilot." Martin's tone was hopeful.

The old man drew a cigar from a box in

a drawer handy to his reach, bit savagely on the end of the weed, then exploded.

"Show me where in the seven sinful seas I can get another vessel! Dodo's eggs! That's what sound bottoms are to-day—on this coast. These war requisitions have stripped us. The fact that the *Dorothy* is flat bottomed—built to carry a whopping load of lumber, and not much good for anything else—is the reason the government didn't shoot her around to the Atlantic. I've turned good vessels over to Uncle Sam—and I'm not grudging them—but, jumping crickets! it puts us in a hole. This tieup of the *Dorothy* is sandpapering it off to a smooth finish. Something's got to be done. Captain Johnson is an old stand-by of the company, but he's getting so he hasn't the nerve of a mouse when it comes to a pinch."

There was a twinkle in Martin's eye. "Have I nerve enough to suit you, Mr. Page?"

"Yes, confound it, young man, you certainly have! I got a twenty-five per cent. increase in my white hairs after you disappeared over Humboldt Bar with the *Don-egal* last Christmas. What's on your mind?"

"Nothing much. Only there's a possibility of this gale hanging on for three or four weeks. One winter it blew from the south for sixty days up on the Washington coast. Remember?"

"You bet I remember! It played heck with our Gray's Harbor traffic. There wasn't much water on the bar that season on account of shifting sand. Our steamer *San Cabo* piled on the breakwater after sticking her snoot on a shoal. Three or four weeks? Huh! I'd be in a private sanitarium by that time. Come out with it!" he snapped. "You've got something on your chest."

"You admit I have nerve. Why not send me to Gray's Harbor on the train? Give me authority to supersede Captain Johnson at any time it becomes necessary to the best interests of the company. I'll wiggle the *Dorothy* over the bar if there's a ghost of an opportunity. And if there is no opportunity, by jinks! I'll try to make one. Safety first—almost! But get results, that's my motto. There never was a first-class skipper who didn't take chances to save time. That's the earmark of the man who stands well with his owners. No recklessness, you understand, but a judicious amount of—gall."

Page grinned for the first time in many days. As he had told his daughter, referring to Martin, he "loved that young man's ingenuity and unholy nerve."

"I'll take you up on that," he decided instantly. "When can you start?"

"Now," said Martin.

"Good! The Columbia Limited leaves in two hours. Wait here, and I'll fix up a document giving you unlimited authority in regard to the *Dorothy*. Then go out and arrange your transportation. You'll still have time to pack a suit case." Page turned and rang for a stenographer.

"Rush that back to me," was his order, after the young woman had taken dictation and prepared to leave the room to type up her notes.

"Now," he said to Martin, "what do you frankly think of the situation?"

"I can't be frank without using profanity. Outside of the facts that the bar is tricky, that any kind of a wind from the south plays the dickens, that the uncertain currents change with different levels of the tide—the *Dorothy Page* draws too much water; she may bump the bottom when down in the trough. The seaway is terrific when it blows from the south. Captain Johnson is afraid of strained plates and a big drydock bill—if not worse. Still, if I had been in his place, I think I would have engaged a tow-boat for pilot during that two-day let-up in the gale. The bar would still be in bad shape, but with a tow-line aboard, and with the use of oil, I think I would have managed to wriggle out."

The ship-owner's face reddened suddenly. "Nothing doing!" he snorted. "I've given Captain Johnson orders to have no dealings with Amos White. The *White Bear* is the only Gray's Harbor tug which dares to cross the bar in this weather, and I won't stand for any business with the White Towing Company. I'd rather lose money than have any truck with them. Didn't you hear how White rip-sawed me for a cold hundred thousand dollars when the *Bucksport* ran aground? That old wolf, Amos White himself, hustled down with the *White Bear*—just like a scavenger buzzard. Then, with the *Bucksport* getting hammered almost to pieces, he stood off and dickered like a pirate. Not till he got a hundred-thousand-dollar guarantee would he put a line aboard. As unethical as a—a—bank robbery. But he claimed it was worth it on account of the

risk to the towboat. Risk! What a joke!" Page snorted in derision. "I fought him from Jericho to Kingdom Come, but he was slick enough to make that outrageous robbery stand up under the salvage law. I'd have been glad to have paid any reasonable amount; I'd cheerfully have paid ten thousand—and the job wasn't worth two hundred, for it was only a matter of a ten-minute strain on the towline. But the cold-blooded way he stood off and dickered put him in wrong with me. According to all law and ethics a towboat can't do that. Demmit, man! I'd rather lose demurrage money than pay White another cent! You get to sea on your own hook or not at all!"

Martin was a privileged character, and always took advantage of it.

"I'll get to sea, all right," he returned calmly, "but you'll have to let me use my own judgment. You shouldn't let a private grudge stand in the way of business. I hope it won't be necessary to deal with the White Towing Company, but leave it to me. I'll see White, but won't let him hold me up. The main thing is to get the steamer to sea, isn't it?"

The old man gave Martin a suspicious glance, then angrily grunted an affirmative reply. At that moment the stenographer returned with duplicate copies of an order which gave Captain Martin the command of the *Dorothy Page* during one voyage from Gray's Harbor to San Francisco. Signing both copies, the shipowner handed the original to Martin.

## II.

When Martin arrived in Aberdeen it was early afternoon. The town of Hoquiam lay a few miles nearer to Westport, but Martin preferred Aberdeen. It was the larger city, and he fancied he could put things through with less loss of time. He knew where he could charter a fast motor boat to convey him down the long channel to where the steamer lay bar-bound.

Fifteen minutes after he left the train, he was nervously pacing the somewhat limited deck space of a speeding gasoline launch. For three miles he watched the harbor shore slide by, then, when passing the headquarters of the White Towing Company, gave abrupt orders to his boatmen. In accordance with these, the launch pulled in alongside of the *White Fox*, a small towboat. The next larger in size, the *White*

*Seal*, lay astern, but the *White Bear*, the largest vessel belonging to the company, was not in sight.

Martin clambered aboard the tug and then onto the dock, where he sought the office. The first person he encountered was Amos White himself.

"Hello, Captain White," was Martin's cheery greeting.

White, surly in manner and hard of eye, looked questioningly at the speaker.

"What's your business here?" he demanded. "This is a private dock!"

"Sure it is," Martin agreed, "but I've got private business with you. What's your price on the *White Bear*, to pilot the *Dorothy Page* to sea?"

White's thin lips parted in a crafty grin; his projecting jaw seemed to project another fraction of an inch. Over his extremely large nose he stared calculatingly at Martin.

"You know I chuck my regular schedule of rates overboard in winter. I have a sliding scale, according to the condition of the bar and the risk involved. A towboat is responsible, you know."

"Sure I know. What's your rate today?"

"My price is sky-high on any Page vessel! The old bluffer put me to a devil of a lot of trouble, you know, to collect a bit of honest salvage."

"Yes," commented Martin dryly, "laying aside the fact that a towboat ordinarily is not entitled to salvage."

"Well, the *White Bear* is! I've got the whiphand here in owning the *only* real tug. And I lay down my own law in emergencies. I make it stick, too. The *Bear* is across the bar right now, but I'll recall her by wireless if you can pay down five thousand dollars this afternoon."

"Some crust!" spluttered Martin. "Three hundred would be a whopping price. They've got a better towboat than yours down in Humboldt Bay, and the rate for pilotage is fifty dollars without a line aboard, and one hundred for a tow—if the bar isn't breaking clear across."

"Yeh!" said White, "you'd better send for it. The Humboldt tug is a few hundred miles south of here—and her captain has no pilot license for Gray's Harbor bar. I'll put a hawser aboard the *Dorothy Page* and guarantee to get her to sea on this afternoon's tide. She draws a lot of water, but I'll get her across without letting her touch

bottom. It's cheap at the price, for the steamer may lay here and eat up fifteen or twenty thousand in expenses before the bar gets smooth."

"There's only one way you'd get her over, and that's by using oil. You'd soak us the limit, and then some, for that."

"Sure," grinned White, "what of it? I've got the bulge on you, and I'll never miss a chance to sink the hooks into Page."

Martin's face had reddened. "You missed your calling!" was his retort. "Too bad the Spanish Main came a little before your time, but I'll make a bet that you'd make an unqualified success at running a hock shop. I came north with the intention of getting the *Dorothy* over the bar by the use of oil. And I'll get her over! So long!" He left the office.

"You'll wind up on the jetty, unless you have a tug to spread the oil ahead of the steamer!" White shouted after him. "I'll do the job for two thousand!"

"Like hell you will!" Martin flung over his shoulder. He walked across the dock, leaped to the deck of the *White Fox*, and climbed down into the launch.

"Stop at the Halvorsen Cannery," he ordered.

Ordinarily, a little oil when distributed in a proper manner will go a long way in smoothing troubled waters, but Martin took no chances. He was going to attempt a heretofore untried method of combating Gray's Harbor bar. Therefore he purchased two puncheons—one hundred and forty-four gallons—of fish oil, rancid, therefore cheap. With these lashed on deck the launch again proceeded on her way, bucking wind can tide down the long, buoy-marked channel.

Captain Johnson came to the rail of the *Dorothy Page*, and looked down at the launch, which had pulled up alongside and lay rolling in the heavy harbor swell.

"Get a cargo boom over and hoist these puncheons aboard!" yelled Martin. "Got steam up?"

"Steam? What's the idea?"

"Didn't you get my wireless message? Sent it from Aberdeen an hour and a half ago."

"No. The operator is sick."

"Sweet lollypops!" wailed Martin. "Shake a leg and tell the chief to turn everything he's got below the boilers. We're going to sea this afternoon!"

"The deuce we are!" was Captain Johnson's sputtered reply, his closely clipped white beard wagging angrily as he spoke. "Did Page send you up here to teach me my business?"

"No! Only to try a new wrinkle. We'll play a dirty trick on the bar—and on Amos White. We'll show a few of these other vessels how to get to sea."

"Oh," said the aggrieved skipper, partly mollified. He turned, shouted orders for the first officer to get the oil aboard, and sent a message to the fire room.

When a rope ladder was thrown over the side Martin made a flying leap for it, and clambered aboard. His suit case followed, on the end of a heaving line. The puncheons were swung inboard and were trundled, by Martin's orders, over the forward deckload to the forecastle head. A fire ax was laid by, ready for use when the time came for broaching the casks.

Martin walked aft and climbed to the bridge. Captain Johnson, a pair of binoculars to his eyes, stood looking toward the bar.

"How long before we get steam up?" inquired Martin.

"A short time. We've been keeping the boilers good and hot. These oil burners certainly have it over the coal eaters." Again Captain Johnson raised the glasses and gazed seaward.

"There's no going to sea on the tide today, Captain Martin," he said decisively, lowering the binoculars and stowing them carefully in a recess of the binnacle. "It's a dirty bar. Too risky! I guess you'll have to wait."

"Guess again! It's up anchor for us just before slack water!"

Martin reached into the binnacle for the glasses and adjusted them to his eyes. Outside the bar the atmosphere was thick with flying spume, but he made out the *White Bear* towing a four-top schooner into port. The sailing vessel, with an empty hold, was rolling at a forty-five degree angle. For a moment Martin watched her crazy flurries, then turned.

"What's this about the wireless man being ill?" The *Dorothy Page*, not being a passenger vessel, carried no relief operator.

"He's pretty well under the weather. Bad cold and fever. I've given him all the medicine in bottle number eight in the medicine chest, and it did him no good. I wanted

to leave him ashore in the marine hospital, but he insisted on sticking aboard till we reach San Francisco. He lives there. Wireless operators are scarce. I wired to Seattle, but there was not a one available. They're all going into the government service."

"What's the name of this chap?"

"Harden. A young fellow—about eighteen. He supports his mother."

"Too bad he's sick. I'm going down and see how he's getting along." Martin left the bridge and went below to the stateroom which had been altered to house the radio instruments. The lower berth had been allowed to remain for the use of the operator, and on this Harden was lying.

"Hello, Captain Martin," said the young man, smiling wanly, "I thought you had the job of 'ship's husband' down in Frisco."

"Yes, but I'm in command of the *Dorothy* for this trip. How are you feeling?"

"Rotten, thank you! Captain Johnson insisted in feeding me some dope which made me worse. I don't know what's the matter, but I guess I'll be all right in a day or two. I feel awful dizzy and weak when I try to sit at the table." He gestured to indicate the wireless instruments.

"Anything I can do for you?"

"Nothing, unless it is to get me to Frisco in a hurry. My mother always dopes me up with some stuff that tastes like a combination of soap and the way bilge water smells."

"You may get worse when we're out at sea. Hadn't we better put you ashore and take no chances?"

"Gosh, no! I want to go to Frisco."

"All right, son. I'm game if you are." Martin left the room.

When he returned to the bridge he found Captain Johnson again replacing the binoculars in the recess.

"The schooner made it all right," he vouchsafed.

"Why shouldn't she? She wasn't drawing over eleven or twelve feet. Why shouldn't she make it? But when *we* start out—then watch your step!"

"I will!" promised Captain Johnson grimly. "My opinion is that it is foolhardy to try it. I had a better bar than this, and wouldn't risk the vessel."

"That's sound conservatism, captain, but we need a little action. I've got a nice soft berth as port captain; let's swap jobs. How does that strike you?"

"Too good to be true. I'd like a chance to spend every evening with my family."

"I think I can persuade Mr. Page to make the change. I'd like to get to sea again on a regular job. When ashore I grow too restless."

He turned to the engine-room speaking tube. Soon, a vibration ran through the steamer as the engines were turned over.

A little later, just before the tide was at its height, the steam windlass began to rattle, and the anchor chain came aboard. With the stock of the patent mud hook pulled snugly into the hawse hole, and all loose gear stowed or lashed securely, the *Dorothy Page* gathered headway, swung about, and headed for the bar.

By the time the steamer had reached a position where she began to respond to the upheaval of the seas coming in through the entrance, the tide had turned. Martin was on the bridge, together with Captain Johnson and Mr. Hillstrum, the second officer. The first officer was forward on the fore-castle head.

"Broach the puncheons!" ordered Martin through a megaphone.

A few swings of the ax in the hands of a husky sailor and the heads of both casks were stove in.

"Try a quart from either bowl!"

With a deck bucket a small quantity of oil was ladled overboard. Immediately a shining "slick" spread over the water ahead of the steamer, which had hove to, engines reversing gently. While the area of smooth water widened as the oil thinned out and continued to spread, Martin carefully watched the direction of its drift. The tide had carried it a short distance seaward. In over the bar came a hungry sea. Higher and higher the crest of it curled. It was ready to break when it struck the patch of oil-covered water.

Martin laughed in exultation. From a raging, towering thing bent on destruction the wave was miraculously transformed into a harmless, glassy swell.

The tide was running swifter. The water from miles and miles of eel-grass-covered mudflats, as well as the temporarily held-up flood waters of the Chehalis and other rivers, was rushing out.

"More oil!" yelled Martin. "Keep it going over the side—a little at a time."

From astern sounded a whistle. The *White Bear*, having anchored the schooner,



was coming up at full speed, her captain determined to make the most of the tide and tow another vessel into port before sunset. She passed not more than thirty yards to windward of the steamer.

"Better go back!" was the towboat captain's warning.

"Go to Halifax!" was Martin's genial reply.

"You're a damn fool!" was the courteous information that came on the wind.

"Correct!" shouted Martin, and immediately turned the engine-room telegraph to half-speed ahead. With the binoculars he continued to watch the progress of the tug over the oil-covered bar. By this time the tide had carried the oil seaward a considerable distance.

"And they said it couldn't be done!" he commented to Captain Johnson. "The trouble was that a gallon or two was expected to do the work. It will, all right, in most cases, but this is a job which calls for a wholesale quantity. Had to put out enough to allow for the big percentage wasted by being carried over the north jetty. I thought the tide would carry it out in a way to suit my purpose—if I used enough oil."

"We're not over yet," Captain Johnson pointed out, with his usual pessimism. "All the same, this is an eye-opener for me. No, sir, I wouldn't have believed it!"

"Another thing," continued Martin, a wary eye ahead. "A great deal depends on the right kind of oil. Mineral oil isn't worth a hoot in Hades for this kind of work, and here we go!" He signaled for more speed.

By the time the *Dorothy Page* had crossed the last dangerous middle ground and was heading out for a safe offing, the *White Bear* was already two miles farther out to sea. She was rounding to into position to throw a heaving line aboard a small schooner.

Martin picked up the binoculars to watch. A nasty sea was tumbling up around the towboat and sailing vessel; they were both caught in a tide rip. No oil was out that far, for wind and sea had carried the "slick" northward along the coast.

He saw the *White Bear* wallow into the trough as it swung around. Right alongside, an enormous sea arose as though spewed from Neptune's mouth. High above the stanch little tug it loomed, then broke, its smashing, destructive crest hurling down and completely enveloping the towboat—a miniature Niagara.

"Gee! The *White Bear* swallowed a corker that time!" exclaimed Martin, grinning. He considered it nothing serious, having often seen tugs take similar ducking and be none the worse.

For a moment he discerned nothing but a smother of foam, in which the two masts and the funnel of the towboat heeled wildly beneath the smash of the boarding sea. Then like a duck she bobbed up again, shedding torrents of water from her deck house. Apparently she had safely weathered the stroke. Martin looked again, and gasped. Through the heavy spume-laden atmosphere he carefully examined the smaller vessel. Something was radically wrong with her appearance, something missing.

The wireless house was gone!

On the *White Bear* a flimsy, makeshift structure, built abaft the pilot house, had sheltered the radio instruments and operator, reckoned safe as too high above the deck for boarding seas to reach. Towboats are built to lift over the waves like a cork.

"My God!" ejaculated Martin. "She's lost her wireless cabin. It's a certainty that the operator was carried overboard with it."

"Port your helm! Hard over!" he shouted down to the helmsman. "Head for the towboat!"

"Careful about getting in the trough," admonished Captain Johnson, with his usual tendency to overcaution.

"Damn the trough!" swore Martin. "This steamer can weather anything, now that we're on the open sea. This may be a question of a man's life." He turned to the second officer. "Mr. Hillstrum, get number-one boat swung out in the davits!"

Again Captain Johnson put in a mild protest.

"Aw, you make me sick!" stormed the younger man. "You wear whiskers like a man, and talk like a scary woman. I'm taking *personal* command of any small boat that puts off from this vessel." He seized the engine-room speaking tube, pressed it to his lips, and blew a shrill blast. The steamer had just swung in obedience to the helm. Wind and sea were off the port quarter.

"More steam!" he ordered the engineer. "Give her all you've got. Man overboard a mile and a half from here, and it's up to you to hump the engines getting there!"

Reaching again for the megaphone he belloyed to the first officer:

"How much oil left?"

"Over half," came the answer, faint against the wind.

"Start dribbling it over the side."

By this time it was apparent that the *White Bear* was in distress. She had no way on, had fallen into the trough, and was rapidly drifting away from the schooner. Buffeted by cross seas, caused by the shift in the tide, she was in a bad way. From the copper whistle abaft her funnel issued a spurt of steam, which streamed away to leeward and was rapidly dissipated by the gale. No sound could be heard against the wind, but Martin watched and counted four short blasts. A slight interval, then four more.

"Wonder what the trouble is?" questioned Captain Johnson.

"I know!" Martin answered. "I'll bet my next month's pay against the hole in a doughnut that one or more of her mooring lines were washed off her deck by the big sea, and that she's got a line wound around her propeller so tight that it's a diver's job to clear it."

"Sounds likely," agreed Johnson.

A few minutes later the steamer raced by the sailing vessel, which had started to beat to windward. A quick glance told Martin why its crew had not gone to the rescue. Her stern davits held only a twelve-foot dinghy, next to useless in a boiling seaway. The larger lifeboat lay on the forward deck, lashed beneath a tarpaulin. No davits were rigged. Neither was a cargo boom available. And the other spars were cumbered with double-reefed canvas.

On closer inspection the damage to the *White Bear* was more apparent. Her single lifeboat had been torn from its place on the deck house; the galley door was stove in; some panes of glass were broken in the pilot-house windows; her decks had been swept clean of everything movable, with the exception of the two heavy manila towing cables. These had lain stowed in long loops between the rail and the deck house on the leeward side, protected by the housing from the force of the enveloping wave.

Martin signaled for the engines to reverse; the steamer slowed down, crawling nearer and nearer the *White Bear*. For a mile to windward the sea was one vast patch of oil-tamed water. More oil was still being poured from the bows. It drifted around the disabled tug.

When the steamer had edged within hail-

ing distance, Martin bellowed a megaphoned query to the towboat captain:

"Where's the wireless operator?"

The other replied in tragic pantomime, pointing to where, half a cable length away, the battered timbers of the wireless house were at the mercy of a freakish, choppy sea.

After shouting some more orders to the officers, Martin turned to Captain Johnson. The latter's professional jealousy had evaporated gradually in the warmth of his chance of obtaining the soft berth of port captain.

"Take command," said Martin. "Just stand by until I return." He grasped the handrail and dropped down off the bridge.

The second officer had the boat swung out ready for lowering. In accordance with Martin's orders a bucket of fish oil and a large bunch of cotton waste were in readiness. Four sailors, two clad in oilskins and two in shirt sleeves, were in their seats, prepared to man the oars.

"Want to come along, Mr. Hillstrum?" inquired Martin, tearing off several small pieces of waste, dipping them in the oil and tossing them overboard.

"Sure!" was the second officer's hearty response.

"All right! Get in the bow with the oil and waste. Soak small bits of cotton in oil and throw them overboard as we get under way. This won't be more than a Sunday-school picnic the way I'm arranging it. Talk about making the seas safe! The guy who invented smelly fish oil had the right idea!"

While he spoke, Martin had been climbing into his place in the stern sheets. Mr. Hillstrum had removed the rudder, the usual steering equipment of the boat, and rigged a rowlock for the steering oar. He sprang into the bows, and a sailor handed him the supplies.

"Lower away!" commanded Martin. "Let her down on the run!"

Thanks to the efficient lifeboat drill Captain Johnson had religiously practiced, the boat went down rapidly—on an even keel. As the steamer rolled, two sailors with the blades of their oars kept the small craft from bumping. The crest of an oil-covered swell leaped up to caress the bottom of the descending boat, then, as the steamer rolled toward them, the boat thumped onto another wave and settled into the water—clear by two fathoms from the side of the larger vessel. The patent fall couplings were released,

and Martin tugged on his steering oar to swing the small craft around.

"Give way!" he roared, and the oars splashed.

It was not quite such a Sunday-school picnic as he had promised. The seas were high, very high, but the oil prevented their breaking; the interior of the lifeboat remained dry. Lustily the sailors swung into their task; the small boat rose and fell over the swells toward the wreck of the wireless house.

Meanwhile, at Martin's orders, the second officer continued to toss bits of oil-soaked waste onto the surface of the ocean. This assured a fairly safe return trip.

The gale howled and shrieked, tugged and bit futilely at the small craft. When the boat arose to the crest of a sea the wind literally seemed to blow it back into the succeeding hollow. Martin at times bent his long steering oar into an arc as he strained to keep on the course.

The bit of wreckage was one hundred feet away—fifty feet away—twenty feet away.

"Back water!" yelled Martin. "A little more oil, Mr. Hillstrum. Don't take chances of getting stove in."

They circled the floating timbers. "No sign of him, sir!" reported the second officer.

"He may be jammed inside. Empty over the rest of the oil, then come aft."

Clambering over the thwarts and oars, Mr. Hillstrum made his way to the stern of the lifeboat. Martin was already making fast a small line about his waist.

"Take the steering oar! I'll get him—if he's inside! Pull up closer! Haul me back in half a minute if I don't appear before then!"

Without stopping to remove his oilskins Martin dove in the direction of the open bottom of the wireless house, which was floating on its side. He disappeared. A breathless wait of perhaps twenty seconds, then three sharp jerks on the line, and two of the sailors laid in their oars to haul him back. The other oarsmen placed the tips of their oars against the wreckage to fend it off. Gasping, Martin appeared at the surface, a limp form clasped in his arms. Both men were pulled into the lifeboat.

"Keep the oar, Mr. Hillstrum! Back to the steamer!" Martin ordered, and, as the oarsmen gave way, he laid the wireless operator face down over the forward thwart and proceeded by crude but effective means to force the water from his lungs.

The steward of the *Dorothy Page* was a thoughtful man, and had anticipated everything. Hot blankets and hot drinks were in readiness for the chilled and half-drowned wireless operator of the tug when he had been lifted out of the boat, after the latter had again been hoisted up to the davits. A cup of steaming coffee was handed to Martin.

Fortified only by this, still wearing his soaked clothing beneath his dripping oilskins, he returned to the bridge. His hand in readiness on the engine-room telegraph, he wore ship and rounded to within easy megaphone distance of the *White Bear*, approaching closer than he would have dared had not the seas been moderated by oil.

"What's the trouble?" he hailed.

"Line fouled in propeller!" was the reply. "Wireless to Amos White for me! He'll take a chance on sending out the *White Seal*!"

Martin thought rapidly. He doubted that the *White Seal*, much smaller than the *White Bear*, and an older vessel, would dare venture to cross the bar. Besides, he wanted to enable his employer to even his score with Amos White.

"*White Seal* be hanged!" he bellowed out, then turned to Captain Johnson. "This towboat is my meat, believe me! She'll go to pieces on the beach a little north of here if her skipper won't let us take a line aboard."

Again he raised the megaphone.

"The *White Seal* can't cross that bar."

"The hell she can't! Who says so?"

"I do! You've got your choice—go ashore and break up in the surf or let us take a line aboard."

"This tug was built *to tow*; not to be towed!"

"Sure! Go ahead and tow!" was Martin's cheery invitation.

"Our for'ard bitts are none too strong," continued the anguished skipper.

"Where'd you get educated? Unshackle an anchor. Bend a hawser to the chain. And shake a leg! It's getting dark, and you'll be near the surf in a profanely short time."

"Where will you take us? You can't get back over the bar. And you'd play hell trying to get into Columbia River in this blow."

Captain Johnson was gleefully rubbing his hands at the prospect of a share in big salvage money.

"Better take her around Cape Flattery."

"Puget Sound! Is that on the way to San Francisco? I'm not going to delay the delivery of this cargo. I'm going to snake this confounded tug clear south to Frisco. Believe me, this is going to be the standing joke of the coast for years to come. And in Frisco, Elwood Page will get a square deal in the salvage court."

Martin walked to the other end of the bridge and looked aft.

"Stand by with the heaving line, Mr. Hillstrum," he ordered. "I'll get sternway on and swing around so you can get it aboard."

A minute later he watched the second officer deftly fling the weighted end of the line across sixty feet of water to the deck of the *White Bear*. In frantic haste, now and then casting a glance toward the ravenous surf, the towboat's deck hand made the thin line fast to a larger one. He raised his arms aloft as a signal, and two sailors, hand over hand, swiftly pulled the heaving line back aboard the steamer. At the end of it came a three-inch rope, the leader to the huge manila hawser.

"Through which chock, sir?" questioned the second officer, tentatively turning steam into the after windlass. This would be used to haul the cable aboard.

"Take it right over the stern. We aren't built for towing, so you'll have to rig bridles. Break out that new eight-inch line in the lazarette."

"How about the stern rail, sir?"

"Hang the stern rail!" returned Martin impatiently. "Let it smash if it feels like it! That's nothing! Shake a leg, and parcel the hawser plenty when it comes aboard." He turned and beckoned the first officer to come aft.

### III.

Darkness had set in and both vessels had drifted within less than a quarter mile from the outer breakers by the time the towline had been rigged. With a sigh of relief Martin reached for the engine-room telegraph. The *Dorothy Page* gathered way and headed out to gain an offing.

The hawser had been bent to the towboat's anchor chain and thirty fathoms of the latter had been run out of the hawse, which, combined with the length of the manila cable, brought the tug nine hundred feet astern of the steamer.

This greatly lessened the possibility of the towline breaking, but in his heart Martin knew it would have been wisest to have taken the *White Bear* to Puget Sound. It is an axiom of seamanship that it is best to tow a vessel to port five hundred miles before the wind, than one hundred miles against wind and sea. But Martin was stubborn. It was a matter of pride with him to assist his employer in rubbing it into Amos White. Towing the *White Bear* to San Francisco would make a decided hit with Elwood Page; Martin could picture the old shipping man holding his sides in glee. So he decided to wireless a report, addressed to Page's residence, and timed to reach him while he sat at the dinner table.

"The glass has gone down two-tenths," volunteered Captain Johnson, returning to the bridge from his cabin. "The gale will be blowing out before morning. Seems to me that you young fellows always play in luck."

"Gosh!" exclaimed Martin in mock surprise, "you can be pleasant once in a while, can't you?"

Johnson smiled feebly. Already he had gained a wholesome respect for this young man who was proving himself a thorough seaman. But the habits of a pessimistic lifetime could not be downed so easily.

"Careful!" he warned, sagely wagging his grizzled head, "you'll be losing your tow during the night if you try to push things."

"Oh, I'll play safe. We could snake that tug along without noticing it, but I'll be satisfied with a conservative nine knots." He grinned behind his hand.

"Conservative nine knots!" gasped Johnson. "Good Lord!"

"Sure," said Martin. "But you don't have to believe all you hear. You can take the bridge now. I'm going below."

In the spare stateroom he was occupying, Martin removed his wet clothing, rubbed himself to a glow with the Turkish towel he carried in his suit case, then dressed.

"Lucky I jammed some spare clothes in the grip," he thought. "I wasn't figuring on going swimming at this time of the year." To his surprise he found that, despite its wetting in salt water, his watch still ran. The time lacked twenty minutes for the supper bell to ring, but he decided to go below and have the steward bring him whatever food might be ready. First, however, he stepped into the wireless room.

"Feel any better?" he inquired kindly.

"Not a bit, thank you," replied the youth, endeavoring to smile. "Want to send a message?"

"Yes, if you can get up."

"Sure, I can."

"We picked up the operator of the *White Bear*, after his cabin got washed overboard. I think he'll be able to relieve you to-morrow. Then I'll get you down to a warmer room."

"Thank you, sir." Harden had seated himself at the table, prepared to send Martin's message.

"All right. I'll look in later and see how you're getting along. Want anything from the steward? How about some graveyard stew?"

"What's that?"

"Milk toast—with condensed milk," grinned Martin, stepping out on deck again.

Without oilskins, unmindful of the buffeting wind and rain, he paused before the dining-room companionway for a prolonged look astern at the bobbing, rain-veiled lights of the tug. Then, smiling with satisfaction, he went below.

At ten o'clock that night, as he stood on the bridge, his body balancing to the heave of the seas, he was surprised at discovering the sick wireless operator approaching. Harden, muffled in a heavy overcoat, stood clinging to the rail with one hand.

"Message for you, sir," he said, passing over a slip of paper.

"Thank you, Harden. But you've got no business getting out in this blast. You might get worse."

"It's the answer from Mr. Page, and I thought you might be anxious to receive it. I'll hustle back to my room."

Martin unfolded the paper, and read the message by the dim light of the binnacle.

"At the present time anything I have is yours, but I warn you to keep out of my reach if you fail to bring *White Bear* into S. F. Play it safe and sure."  
ELWOOD PAGE."

Smiling, Martin turned to Captain Johnson, and remarked:

"Well, I guess the port captain's job is cinched for you. I'm going to turn in until midnight. The bridge is yours till then."

"Very good!" said the other. "I'll be keeping both eyes astern as well as ahead."

On the deck below as he turned into the alleyway Martin bumped into Harden.

"Hello, Sparks!" he laughed, reaching out

a steady hand to keep the other from falling. "You seem stuck on getting your fill of fresh air to-night."

"Another message, sir." And with that Harden collapsed.

Martin placed the paper between his teeth, picked up the unconscious man, and carried him down to the dining room. The steward's room opened off of this, and Martin rapped loudly on the door. It opened almost immediately.

"Hello, Rochelle. I want you to keep this young man in the spare berth in your room. Nurse him the best you can. He's pretty weak, and fainted from overexertion."

"Very good, sir, I'll take care of him."

"Fine, Rochelle; I leave it to you."

Momentarily dropping into a dining chair, Martin read the second message:

"Hurrah for you. Father is tickled pink. So am I."  
DOROTHY PAGE."

To Martin's mind came a vision of a refreshingly wholesome sapphire-eyed girl of twenty-four. He remembered how she had dragged him off to dinner with her father and herself after the arrival of the *Donegal* from her supposed trip to the port of missing ships. Twice since had he seen her, and neither time had been of his choosing. The fact that she was the daughter of his employer made him wish to avoid her, for she was dangerously fair, and Martin's blood ran red.

"Confound the girl!" he burst out. "Why in Halifax is she butting in again?" Thereupon, endeavoring to imagine himself a much-abused young man, he strode angrily to his room, removed only his borrowed sea boots and oilskins, and threw himself on the berth for a needed rest.

Struck by a sudden disquieting thought, he spoke through the tube to the engine room.

"When Frenchy comes on duty tell him to speak to me."

"All right, sir," replied the first assistant, and then, because he liked nothing better than an excuse to root his martinet chief from his warm bunk, raised the mouth of another tube to his lips and put all the power of his lungs behind it.

"What's wrong now?" came a grouchy, sleepy voice.

"The skipper wants to chin with you—immediately."

"What's your hurry?" inquired Martin, as the chief appeared.

"Didn't you want me in a hurry?"

"Sure!" grinned Martin, protecting the mischievous assistant. "You said you had plenty of oil. But were you reckoning on being delayed by a tow?"

"Hell, no! Not if you baby her along this way. I've got oil enough to get us to San Francisco without a tow. It's plenty. I was figuring on the gale delaying us, too—a good margin. We usually make it in something over sixty hours."

"Huh! Five days supply. The gale will blow out in a few hours, but if the sea doesn't moderate at a scandalous rate we'll be about six days reaching San Francisco. There's something to chew on. Think it over. Go easy on the fuel; give me enough steam for five knots during the night, and to-morrow I'll talk it over with you. I'll find a way out."

#### IV.

Daylight found the steamer humping south in a windless but white and lumpy sea. Huge towering swells continued to roll up from the south; after hammering at the bulk of the deep-laden cargo vessel they passed on to pound at the *White Bear*—harmlessly.

By nightfall the seas had moderated to a considerable extent and the steamer was making better progress, jerking the small tug along at a round nine knots. A brief conference with the engineer, and Martin's hopes picked up.

But they were dashed again the next morning by Captain Johnson, who climbed to the bridge with the pleasing announcement that the glass had fallen a tenth of a point within two hours.

"It'll be blowing up again to-night," he asserted. "The chief says we'd better put into Eureka."

"Humboldt! With another southerly festivity on the way? That bar will be boiling white when we reach it. Not a chance there. I'm keeping on my way. I'll put the situation up to Page."

"How will you reach him? Harden is too sick to leave his berth in the steward's room."

"Oh, that's all right. Why do you suppose I went to all that trouble to rescue the *White Bear's* operator?"

"Phwee-ee-ee!" sounded the speaking tube, before Johnson could reply.

Martin lifted it. He heard Frenchy's voice.

"Hello, Captain Martin? I just found that one of the oil gauges is jiggered up—probably from the heavy rolling. It says the tank is empty, and we'd switched off to feed from another one. But I sounded the tank, and there's several hundred gallons left."

"Fine! That assures us getting to Frisco, doesn't it?"

"I can't guarantee that, if another twister blows up. If Humboldt bar is too nasty, how about pulling into the kelp anchorage down the coast where we shipped the spare propeller on the *Donegal*? We might be able to clear the tug's screw."

"What good would that do us? It would complicate the salvage problem to a fare-ye-well. Old White will ring in fine shades in technicalities, claiming we never reached port with his vessel. I don't want pay for a mere tow job."

"*Why not leave her there?* Her wireless is gone, she has no small boat, the coast is damnably isolated, all vessels passing will be far at sea to round Cape Mendocino. Without a tow we could reach San Francisco. We could refill the tanks and come back after her. Or wireless to Page and let him send another steamer to meet us in the kelp to pick up the tug."

"Not a bad idea at that. Grin, Frenchy, grin! It's some technical situation, believe me."

A little later, Martin conferred with Billings, the *White Bear's* wireless man.

"Want to earn your passage?" he inquired.

"Maybe," answered Billings, his red-rimmed, furtive eyes meeting Martin's momentarily. "Whatcha want?"

"Our operator is sick. I want you to send out a few messages."

"Sure," said the other. "Glad to be of any use."

Accompanying Billings to the radio cabin, Martin wrote out a long report to Elwood Page, passed it over to the operator, then returned to the bridge. Shortly afterward he heard the clatter of the wireless as the message went out. Fifteen minutes later he again heard the staccato crashes of the sending instruments. Struck by sudden suspicion he hastened back to Billings.

"What are you sending out now?" he demanded.

"They asked for a repeat," was the sullen reply. "Some one else cut in with the same wave length."



"Oh!" said Martin. "But this message seemed longer than the first one."

"Same length!" was the short answer. "Couldn't you read it?"

"It's all Greek to me." Martin turned away.

When he read the answer from Elwood Page, Martin swore luridly, and called Frenchy on the tube.

"Can you make Tomales Bay?" he inquired.

"Maybe. Why?"

"Page sat all over the kelp-bed idea. Says we have to make Tomales Bay and meet the *Donegal* there. She'll supply us with a little oil and take the *White Bear* in tow."

"We can make it—if you'll be satisfied with less speed. We can go twice as far on the same amount of fuel if you let me nurse her along."

"Fine! How much can we do?"

"I'll guarantee to make it at three knots."

"Three knots!" howled Martin. "Jumping catfish, man! Do you think I'm running a Market Street horse car? I suppose I'll have to be satisfied, but, by the missing chimneys of Jerusalem! I'll nail your tough hide to the deckload if we don't make Tomales."

Frenchy only laughed.

On the morning of the second day following, Martin paced the bridge, occasionally glancing to port over a foreground of sunless, heaving, racing white and green seas to where the gray outline of the coast was visible. The gale, when it had blown up again, had shifted around to south by east; therefore Martin had ventured nearer the shore. The wind was still gradually hauling to the eastward, and each point bettered the situation.

In his mind he was comparatively easy, for hill-sheltered Tomales Bay lay, at their present rate of steaming, less than five hours ahead. And they were already feeling the screening effect of the jutting promontory of Point Reyes, which lay to the southward of Tomales Bay.

His pleasant frame of mind was interrupted by the steward.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but Mr. Harden says it is very necessary that you come to see him at once."

"Thank you, Rochelle. I'll come right down."

The ill wireless operator occupied the lower berth in the steward's room. At Mar-

tin's approach he arose on one elbow and blurted out:

"Say, there's some dirty double-crossing work going on! I want to know a few things. Have you sent any reports to Mr. Page in the last two days?"

"Why, yes, what about them?"

"And have you sent any messages to the White Towing Company of Hoquiam?" continued the excited youth.

"Nary a one. Why?"

"Then you're getting razooed royally. The wireless room is directly above here, and I can hear his spark every time this bird sends out anything. He hasn't sent a message to Page since the first one about the kelp bed. And he's been shouting bloody murder to Amos White ever since. White is chartering a steamer in San Francisco, and intends meeting you off Tomales Bay. The way I've got it doped out is that he'll hail the *White Bear* outside the three-mile limit and tell the captain to slip his towline. Then where'll you be? He can cut a link or something and swear the anchor chain broke. You can't prove it *didn't* break. Can you still claim salvage if you lose your tow?"

"Search me," said Martin, absently scratching his head. "But I'm not going to lose my tow. And it's hard to believe that Billings would show such little gratitude."

"Billings!" repeated Harden. "*Billings!* Why that's old White's pet nephew! Now do you believe me?"

"I guess I do, son. You can't look for anything but a double cross from any one of the White family. Golly, the *Donegal* must have passed us last night—on her way to the kelp."

"Yep. Billings sent your first message straight. Then he got a bright idea and changed Page's answer to you."

"Um-m! That's about the size of it," grunted Martin. "But they're going to get a run for their money."

Upon returning to the deck Martin's first action was to open the door of the radio office, reach inside for a firm grasp on the back of Billings' collar, and yank him through the doorway. Then he locked him in another room, and pocketed the key.

"Starboard your helm!" he shouted as he mounted to the bridge. "Get in the lee of Camel Point." The steamer swung to port, and began to wallow crazily in the trough as she worked her way inshore.

Camel Point, evidently named from its

physical resemblance to the neck of that animal, was a sore spot with coastwise mariners. No lighthouse was built there. Nor was there even a fog signal. And uncertain currents flowed with the tides around its seaward end. The latter, coupled with the lack of a fog signal, had been responsible for the steamer *Parama* piling on the reef just south of it. A wrecking steamer was engaged in salvaging the removable parts of the unfortunate *Parama*, but its work had been delayed by the gale. Instead of returning to port when the wind blew too hard, the salvage vessel simply slipped around the point and dropped anchor in the sheltered lee. Martin had seen it there less than half an hour before he changed the course.

As the *Dorothy Page* crept into the lee of the point, Martin gave orders to head to the northward. Captain Johnson thought him mentally deranged, and stated his views emphatically and plainly. But Martin smiled, fastened down a chart and began using a station pointer.

"Now," he explained, a little later, "we're just outside the three-mile limit. I'm going to give the crew of the *White Bear* a chance to abandon their vessel willfully on the high seas. I'll show White a point or two of maritime law."

Johnson gasped, then grinned speechlessly.

Martin turned away and ordered a careful distribution of oil on the seas, then took command of a lifeboat and pulled out to the *White Bear* as it drifted down from the windward position it had held for a short time.

"How are you off for grub?" he inquired genially.

The towboat captain grimaced. "Are you speaking of food? Real food?" he returned. "I don't believe you! For the last three days we've had nothing but potatoes, onions, and coffee, and last night we ran out of potatoes and coffee. So speak gently when you mention food."

"Nice hot dinner—pea soup, roast beef, pudding and fixings—waiting for all hands on the *Dorothy Page*," said Martin, guilefully, "that is, if you want to leave the tug."

"Leave the tug! Say, in one more day I'd be willing to leave *the earth* for a square meal."

"Come along then." He pulled up and allowed the eight men on the tug to leap down into the boat.

Hastening back to the *Dorothy Page* he left the hungry men in charge of the steward, then returned to the bridge. When the steamer was finally headed back toward the wrecking vessel, he called the engineer on the tube.

"Hello, Frenchy. Derelict astern. Abandoned on the high seas. Think you can run her engines? We're going to get the line off her propeller. There'll be a diver on the salvage steamer."

"I can run anything if I get the steam to do it with," was the chief's boast.

"Good! Get two men who savvy shoveling coal, and prepare to transfer to the *White Bear*. We're going to pull off a seven-year scandal."

## V.

Elwood Page was excited, very; also wrathful and perturbed, for, after several days of mysterious and alarming silence from the *Dorothy Page*, he had just received word that this steamer was passing in through the Golden Gate, towed by a Gray's Harbor tug, the *White Bear*.

"Demmit!" he cogitated, as calmly as possible under the circumstances, "young Martin bit off more than he could work his jaws on. There's something fishy somewhere, though."

With this somewhat ambiguous reflection in mind, he motored in haste to the waterfront and hired a gasoline launch from a certain Mr. Crowley. Upon rounding North Point in the motor boat he caught sight of the *White Bear* with the *Dorothy Page* in tow. The two vessels had just passed Meigg's wharf, inbound.

"Good gosh!" swore the old shipping man. "I couldn't believe it before! And the heck of it is that Amos White is again at the long end of the stick! Martin has lost his luck—and so have I. Demmit!" He pulled a silk handkerchief and mopped his brow.

A few minutes later the launch turned in a semicircle and came up from astern on the leeward side of the *White Bear*.

"Ah, there, Mr. Page," Martin hailed, sticking his grinning countenance through a missing pane in the pilot house of the tug, "as the French say, *wee gates!*"

The old man gasped, then assumed a poker face.

"You're a bit mixed," he stated severely. "Outside of that, what are you doing on this tug?"

"Oh, little odd jobs of captaining, mating, and deck-handing. I found this derelict adrift, abandoned, on the high seas. I thought she might come in handy in your business."

"She will," said Page, his face slipping into a grin as wide as Martin's. "But why worry ten years off my life? Why didn't you wireless?"

"Operator's sick. We've got another aboard, but he ain't reliable. Gee, now that I think of it, he's locked in a stateroom—and I have the key with me."

"How did you clear the propeller?"

"Easily. Got a diver from a wrecking steamer behind the lee of Camel Point. Only cost fifty bucks. By that time the *Dorothy* was just about ready to quit—oil all gone, and, as the tug had her bunkers over half full, I just reversed the situation. I might mention that I used a little gastronomic diplomacy in enticing away the crew of the tug—outside the three-mile limit. About all of this vessel that White will get in the salvage court is the clinkers out of the fires."

"Maybe. But all I want is justice. I want my hundred thousand back. That'll be the injury—from White's viewpoint. And I'll soak him fifty dollars extra to pay the diver's bill. That'll be the insult. He'll pretty near get laughed out of business."

"Say, young man, before I forget it, I have a dinner invitation to extend to you from a very charming and determined young woman, my daughter. Of course I'm the one who's supposed to be inviting you, but I'm giving you the straight facts—which I shouldn't. You're due to dine with us this evening."

*There will be another sea yarn of Jackson's in the October 7th POPULAR, called "The Flat-Footed Road."*

"Nothing doing," mumbled Martin, flushing. "Got another engagement."

"The heck you have! What is it?"

"Well, when the *Dorothy Page* ties up at the dock, I figure the edge of her deck-load will be about ten feet from the string-piece. Then I'm going to take this wireless operator from the *White Bear*—a guy I shouldn't have wasted my time rescuing—and stand him on the edge of the deck load. Then I'll tell him to jump his darndest for the dock. And to show you how fair I am, I'll give him all the help I can. I certainly will—with my foot."

Page laughed. "Young man," he asserted, "you evaded the question. And I'm telling you that you're only wasting your time in trying to sidestep this invitation. You've simply got to come, or I'll be in wrong. Dorothy will everlastingly blame me for not putting it strong enough. Won't you come to help me out?"

"Sure I will," promised Martin, "since you put it that way. But you'll have to let me swap berths with Captain Johnson. I want a regular job at sea."

"Trade with him twice if you want to," agreed the old man. "I'll live up to my word, for you certainly put a few fancy touches on bringing the *White Bear* to San Francisco."

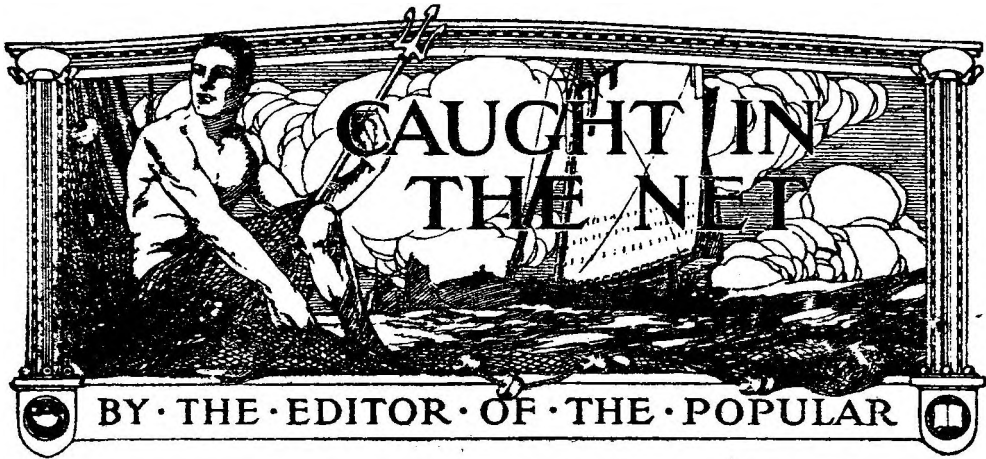
"I'm going to ask another favor," said Martin carelessly. "Make that dinner as early as possible."

"Changed your mind a little, eh?" smiled Page.

Martin wriggled uncomfortably. "Not a bit," he denied stoutly. "But I forgot to take any provisions along when I came aboard the *White Bear*, and gee! I'm hungry."

## TERHUNE AND LYNDE

These popular writers are giving us two rare stories in the next number of this magazine. Terhune presents Najib again in a funny one, entitled "On Strike," and Lynde opens with a novel of mining engineering, "The Girl, a Horse, and a Dog."



## BRAINS AND THE YARDSTICK

**S**EVERAL hundred mining engineers at a convention of their national organization in New York the other day discussed the subject of measuring brains in industry. The principal speaker, Major Robert M. Yerkes, chief of the division of psychology, medical department of the army, went into the possibility of applying to industry the methods of grading human intelligence used in weeding out the draft army.

Men who took these army tests were classified according to intelligence in the following percentages: very superior, five; superior, ten; high average, fifteen; average, twenty-five; low average, twenty; inferior, fifteen. The balance were graded as of very inferior intelligence, being below ten years in mental age.

Major Yerkes stated that forty-five per cent of the men examined were below average intelligence. Just what constitutes average intelligence should furnish topic for many a long wintry night in crossroads grocery, desert pumping station, or snowed-in cabin. We have known men with the wisdom of Solomon at draw-poker or hoss swappin'; outside of that they were imbeciles. Another fellow's brain may be a shellhole on the battlefield of knowledge and still flash forth in absolute genius at auditing books, laboratory research, or reform schemes.

Anybody who has read some of the published mental tests alleged to be employed by the army is apt to suspect that they were invented by a street faker with a sense of humor who had turned efficiency expert. They run like this: "If green is red in color make a cipher here — but if water is wet write your name in this space — then if two plus three equals seven . . ." et cetera.

While such tests may gauge alertness, mental sleight of hand is no standard of intelligence. The nimble brain may be cunning but the "git-thar" slow thinker is no slouch.

Psychological tests for selecting unfit workmen—and sensible tests—were long since worked out by James E. Lough, S. E. Thompson, and the late Hugo Munsterberg. Thompson, called in to choose among girls who inspected ball bearings to detect flaws, did the simple, natural thing—timed the girls individually and checked up their accuracy; thirty-five girls from then on did the work previously requiring one hundred and twenty.

Munsterberg went more into the mystic, used tests for ability, adaptability, natural resourcefulness, speed in attaining certain degrees of improvement, et cetera—but his psychological tests all were sensible and got results.

It is a long time since Taylor revolutionized the business world with his system of correcting faulty body motions and eliminating waste effort. From then on, bricklayers have carried more bricks to the hod and nails are driven with three strokes instead of from five to twelve. There are nine thousand three hundred and twenty-six occupations in American industry; no one set of tests will apply to all.

## WAGES AND HIGH PRICES

**B**USINESS men insist that prices cannot be lowered unless wages are cut—and point to the steel industry where it is claimed that the latest figures show labor constituting eighty-five per cent of the cost of finished steel; out of the remaining fifteen per cent comes payment for raw materials, taxes, and dividends.

The last census reported that for all American industries in 1899 labor constituted forty-nine per cent of cost in manufacturing, capital fifty-one. In 1909 the figures had been reversed. The proportion allotted to capital, however, does not mean clear profit—it covers raw materials, rent, freight bills, et cetera.

In flour and grist mill products labor received twenty-nine per cent against seventy-one for capital. In general shop construction and repairs by steam railroad companies labor found its highest recompense—ninety-six per cent of costs, only four going to capital. In the manufacture of sugar and molasses, not including beet sugar, labor's return was low—only thirty-one per cent; in meat packing, forty-two; in men's clothing, forty-nine. The average appears to split about fifty-fifty between labor and capital—until the war injected new conditions.

The steel industry in 1909—iron and steel, steelworks and rolling mills—apportioned fifty-seven per cent of the costs to labor in the form of wages; this has since advanced to eighty-five

Observe that capital makes no comparison between wages and *selling* price.

The problem resolves itself into this: "When I, a worker, buy anything, so many cents of each dollar I pay out go as wages to the worker who produced it. When that worker buys the products turned out by my hands, so many cents of each dollar he spends come to me in wages. We are exchanging wages—through the business heads. If the prices are cut, will there be less to divide among us as wages?"

## CRACKS IN THE LITTLE RED SCHOOLHOUSE

**T**HE "little red schoolhouse" of our fathers has long been idealized in the minds of the people. But under the microscope of the expert investigator and the scientific deducer of facts from certainties, it is losing its glamour. We now discern that in many cases it needs paint, that it is drafty and inadequate, that there has been a great deal of hot air about it, but little inside of it to keep the pupils warm or even comfortable in winter, and that its foundations are far from secure. Like the ox team and the old-fashioned plow, it was good enough in its time, but the world moves, and the country with it, and our educational system is much in need of up-to-date machinery.

The foregoing is all symbolical. The point is that there is a strong movement for a national department of education with a member of the cabinet as its head, to improve and standardize education throughout the country. Summarized, the contentions of the advocates of nationalization are that indifference, politics, bad laws, lack of funds and conflict of aims and authority make our educational system a poor vehicle for a pupil to get anywhere in, and that it should have been scrapped long ago. One of the tragic features is the under pay of teachers, the average being under six hundred dollars. Perhaps the most important of all our defects is the startling dissimilarity of standards the country over. The child born in Georgia is educationally handicapped as compared with the New York child, the country boy as compared with the city boy, the negro as compared with the white. The present bureau of education can do nothing to remedy this. What is wanted is national control that shall universalize, standardize, and subsidize our school system. But while the nation should control, coöperation, not dictation, is the aim sought.

National control should consist of encouraging, investigating, suggesting programs, acting as a clearing house of experience, keeping us in touch with foreign systems and experiments, and making possible the exchange of teachers between States and countries. The recently announced plan of exchanging college professors with Sweden instead of with Germany, as formerly, is an illustration of what private initiative can do, but exchanges with many other nations could be more intelligently directed by a department at Wash-

ington. It is proposed that a permanent educational board, representative of every State, shall be created, to have associated with it a certain number of eminent specialists at large.

Physical training has been largely neglected, as the record of examinations for the army shows, but more important, in the eyes of many critics, is the lack of æsthetic training. A few enlightened cities, like Cleveland and Indianapolis, have brought about the coöperation of art museums with schools. This idea should be nationalized.

## MUSIC IN MEDICINE

**A**LL of us have responded to the powerful influence of music at one time or another as it moved our feet, swayed our bodies, stirred our blood, or woke in us æsthetic ecstasies of imaginary joy or sorrow. But in all probability the possible medicinal value of music has not come to our attention. It is practically a new thing, although for several years now authorities on nervous diseases have recognized the curative potency of music on certain forms of insanity, and a great deal of experimentation is under way to ascertain and determine the therapeutic action on diseases in general.

One of the American pioneer practitioners of this healing of sweet sounds is Mrs. Isa Maud Ilsen, who is occupant of the chair of musico-therapy at Columbia University, and who had a big opportunity to practice the principles of her art on many of our sick and wounded soldier boys. She was enlisted under the American Red Cross and her official title was Director of Hospital Music in Reconstruction Hospitals.

Success attended her unique ministrations. In conjunction with the work of the medicos, she treated musically such ailments as insomnia, hysteria, shell shock, neurasthenia, tuberculosis, rheumatism, and dyspepsia. It is interesting to learn what her musical prescriptions were, and we have selected a few of them for your enlightening.

In cases of insomnia Raff's "Spinning Maiden," Schubert's "Serenade," and Schutt's "Reverie" were found useful. The Barcarole from "Tales of Hoffmann," "To a Wild Rose," by MacDowell, and the first movement of Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" were excellent in hysteria. Shell shock was treated with Rubinstein's "Melody in F," the Meditation from "Thais," the Mendelssohn "Spring Song," and the Lullaby from "Jocelyn." Rheumatism was treated with Bach's "Toccatà" and some of the sonata rondos of Beethoven. The following selections were given in digestive troubles: "Invitation to the Waltz," by Von Weber; "Tambourin Chinois," by Kreisler; Prelude in C Sharp Minor, by Rachmaninoff; the Hungarian Dances of Brahms; Mazurka in A Minor, by Chopin, and the "March Grottesque," by Sinding.

To this we feel compelled to add our personal testimony. Once the writer remembers playing the piano for ten hours—stopping only for quick meals—to a patient dying of malignant cancer, the sufferer declaring that the music was more of an anodyne than the morphine administered.

Not more than a year ago Doctor Ernest Zueblin, associate professor of medicine in the University of Cincinnati, pointed out that a musical training would be found very valuable to the practicing physician in the objective signs of disease, which are closely related to acoustic phenomena, pointing out that the quality and tonality of sounds produced within the lungs, the heart, and the abdominal regions called for the finest perceptions of the ear. "For the students in medicine," said the professor, "a short course in the elements of music would mean a decided advantage just for the proper understanding of the sounds listened to in physical diagnosis."

It would not be surprising, therefore, if medicine and music went hand in hand in the new era of preventative therapeutics.

## THE PRICE OF MEAT

**A**PECULIARITY of American news is that nearly all big stories are dropped just as they begin to get interesting. A case in mind is the recent investigation of the packing industry. Like most investigations on the part of Congress, it died away into thin air, leaving in its trail a confusing mass of statistics—fairly well balanced so that figures are on hand to contradict any objectionable ones that happen to be poked from the ashes.

American meat production in 1918 was twenty-three billion three hundred and sixty-six million pounds, an increase over the previous year of twenty-four per cent. and five billion pounds more than in 1900. Shipments abroad did not create a shortage; despite war-time restrictions, according to the department of agriculture, we ate per capita seven-tue per cent more meat than the year before. Present high prices, therefore, are hardly due to shortage of supply.

The packers were limited to a nine per cent profit by the food administration. This is far from exorbitant, as remuneration goes in the business world. Furthermore, the packing-house heads maintain, the profit comes mainly from by-products.

In the manipulating of stock, however, the packing trade is far from paralysis. One outfit, capitalized at seventy-five millions and with a surplus of sixty-six millions, in 1916 jumped its capitalization to one hundred millions, declared a thirty-three and one-third per cent dividend from surplus, with right of stockholders to subscribe to the new stock at par. This process of giving new dividend-paying stock to stockholders was repeated two years later.

Still another packer set forth that stock raisers on the farms and ranches are making twenty-five per cent and cited a personal enterprise that yielded as high as eighty-seven per cent, growing cattle and hogs.

The investigation disclosed little else, the balance being red-white-and-blue oratorical spasms for the benefit of readers back home. Should you disagree with the figures quoted, the records of the investigating committee offer contradictory statistics that will knock them cold.

"So you're the official muskrat catcher?" repeated the man who came upon a shifty character sitting beside a stream. "There goes one! Why didn't you shoot it?"

"If I shoot 'em," drawled the muskrat catcher, "there wouldn't be any job left."



## POPULAR TOPICS

**W**ITH the familiar threat that prices will go higher, not lower, and with evidences all about us that such is the tendency, it behooves us to employ every ingenuity to ferret out the causes, real or artificial. One of the best schemes to squelch the profiteer comes from Canada where a price tribunal was proposed, the duty of that body being to investigate and combat all combinations aimed at monopoly of goods or trade, and with drastic powers to punish malefactors.



**W**E are warned of coal shortage which is to be "the greatest in history." It is predicted that at the present rate of production it will be necessary for one in every eight industrial plants to shut down next winter for lack of fuel. That would be a national calamity. We hope it won't be so. But for the first twenty-four weeks of 1919 the production of bituminous coal was 65,000,000 tons short of what it should be to meet the national requirements of 530,000,000 tons. Various reasons are given for the failure of the mines to yield the necessary amount, the emigration of alien workmen being preëminent. But we wonder if the real reason has been given. Can it be inefficiency of boasted American methods? Or can it be the getting of as much or more money for an under supply of this necessity? Who knows?



**T**HESE reflections bring to mind again the crying need for developed water power, not only in our own country but in other lands. Sweden and Norway are forging ahead in this great enterprise, and Italy is trying her best in that direction. Water-power development will be a godsend to Italy where coal is at the highest premium. In two manufacturing cities, Milan and Turin, already there is considerable use of hydroelectric energy, and there is a project to electrify four thousand miles of railway by harnessing the



Trentino waterfalls. That will be the largest achievement of its kind in the world. Meanwhile Congress is satisfied to keep our water-power bill sidetracked, a course pursued for the past year.



**T**HE Adirondack Mountain Silver Black Fox Ranch is an interesting and unique business of New York State. Ten pairs of foxes comprised the original stock, which cost forty thousand dollars. The animals now number fifty-five. Their playground takes in two hundred and fourteen acres. It is an aristocratic colony. What they eat gives us an indication of their exclusive rearing. The menu is fish, beef, veal, liver, broth, bread, cabbage, potatoes, carrots, milk, eggs, rolled oats, rice, raisins, and berries.



**L**ENSES specially designed for photography from the air are beginning to be one of the most important manufactures of Nottingham, England, hitherto famous for its lace curtains. The new industry was started as a war measure, but it now bids to be a chief peace product. The lenses are said to be better than those formerly made in Germany.



**A**ND off the coast of what was formerly German Southwest Africa a live company is dredging for diamonds. A mine is thought to exist under the sea between Possession Island and Pomona. We have had pearls and gold from the bottom of the sea, but diamonds are something brand-new from Neptune's locker.



**B**IDS have been asked for on the rebuilding of some of the cities in northern France and Belgium. As we go to press it is rumored that one of the American steel companies has signed a contract to rebuild the war-destroyed areas of Nancy, the cost involving something between \$250,000,000 and \$500,000,000. There are certainly gigantic jobs ahead for the constructive Yankees.



**V**ERSAILLES, where the Peace Treaty was signed, is one of the storied spots of history. It was here that Great Britain first recognized the independence of the United States. It was here that the Third Estate formed a national assembly which resulted in the French Revolution. It was here that William I. was crowned emperor of Germany. It was here that the League of Nations was born. The palace is magnificent and spacious. Ten thousand persons could be housed in it.



**T**HE indictment brought against Japan by the United Asiatic Society for her treatment of Korea is something to be reckoned with. This manifesto was issued by Chinese and Koreans in America. Some of the charges are:

There is no law for Koreans except martial law. Death or torture is the certain reward of patriotism. Trial by jury has been withheld. No permit is given to a citizen of Korea to study in the Western nations; and if he returns after study, constant watch is placed on him.

Korean education is limited to the very elementary and material kind. Our language is absolutely forbidden in Korean schools. No college exists in Korea. Foreign mission institutions have been crippled and curtailed.

Korean religion has been almost stamped out.

Publications are not permitted to be circulated in Korea, so that her people are deprived of the means of common understanding and common purpose.

Koreans are not allowed to assemble and talk together in their own language.

Japan oversees all mail and cable communications.

Native women are not safe in Korea, and death may result for a son of that land who would defend his sister against Japanese outrages.

# Breath of the Devil

By Howard Fielding

Author of "Plot of Number Eleven," "Bill Harris," Etc.

## SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

The elder Werner, one of the founders of the Holbach-Werner Company, chemists, invents a deadly gas which he calls neo- eserine, and he dies just before the outbreak of the Great War, so that it is uncertain whether, had he remained alive, he would have communicated the secret to his native country, Germany, or used the invention as any American chemist would have done. His son, Edmund Werner, succeeds to the business, and Karl Holbach, nephew of the other founder, inherits a share. The two are very friendly, Holbach even occupying bachelor's quarters in the Werner home in West End Avenue. A next-door neighbor is Mrs. Bayne, who is visited by two cousins, an American named Kenyon who had married a Belgian woman, and his daughter Alma, a beautiful auburn-haired girl. Holbach and Werner both fall in love with Alma. Holbach steals the secret formula of neo- eserine from Werner and determines to sell it to the German government in 1915, but will not do so if in any way his chances of winning Alma are jeopardized. Then he hears that the Germans have in some manner got information of how to make the chemical. The British government, meantime, opens negotiations, and as Werner is disinclined to go to England, Holbach volunteers to go, and the steamer on which he sails is torpedoed. He is selected by the Germans for special consideration, being known to them through his negotiations with their agents. When he refuses full information about neo- eserine, he is made to serve on another submarine, after vainly trying to escape. He has many terrible adventures, and finally escapes from a U-boat off the American coast, and assumes the identity of Gus Westcott, an American sailor on a fishing boat that has been torpedoed. He haunts the vicinity of the West End Avenue home, learns that Alma is now Mrs. Werner, and when she sees a forlorn sailor outside, she sends the maid to invite him in. He enters the house, is not recognized, and spends several days there, plotting the death of Alma as a revenge upon Edmund Werner.

## (A Two-Part Story—Part Two)

### CHAPTER VI.

MR. HOLBACH TURNS THE LAUGH.

MIRIAM returned alone, to tell him that a place where he might rest would soon be ready. His mind was instantly turned to conjecture as to where that place might be, and he heard imperfectly the most of what she said, otherwise he would have inferred that Alma had come back, and was herself attending to the preparations. He was off his guard, therefore, when he followed Miriam's guidance whither he could have found his own way with closed eyes.

He had guessed the destination, a room that had been the valet's. No such servant being employed in war time, it stood unoccupied, opening off a short passage at whose end was the door of Holbach's former apartments. Thus the designs with which the

major portion of his thought was continuously busy would be well served.

So confidently had he pictured his old rooms as closed that he was startled by a sudden view through their open door, as he turned his eyes that way at the angle of the hall. He saw broadly across the sitting room, dim with drawn curtains and lighted chiefly from the bedchamber beyond, where electric lamps were shining.

Steadier observation tended strongly to reassure him, for all was unchanged, and the place plainly declared itself tenantless, as if it had been opened for the present occasion merely. Accommodations so elaborate would hardly be offered to so poor a guest, yet some small thing might have been needed. Certainly his personal belongings were still kept in these rooms, no matter what use might have been made of them; the closed desk answered exactly to his recollection; and though the unimportant papers

which it had contained might have been scanned and assembled into packets, it was unlikely that anything had been taken away. The trifling contents of the little drawer would have been especially safe.

Miriam had stopped at the valet's door, indicating that he should enter. He passed in, crossed to the neat bed, and turned toward where he thought the maid would be standing, having followed him. Instead he faced Alma, barely at arm's length in the small space.

It was a simple, ordinary occurrence, but cruelly sharp. To this murder-haunted wretch it was not unlike the apparition of his victim, after the deed; and he experienced, besides, that hideous phenomenon of jealousy, the sensation of a bursting shock within the brain, shattering the visual mechanism. He saw Alma in a hundred fragmentary, dazzling images, as through a broken lens.

What Alma saw was only a man affected by nervous exhaustion, like so many others in her recent experience, who had been startled by the sudden sight of her, and who now sat down, weakly but naturally enough, on the edge of the bed. She spoke to him with the simplest words of kindness, touching upon his state of health as lightly as possible and with cheery suggestion and good will in its plainest dress for every day.

He gathered the sense of what she said sufficiently to discern the point toward which his reply must be directed, but for the most part her voice was a mockery of old echoes once his consolation in profound depths when for their sake alone he clung to life, but now thrilling with anguish and intolerable resentment every un nourished nerve of his starved body.

"I thought, perhaps, you'd like a warm bath before you sleep," he heard her say, "so I've prepared one for you in the room beyond. You'll find everything you need, I think. Then you may rest here as long as you like. No one will disturb you till morning."

He knew now why his old rooms were open, and was satisfied as to that. The key and the pen would be found here. He must invent an explanation of his early departure from the house, and this must seem reasonable to Alma's mind to-night, and remain clear in that of the maid to-morrow.

"I thank you," he said, "but it's only a

few hours that I can rest. I've got to go aboard my ship at ten o'clock. She's sailing to-night."

In the present scarcity of seamen it was conceivable that even such a one as this might be taken on a ship, with the hope of his services on the return voyage but Alma could not see it as humane.

"I think you'd better not go," she said. "You'll be much more comfortable here. We can send word to the vessel. Suppose we see what my physician says about it, after you've had a little rest?"

Holbach hastened to build up his story. He was not going as a sailor.

"They're taking me home," he said. "I got the chance through the ship's doctor that got away in the same boat with me, after we hit the mine. He's transferred to this other steamer, and she'll set me ashore in Halifax, when she puts in there. That's where my folks live."

If the man had a home, and a friendly physician to attend him on the way, it seemed best that he should go. Alma raised no further question, but promised, in response to his request, that he should be waked at eight.

This was well, but Holbach wished to leave no mysteries to be the subject of Alma's comment to-night, and of Miriam's thereafter. He told a story, not too definite, of having spent last night ashore at the home of friends, and of having found, this morning, that the ship had changed her berth. It had taken him the whole day to find out where she was.

"She's right down here," he said, pointing vaguely in the direction of the river where many ships were anchored, "but there's no chance to get aboard till ten. So I started back toward Broadway to find a place where I could get something to eat. Well, I got better food than I expected, thanks to you."

"I'm glad you liked it," Alma responded, "and I hope you'll enjoy your rest."

"And the same to you, Mrs. Werner," Holbach said, "when it comes time for you to sleep."

He watched her from under his brows as she left the room. Her looks were very bright, he fancied; and she seemed in haste. Sounds which had reached him in the last few moments—doubtless misinterpreted through jealousy—made him believe that Edmund had returned, and that Alma was hurrying to meet him. As to what that

meant to Holbach, who dares conjecture, in a rational state? Jealousy has no quantitative relation to its cause, and no known limitations. Whatever a particular individual has endured therefrom is only a mark of degree on a scale that has no top. Believe all that your mind has retained from experience, and as much more as any extravagance of language can convey, and you will still have only an imperfect conception, tending perhaps toward the ridiculous. Others will have suffered more than you imagine, and neither they nor you can measure the torture while it lasts, or accurately remember it afterward.

Different natures react to this passion in different ways. Holbach was one of those who are affected by an intolerable sense of injustice, and are unable to conceive of relief except through monstrous acts of retaliation. They do not yield, and die by their own hands to escape from pain.

It is usual that they are blind to some particular aspect of the case or chance of error on their own part. The perfectly plain possibility that Edmund and Alma had believed him to be dead—not on rumor but a definite report—this, and their unquestionable right to marry under such conditions, despite any former obligation to himself, never once entered his mind. So far as he was concerned that phase of the subject did not exist.

He had begun to exaggerate the fortunate miracle of his escape, and his return at this exact time. This thought energized him; it aroused in distorted form those qualities which had baffled death and shone as virtues in the eyes of rude but brave companions. He had fairly won his game against Germany, and meanwhile a traitor at home had stolen the prize. What remained was to defeat that man, and destroy the fruits of his treachery. The loss of Alma was a weapon whose thrust he had felt; its point was in his own breast. He would wrench it out, and drive it into the heart of his adversary. The death of the woman was not an object but an incident of the conflict.

Holbach was one who believed in home and family, with a world outside, for the man. The home of his hopes was now impossible, even in a dream. Alma could never bear his children; nature below man's level teaches that, but some of us are slow to learn. Holbach was not numbered among the dull or the complaisant. He knew that he was mocked; he would turn the laugh

upon the mocker. The zest with which he undertook that task was heightened by the difficulty of the means he intended to employ; the hazard to his own life. From these causes came that look of eagerness in leash, of exultation embittered by malice and shining from deep within—the look which won my momentary interest in the Broadway barroom.

It was then a little after nine o'clock. Holbach had just left the Werner house, evading Alma's offer to send some one with him to the boat landing. He had seen Edmund for only a few moments at the head of the main stairway as Holbach was about to descend. Edmund had asked if he needed money; had apologized for neglecting him thus far, pleading haste while at home on account of an engagement which he must now keep. Holbach had refused the money; he had watched Edmund go to his room, and had thus learned which one he occupied as his own—at the rear of the house; formerly his father's. Doubtless, Alma had the suite at the front, remodeled at the time of the old chemist's second marriage. Holbach noted with satisfaction that the arrangements were those with which he was familiar.

In his pocket he had not only the key of the outer door, but several others which he had taken from the linen room. He had known where to look for these things; virtually all doors in the house were now open to him.

After a time, Holbach walked down to Riverside Drive, and sat on a bench till the bells struck for midnight on the warships anchored in the stream.

The front of the Werner house was almost dark when he came within view. A faint light shone from Alma's windows, and the stained glass in the scroll over the main portal was brighter than he had expected it to be. The result of opening that door must depend on luck; there was no way of seeing beyond it. An encounter would involve flight; perhaps not utter failure, but certainly a postponement almost equally difficult for his impatience to endure.

He walked to the end of the block and back again. Not a single wayfarer was in sight. Should he be forced to flee, the moment would be opportune. He hesitated; then took the chance and won, though by a margin very narrow. The door was barely closed behind him; he was not halfway to

the stairs, when a latch clicked beyond them, to the left and he saw a light flash across the tall clock that stood at the end of the hall. The great white face of it came out like the moon from which a storm cloud had been whirled away. That dial was photographed on Holbach's mind, and he need never hope to forget at what minute of the night he entered the house of his former habitation with his forehead free from the mark of Cain, for the last time.

The stairs shielded him, and he reached them in safety. Meanwhile he had heard Edmund speak from the threshold of a room that had once been his father's study, and afterward a secondary and more private living room for the family.

"The servants have gone to bed," he said. "I will get it for you."

From within the room, as the door closed, came a mere syllable of response so faintly audible to Holbach that he knew not whether he had heard or imagined Alma's voice. He saw Edmund for an instant, crossing the hall as if he might be going to the dining room for a glass of water, at Alma's request. Holbach went on to his goal without more adventure.

In his old rooms, some hours earlier, he had found not only the key and the pen that were the prime essentials of his design, but several other articles that were contributory. Among them were a quantity of surgical gauze, and an ounce of alcohol in a vial. These he had taken with him. And now, before entering the rooms for a second time, he moistened some of the gauze, and masked his mouth and nostrils. Small reliance could be placed on this protection against Devil's Breath, but it was better than nothing, and the present risk was extremely little.

From a window he looked down sidelong, and noted that the light still burned in the study, but there was no view of its interior, the shades being closely drawn. His own windows being even better covered he ventured to use a single electric bulb screened on the danger side with a bit of cardboard but open toward the point of his immediate interest, which was the grate.

Against a side of the chimney where the bricks were heated by the flue from the kitchen he had fastened the tube taken from the stylographic pen. This tube had been closed with a tiny ground-glass stopper threaded like a screw; but for purposes of

his own he had left it open during his absence. Now, with all possible caution, he fitted the stopper into its place; and presently he risked examining the tube holding it within the upward draft of the chimney, for as much as that might be worth by way of safety.

Evaporation of the very volatile liquid had been more speedy than he had expected. Less than half remained; and above its surface the glass within was delicately frosted with crystals of neo-eserine for a height of nearly an inch. Here was abundant death.

In his contemplated use of the tube he could not avoid wetting some of the crystals, but enough would remain dry to insure the desired activity. If it were held close, a single breath would suffice. He set the tube back against the bricks which were still warm; this would create a little pressure within, and contribute to the certainty of an instant success.

There was no more to do; Holbach stood watching the window of the study, waiting for the light to vanish. Except for those narrow strips of brightness at the curtain's edge, he saw almost nothing; it had fallen extremely dark, so that his room, now rayless, differed little from the general texture of the night. He began to be apprehensive of a thunderstorm which might arouse persons in the house, but as yet there were no mutterings from the clouds.

Why should Edmund and Alma sit so late in the study? It was past one; the bell in the tower of Holy Name had struck some while since. Imagined glimpses into the softly lighted room below haunted him unbidden; and the artist was his own unconscious craving for repose of mind and body, a reaction from the violence of his recent life and from his present physical distress. Wherefore the pictures that he saw might have been products of a very gentle fancy, delicately beautiful—the lovers sitting side by side, and hand in hand, idly content and spendthrifts of a golden hour, listening to each other's voices as to languorous music. Nothing could have been more terrible to endure than the peace and loveliness of these scenes, which he looked upon as stolen from his own life. The spirit of revenge was awake, standing apart from these dreams, and tallying them on the score that would soon be evened.

The thought came to Holbach that Edmund might be alone in the study; he had

sometimes worked late, reading up on chemical publications. Alma might have retired long ago, leaving her husband to sit with his books till dawn perhaps. Such a situation would involve additional risk, but not the abandonment of Holbach's purpose. While Edmund was in the study the way out of the house was clear. Nothing was to be feared but meeting him in the hall or on the stairs; he would go to his own room when his work was done; he would not wake Alma so late.

The dark hours were wearing away; dawn would come early at this season. It was essential to find out at once whether Edmund was alone; and Holbach knew no other way than to listen at the door of the study, dangerous as that would be. He was armed; at the worst he could shoot the thief who had robbed him.

He descended by the servants' stairs, moving cautiously in what seemed to him an unexampled darkness, until he reached the dining room into which, at the opposite side, there shone a little light from the hall. Crossing, he was aware of small sounds from beyond. Two persons were speaking softly, at the head of the stairs, but he distinguished no words except, "good night" in Edmund's voice. The tone seemed cold.

Edmund walked toward his own room, and Holbach heard the sound of two doors opened almost simultaneously—distinct in the quiet house. Then Edmund spoke again a single word, "Alma." There was no response. The door at the front of the hall was heard to close. A moment later Edmund entered his room and shut the door.

Holbach retraced his steps. In his own rooms again, he turned on the shaded light and noted the time by his watch. It lacked twenty minutes of two. He waited an hour filled with whirling, fragmentary thoughts in the midst of which a single idea remained fixed, like the smoldering gaze of a man who stares at his enemy while himself restrained by the hands of others.

When he left the room all trace of his presence had been obliterated. The key and the pen were in the drawer as before. He carried the little tube, tightly closed. His nostrils and mouth were shielded more carefully than before; he breathed with difficulty, and was in great fear of coughing.

He had a bit of wire with which to turn Alma's key to a position where it could be pushed out, making possible the use of one

that he had brought, but he found the door unlocked. After momentary doubt his instinct for perfection impelled him to restore the key for which he had now no use, to its place in the linen room. He was satisfied now; there would be absolutely nothing to show the presence of an intruder. Returning, he softly entered Alma's sitting room.

Blinds were closed at the windows now, to exclude the glare of a street lamp near the house. Needles of light penetrated here and there, but they revealed little except their own presence in the gloom. Holbach felt his way to the broad door of the bedroom, and stared at mere blackness; not even the white covering of the bed was visible. He knew where the bed stood, however, and he crept toward it, till, without warning, his forehead touched a hand. It passed lightly across his hair; he heard a sigh, and a slight movement of the sleeping woman, as the hand was withdrawn to rest upon the covers.

He let his body sink down till it lay along the floor. He seemed to be lying on his heart which struggled to be free. Those pulsations knocked loud enough to waken Alma, if she still slept, he thought—the sound of his heart; why not? No summons could be more to the purpose, but it went unheeded.

Holbach rose to a kneeling posture; drew his breath as deeply as possible, several times, and then held it, for his life. With his hands extended toward the bed he opened the tube and released its deadly tenant to the air. He could not fail now. Should she wake, the inspiration which must precede a cry would still the voice before it could find utterance. Indeed, that was what took place, for in the darkness he touched her throat more rudely than he had expected, and his arm felt the quick rising of her breast—suddenly arrested; then, a sinking of the body into an infinite repose.

That sudden lifting of her body with a breath had nearly caused the tube to fall from his hand, but he recovered his hold upon it and deftly shut the little door upon the demon that had served him. Then he wrapped it in wet gauze, and thrust it thus into a wide-mouthed vial which he had in readiness, and quickly corked.

In doing these things he again encountered her hand that had fallen outward from the bed, but now there was no answering movement. No pulse throbbed in the wrist.

He would have wished to lay his head on her breast to listen for a heartbeat, but he feared the vapor, and lay close to the floor, pressing the mask against his lips. Again, after long minutes of torment from which remorse and natural horror of himself were not absent, he laid his fingers on her wrist. Then, for the first time in his life, he knew what it was to fear the dead; and he sprang up, and staggered from the room.

The delusion of pursuit was somewhat less when he had closed the door, but on the stairs he was so haunted by it that his judgment was unsettled altogether. When he emerged into the hushed and threatening night he did not know whether his proper senses had given him warning of a human presence, or he had fled from a ghost. It seemed that the house door would be instantly opened behind him; and he crouched on the steps, shielding himself in shadow beyond the turn of the stone balustrade.

Between the short pillars he could see upward to that window where Alma had appeared to him, that afternoon. It hardly surprised him that she should be there again.

The room was dark behind her; the oblique rays from the electric street lamp made a dazzle on the glass. But for a few moments Alma's face was quite distinct. Her robe seemed rose-tinted; her throat gleamed like marble. Then, even as in his dreams, she slowly receded; she was gone. He clutched the stone railing, drew himself erect, and fled.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A LITTLE JOURNEY WITH THE FURIES.

Holbach's private oracle of Delphi—in other words the partial foresight which the gods have given to mortals in a spirit of mockery—had warned him that he might reach his home only to turn again and flee. He had read the scroll as if the reference were to traffic with the enemies of his country; and the fates had chuckled to see him thus deceived while they held in leash the furies that would pursue him crying, "Murderer!"

Except for the uncertainty as to what was known in America as to Devil's Breath, he would have resumed in Boston the externals of his former condition in life, and would have come to his home without disguise. Had he done this, the crime with which he had now burdened his soul would have been

impossible, or wholly different in manner of execution. Thus a false fear had prepared him to incur a real and deadly peril; but upon the other hand certain precautions which he had been led to take were now of value as assets of self-preservation.

With all possible care to avoid leaving clues he had bought a change of apparel in Boston, and a bag which upon arriving in New York he had checked at the station. The parcel room might not be open at four in the morning, and in any case to reclaim the bag at such an hour would be too conspicuous. He waited therefore till seven o'clock, spending the time on a bench in Central Park, sleeping fitfully from sheer exhaustion, and waking to fantastic terrors which he quelled with such remnants of strength as could be levied in his mind by the final summons that calls every possible defender however feeble. In the end he reached that state in which all decisions seem to be made by somebody else, and the worn-out body attains a kind of ease through relief from the contrary stresses of control by reason, and there is nothing involved in any act except the doing. Simplicity of behavior is the natural result, and this was abetted by luck to protect him from such incidents as might have stamped his image on the minds of persons with whom he came into necessary contact.

He crossed the Lackawanna ferry and took a local train to Inverness, a town with which he was familiar. There, in the dense wood beyond the golf links, he washed his face and hands in the brook, shaved, and changed his clothes. Here was already a great alteration, but the real essence of it lay in the easy resumption of his natural bearing. Rough sailor ways so recently acquired vanished into the bag with the costume of the rôle; and when Holbach walked out from the opposite side of the wood he was more than superficially a different man.

He traveled westward and southward in an irregular course toward Galveston which was his destination. In three or four of the larger cities on the way he halted briefly, and he never went out from one of them in the same attire as he had worn on arrival.

Naturally he was a careful reader of the New York newspapers from the time when copies of the proper dates began to overtake him; but he found not one word relating to that subject which dwelt forever in his thoughts. A short item which would



have interested him was published in New York, on the next day after his departure, but perhaps it appeared only in city editions; or Holbach, looking for an extended notice, may have failed to see so small a thing.

The incomprehensible silence tortured him. He knew that Alma's death could not have escaped the attention of the press. Even though crime were not suspected there would have been news in the event. Alma's beauty, and romantic story; her war work overseas, and recent association with conspicuous local activities, her husband's prominence among chemists, all combined to make it unbelievable that her death should be ignored. Rather, it would seem, that all reports had been forbidden by the military censors; and this would never have been done unless the authorities were fully cognizant of the means employed, the same lethal agent now being used by the enemy in the field, the discovery of the late Friedrich Werner which had come mysteriously into the possession of the Germans.

"If this is true, it will cost Edmund his life," said Holbach to himself. "That is well."

He never seriously doubted that Alma was dead; the mere mirage seen at the window he disregarded. His memory held evidence entirely convincing. Rarely, now, could he touch anything lightly with the fingers of his right hand and not feel her wrist in which the pulse had ceased to beat. At night when he strove for vacancy of mind that he might sleep, her wrist cool and still would form itself under his hand. He learned to lie with his fingers clasped tightly above his breast, like those of a man who prays from a despairing soul.

After some days he came definitely to accept the belief that the cause of Alma's death had been detected, and that Edmund had been accused not only of the murder but of dealings with Germany in the material of gas warfare. As to any revelations concerning himself he attained a conviction of safety, after what he thought to be a process of dispassionate reasoning. He would dare to appear in New York at the proper time.

Obviously, however, he must resume his own identity somewhere in Europe, and pose as a prisoner escaped from Germany. This was not a new plan; it had been in his mind from the beginning of his flight. Arrived

in Galveston he assumed again the rôle of a sailor, and by a clever bit of lying, and a bold use of Westcott's documents, he succeeded in shipping as a seaman on a steamer bound for Sweden.

On the first day at sea, the wireless operator, who was from New York, opened a parcel and threw the wrapper over the rail, but it was blown back to the deck where Holbach picked it up—a recent copy of the *New York Times*, and he thought that it was one which he had not read. Being unemployed at the moment, he glanced over the pages until suddenly a name leaped out at him—Mrs. Edmund Werner. It was in the midst of an article about a disagreement among the directors of a war charity, and the words ran thus:

Mrs. Edmund Werner also resigned to-day, but she states that the quarrel in the board is not the cause of her action. She has not taken sides in the controversy. It is understood that the condition of her health necessitates her retirement from other war charities besides this.

The date of the paper informed Holbach that Alma had been alive on the third day after his attempt to kill her—if the item in question was true. He could not credit it; so far as he knew a recovery from poisoning with the vapor of neo-esterine was impossible. He suspected that the publication of this notice was a part of a trick to conceal her death from the public, but this conjecture merely led to innumerable others, and to an agonizing incertitude upon every point. Reason had nothing solid to take hold on, and it became very hard for him to exercise that control of primitive emotions which was the source of his strength.

What misery the man endured in the long voyage, hopelessly cut off from information, it would be futile to portray, for these are things that must be suffered to be known. His mind sought an answer to its grim problem as a caged beast tries with vain persistence to find an exit between the bars, measuring every space a thousand times. His sanity was preserved by the counterbalancing effect of daily gain in physical health. The buoyancy of spirit natural in convalescence supplied exactly the sustaining force required to stabilize the mind.

The voyage was without incident unusual in war time. At its end Holbach had gained twenty pounds in weight, and had approximated his old-time looks somewhat more closely than he would have wished. In

port, he successfully deserted the ship, and once more changed his status in the world. The use of a very little money sufficed to save him from annoyance in Sweden, and he had no serious difficulty in getting out of that country when he was ready to go.

It was now September; the war was on the wane, and the lines were visibly forming for the new struggle between socialism and the old order. The changed conditions bred new severities, yet permitted greater freedom of movement to a clever man. Holbach got into Holland where he lay low until the armistice was signed, when he appeared in his own person, as a prisoner who had walked out of Germany. Nobody took the trouble to investigate his story; he discovered easily enough that the American representatives were not interested to detain him, and that England would not stop him on the way home.

He cabled to Alma in care of Mrs. Bayne, because that would have been the natural thing to do, wording the message not as if he were a dead man just restored to life, but as if his captivity were known. Fearing trouble, he filed no dispatch to Edmund Werner. If necessary after reaching America, he could cover this omission with a lie, blaming the cable service; indeed, he doubted that the message really sent would ever get through.

For an intelligible answer he would willingly have paid the highest rate ever exacted on this earth, but he was not so foolish as to wait for it to come. An opportunity for direct passage to America suddenly presented itself; no man could say when there would be another, and Holbach seized the occasion. Once more he took the melancholy ocean for his counselor through weary days and nights; once more he moved among a small ship's company hiding in his breast a damnable secret whose essence was hidden from himself. Months had elapsed since his atrocious act, and he did not yet know what it was that he had really done.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### HOW HOLBACH HAD BUILT BETTER THAN HE KNEW.

It is necessary now to consider that part of the affair which was not known to Holbach, the events in New York subsequent to his departure, and the actual situation which he had created but had not yet seen.

This may best be done by following the course of my own relation to the case.

On the morning after the crime I left my lodgings at the usual hour, and took my regular route which made the distance to the subway station two blocks longer, but had the merit of permitting me to pass the Werner house. My beautiful lady rose early, as a rule, and might often be seen at the time of her husband's departure in his car, for business. On this occasion I was disappointed. The car was waiting, but the household seemed to be barely awake. There was no sign of anything amiss.

That night I was out of town. Returning on the following morning I was immediately summoned to the presence of my chief. Two American officers and one British, and little Joe Bates of the attorney general's staff were in the room. The chief spoke to me privately; and ignoring the business I had just completed, he plunged into another subject which commanded all my attention from the first word.

"You know Edmund Werner, the chemist?" he began.

"By sight," said I; "if it's the same person."

It was, to my surprise; for though I knew of the firm's existence, and vaguely of a chemist named Werner who had done some work for the government, my imagination had not pictured my young and light-hearted neighbor as engaged in scientific pursuits.

"There was a bare chance of your being acquainted with him," the chief proceeded; "you live so near. I hoped it might be so, for I want everything about him that I can get, and as soon as possible."

"He certainly looks all right," I remarked. "What seems to be the trouble?"

"Werner is in a mighty bad place," the chief said. "He doesn't seem to realize it as yet, though he may, at that. I'll admit that I don't see an inch into his game. To begin with, I can't prove to my own mind that he'd ever have been suspected, if he hadn't taken the trouble to inform me about it, formally and in the way of duty; and as agreeable while we talked as the weather this morning. And it's a shooting matter, my boy."

"Possibly he's honest," I suggested.

"Maybe so," said he. "I'm still hopeful, after thirty-nine years in the business."

He glanced toward the door. "Our friend is a few minutes early."

The chief was mistaken. Some one was at the door, but it was not Werner. Two men were admitted, an assistant district attorney named Jewett, and a stranger who looked as if he might be a witness under duress. Any other kind of witness, in those days, would have been a rare bird. This specimen was a dark-eyed man of thirty, thick-legged and somewhat weak in the chest; his countenance marked by broad, black eyebrows with a very white lane between, as if he shaved to keep them from meeting over his nose. He was expensively dressed, and possibly a lawyer.

Jewett brought him over, and introduced him, not by his full name and description, which was Martin Luther Lombard, of Lansing, Michigan. He has been mentioned earlier in this record as a man whom Mrs. Harriet Werner regarded with a sentimental interest.

The chief gave Jewett a sign which caused him to lead Lombard away. Privacy could not have been restored too quickly for my impatience, and I listened to my superior with more interest than he imagined.

"The Germans have been using a new gas," he said; "not very much of it, but it is awful stuff, and our chemists can't get any line on it. Late reports said they hadn't any idea what it is or how it's made.

"All information received on this side has been laid before certain chemists, Edmund Werner among them; and it has fallen to me to see Werner about the matter from time to time. A few days ago he called me by telephone, asking for an immediate interview; and I went up to his laboratory. He had just heard, from another chemist, that the new gas was called Breath of the Devil—or the equivalent in German. We have had a hazy report to that effect, but it meant nothing to us.

"It meant something to Werner, so he told me, and led him to suspect that his own father was the man who discovered the substance that the Germans are now using on our boys. But his father died before the World War broke out, and certainly he hadn't sold the secret to the German government—so Edmund says. It seems the old man was a pacifist, and what is more evidential, the discovery was never worked out to any practical end. His father had made no report of it to any chemical society or

journal; wasn't ready to do so. Edmund told me that he would have supposed no one now on earth, except himself, ever heard of Devil's Breath."

And the chief went on to tell me what it is, the vapor from a substance that had never existed till old man Werner made it, and was wholly unknown in chemistry. Edmund himself couldn't make it, and had forgotten almost all that his father had said to him about the process.

"The records and a little of the drug were in a locked box," the chief went on. "Edmund Werner put it away, directly after his father's death, and never thought of it again till this matter came up. Then he looked for it, and it was gone—stolen; he doesn't know when or how or by whom. It should have been safe, in ordinary circumstances, but anybody who knew what it was worth in war time might have got it.

"Who was wise? That's the question. A former partner, Karl Holbach, is the only person, so far as Werner knows, who ever heard of the stuff; and Holbach has been dead more than two years. He was drowned; submarined. So he's out of the question.

"Werner's theory is that his father, unknown to him, may have spoken of the secret to friends in the profession. With this idea in mind Werner looked through his father's papers, and telegraphed to his step-mother, who lived in Michigan, asking her to come here immediately and bring some letters that were in her possession—not written to herself, but to her late husband by various acquaintances.

"She lost no time, and arrived in New York at ten o'clock night before last, bringing the letters. Werner says she was amazed when he laid the matter before her; she could give him no information. They sat up late, reading the letters, but they found nothing—according to his story."

"What does *she* say?" I asked as he paused.

"She'll never say anything," the chief replied. "She died suddenly, in Werner's house, that night."

I took plenty of time before speaking. The chief has a good ear for revelations from the voice, and I desired him to think me wholly disinterested in this affair. I was far from that; I was deeply concerned to save somebody's husband from great danger.

"Died?" said I. "From what cause?"

"It looked like heart failure," said he. "The matter is under investigation, but Werner doesn't know it. He thinks the body was embalmed, and will be on its way to Lansing in a few hours. On the contrary it is held by our orders in the strictest secrecy—our kind, you understand. Werner intends to go to Lansing for the funeral. He won't leave this city."

"Where's the evidence to support all this?" I asked. "Does the body show signs of poison?"

"No," the chief admitted; "but you want to remember that sudden death can be made in any laboratory, my son."

It has been made in a person's soul first, and I have yet to meet with a case where I couldn't see some sign of it on the outside. The chief must have been following somewhat the same line of meditation.

"Werner seems to be the squarest man I ever saw, bar none," said he; "but he may have been driven pretty hard. Nonsense, of course; he's either a crook or he didn't do any of this. If he did, we know why; his stepmother had something on him, about the sale of that secret, and he couldn't silence her except in the one way. If we can prove that, you know the end of Mr. Werner. He won't be shot in Madison Square Garden, at so much a ticket, but you'll lose a neighbor, just the same. He's in the service of the United States government, the most merciful on earth; but there's a limit."

Jewett now crossed to us, leaving Martin Luther Lombard on the other side of the room.

"He's admitted it," Jewett said softly; "the fact of the marriage. It wasn't covered carefully enough to meet any such development as this. Lombard loses everything by her death, and must have known that he would. He stands acquitted."

Before I could ask an explanation of this, the chief made a warning sign, and next moment Edmund Werner was ushered in.

He was dressed in black, and his manner seemed very grave to one who had always seen him in the sunniest humor; but he gave no indication of nervousness or of that strained effort to remember everything at once—like an actor on a first night—which may often be noted in the countenances of men about to meet an ordeal of this kind. Suspicion and enmity were plain in the faces of the military officers, but his own deportment, easy but precise, seemed to

transform a hostile reception into nothing worse than an exchange of formal courtesies. There were few preliminaries, the chief merely thanking Werner for the keeping of this engagement in the midst of domestic affliction.

Then, at the chief's request, Werner made a statement from the standpoint of a chemist, explaining the reports from abroad and giving the grounds of the inferences which had led him to suspect what the new gas might be, even before he had heard the rumor of its name. The British officer asked if neo-eserine might have been independently discovered by the Germans. He wished to have Werner himself shut this door of escape; and Werner obliged him, promptly and with decision.

"My father's discovery was pure accident," he said. "It was not within the proper scope of his experiments that he should produce a substance having the properties of neo-eserine. If that astonishing lethal action had been the object sought, chemical research might have gone on ten thousand years without finding it."

The chief asked whether there had been any assistant in the laboratory who might have known what the elder Werner was doing. Edmund replied that his father's methods of work had been extraordinarily private, especially in later years. His former confidential assistant was dead; Edmund himself acted in that capacity, so far as anybody did.

Again the Briton acted as tempter, asking what persons had access to the place where the metal box was kept.

"It is a locked vault in the wall," Werner answered. "There is only one key, and I carry it, on my ring in my pocket. The vault is a kind of final resting place for things never to be used again. I may have opened it half a dozen times in two years. Nobody else has done so. There would have been no great difficulty in committing the theft, even in the daytime, if the person had a key and was familiar with the establishment. The door was not forced nor the lock tampered with, so far as I can discover. And who knew that such a record existed or where it was? I alone knew, in my own opinion."

"You never missed your keys, even for a short time?" the Englishman asked; and Werner answered in the negative.

I perceived very clearly that the chief

had not exaggerated when he spoke of Werner's peril; and certainly the man was not doing anything to open loopholes for his escape. He seemed to be aware of the bearing of what he said, but not of the attitude of his hearers. He was interested but impartial, as if singly occupied in describing a series of experiments to a company of professional brethren.

He had a wonderfully pleasant address; a voice deep toned and clear like a big bell. There was a quiet natural dignity in his manner, and the enviable ease of a handsome man who has no vanity. These merits would not serve him; the peculiar sincerity of his speech merely impressed damaging facts on the minds of his listeners more conveniently for subsequent recollection.

Thus far he had permitted others to direct the course of the discussion, but now that there was a pause, he offered a few words unsolicited.

"I am happy to report that I have succeeded in producing neo-*eserine*," he said. "I have been very fortunate. I shall be able, now, to give our chemists the process or as much of the substance as they will need for experimental purposes."

It is my recollection that my mouth fell open at this statement, and remained so for several minutes. From under the table around which we were seated came the sound of that peculiar movement of the chief's feet which always lets me know that he thinks he has obtained a fatal admission from a culprit. The act has become habitual with him, the second nature that is uncontrollable.

"When did you make it?" he asked, after a good breath.

"Day before yesterday," Werner responded; "but owing to the death in my home I have been unable to verify the results until this morning. I am now prepared to say that the substance is almost certainly identical with neo-*eserine* as made by my father."

Jewett and Lombard were at the end of the table farthest from Werner. I heard Lombard whispering: "What do you think of *that*? I guess we've got him now, all right."

The chief heard him, and glared; but from that moment Lombard was irrepressible except by physical violence. Werner had not heard him; he was answering a question from one of our officers as to the possibility

that the enemy would produce the new gas in quantity. He said there would be great difficulty. Then he turned to the chief:

"There is a phase of this matter," he said, "which I had thought of mentioning to the civil authorities alone, but on further consideration I have seen to be inseparable from the subject now before us—which is the lives of our men at the front. The recent death under my roof seemed due to natural causes; our physician took that view; but I am now persuaded that we were in error, and that the true cause was probably the same lethal agent which is in possession of our enemies."

Lombard was on his feet, despite the efforts of Jewett to restrain him.

"I suppose you mean to argue that the Germans killed my wife!" he exclaimed. "Perhaps Hindenburg did it. Von Tirpitz, eh? Probably he came over in a submarine"—a random shot which I remembered long afterward with wonder.

"I was not aware of your marriage," Werner began, mildly and with inimitable politeness; but Lombard interrupted, and with a sweeping gesture addressed the assembly:

"My wife had a life interest in nearly half the shares of the millionaire corporation which this man manages. Her interest was conditioned upon her remaining single for a period of ten years from the testator's death. She failed in that requirement, and her shares were forfeit, to be divided between the other principal holders, Werner and Karl Holbach, their heirs, executors, or assigns. And what is the result? Holbach, now dead, willed all his property to Alma Kenyon. She is now the wife of Werner. Therefore, Werner is virtually sole owner of that rich company."

"And you allege that Werner had discovered your marriage?" said I; but he was not so easy.

"Don't try to trap *me*," he cried. "I have just trapped the other fellow." He pointed to Werner. "He has said in the presence of all these witnesses that he didn't know of that marriage. I knew he'd do it, if I sprung it on him suddenly. And he told the truth. He *was* ignorant of it. In his view, only her death would cause that vast property to revert to him. And that is not all. I believe that my wife accused him of traffic with the German government for this deadly secret, and that she threatened to

expose him, when the matter came up between them, in his house that night. There was a double profit in this deed, for whom? For Edmund Werner. Who had the opportunity? The peculiar means? Edmund Werner. You have heard his admission; and I ask you, gentlemen, are they not fatal to his case?"

No doubt he had the jury with him, except for one obstinate juror sitting in my chair.

"What did your wife know as to neo-*eserine* or the sale of the process to the enemy?" I asked.

"She had no direct information, of course," said Lombard; "or we should have laid it before the government instantly. But she knew that the late Mr. Werner had been engaged in serious experimental work for many months prior to his death, and she could never get this man to give her any account of it, at the time when the estate was in course of settlement."

"I think that is a mistake," said Werner. "I assure you that no such question ever arose between us. In fact——"

Jewett interposed, with the admonition to Werner that he was under arrest, and that whatever he might say would be used against him.

"Thank you," said Werner; "but I desire that the truth shall be discovered, and I hope that no selfish impulse will affect my procedure. I have the natural feelings. My arrest is a heavy blow, and will be worse for my wife. You will get a good fight out of me; but you may depend also upon getting everything I know that will help any honest investigator."

"Indeed?" said Lombard. "Then let's begin right away. Perhaps you can explain the disappearance of a pillowcase from the bed where my wife died."

Werner had put his hand into a satchel from which he had previously taken some papers—abstracts of chemical reports. He drew forth a pillowcase, and spread it before him on the table. It bore several stains of a peculiar tint, a light rose-pink. The largest was about the size of a dime. Then he laid upon the pillowcase a square of cloth of similar fabric. This also bore several spots of the same hue.

"Ordinary *eserine* in solution is colorless until exposed to sunlight, when it turns faintly pink," said he. "It happened that this pillow slip was laid in the sunlight, on

the day following the death at my house. I saw it, and noticed these spots which had not been visible at first; and I was led to conjecture that the sunlight had brought them out. Nobody could predict with confidence that neo-*eserine* would act in that manner, merely because the familiar substance does so. I have demonstrated the fact, however, on this bit of cloth. There is no danger; all the vapor has been dissipated by heat."

Several heads on military gentlemen's shoulders bent much closer to those spots after that assurance.

"For my own part," Werner resumed, "I find this evidence conclusive as to the manner of Mrs. Lombard's death, but as to the human agent I have no reasonable theory. All I can say with any approach to confidence is that I do not believe that Mrs. Lombard was killed while she slept. My belief is that a neo-*eserine* solution was sprinkled on the pillow and on the upper sheet, at the fold. Most unfortunately the sheet had been soaked in hot water before I noticed the spots on the pillow slip."

Replying to questions, he said that the bed had been changed about five in the afternoon, when Werner received a telegram from Mrs. Lombard en route, and telephoned the message to his home. The guest had not been expected till next morning, but now her old rooms were immediately prepared for her.

"Was any stranger in your house between five o'clock and midnight?" the chief inquired.

It was obvious that Werner replied reluctantly; and if the poor sailor whom he had fed and sheltered had been the most deserving waif that ever tasted charity he would have merited no more considerate words. But they were wasted on me who had seen the man. His remembered image came before my mind like a messenger of glad tidings. The whole case became plain—in my foolish opinion.

The secret of the neo-*eserine* process had been sold to German agents in this country by Mrs. Harriet Werner, with her present husband as legal adviser and manager of business details. She had been kept in view, of course; and when the government's investigation of the affair began to get too near a full exposure, an agent of the many still at large in America had been detailed to remove the woman, and he had done the

work to admiration. When I saw him in the barroom he had just come from the Werner house, having sprinkled the poison on the bed. The excited and exultant look which I had noticed was now explained. He had succeeded, and could count upon reward and the praise of his superiors.

"The man will be found, and his innocence established," said Jewett. "This is no crime for an ignorant sailor to commit. I should as soon suspect one of the servants."

He said it very well, but it had no effect toward brightening the countenances of the chief and the military officers. The chief was especially deep in gloom. I had whispered "German spy" in his ear, and now he was trying to decide whether the rascal had been acting with Werner or against him. The occasion seemed opportune, and I whispered a little more.

"Good Lord," the chief responded in the same guarded manner. "This case is in a knot, sure enough. And it was going so well." He sighed. "We've got to find that man double-quick. You take charge of it, son; and if you see a place where a hundred dollars might do some good, spend a thousand."

Jewett now came behind the chief's chair, asking for permission to call detectives and take Werner away.

"He is our prisoner," I suggested, "charged with a capital offense. Are we going to surrender him to the civil authorities?"

I didn't know what a New York jury might do to Werner on the murder charge, but he had nothing to fear from any military tribunal with the evidence standing as at present, and that sailor uncaught. I should have time to solve the whole case. Yes; I was just as modest as that.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Jewett," the chief was saying, "but this man is ours, and there's a war going on just now. I appreciate your arguments, but I'm responsible to my superior officers, not to the county of New York. And one more point: all the silence that ever fell since the hush that preceded creation, was a rumpus compared to the lack of publicity that will attend this affair. The man who utters a whisper about it will not speak again till the Angel Gabriel lets him know it's time. And now will you have the kindness to bring Martin Luther Lombard over here. He is too vocal: I'm going to scare him so bad that he'll try to leave

his larynx with the man at the door when he goes out."

## CHAPTER IX.

### ALMA IN THE HANDS OF HER FRIENDS.

While Jewett was replying I received permission, from the chief's eye, to speak with Werner who had sat alone while the three officers were in conference by a window. I expressed as much good will as was likely to be credited, and told him what was going to happen.

"As a choice of evils, it is satisfactory," he said. "Of course I expected to be detained. Shall I be permitted to see my wife? She is waiting in our car, below."

I reported this request to the chief, and he replied that I might bring Mrs. Werner up, for five minutes. The prisoner expressed gratitude, and we fell into agreeable talk, as if I were not officially his guard, while the chief and the others were discussing certain points of the case. Werner was not artful in conversation, but he was an artist, and without a trace of inquisitiveness he got the facts that he wanted as to my ancestry, education, and attitude toward my work. I communicated more real information about myself in ten minutes than the United States government got when it gave me my job; and it came so easily that I was aware of no effort and no embarrassment. Finally he said he was glad that it was I who would palliate the evil news for his wife's hearing.

"She will not regard you as a stranger," he said, smiling. "I may fairly say you would have been missed by us, had you moved from the neighborhood. Mrs. Werner once remarked to me that she knew you much better than some of her acquaintances."

I could believe even that story from a man whose love of truth had not been affected by the menace of a firing squad in front of him and the electric chair behind. And if the story was not true, Alma's kindness made it seem so, in that first conversation so ill conditioned to leave a pleasant memory.

I told her that the search for the sailor was my immediate task, and that it would be of advantage for me to visit her house; whereupon she asked me to ride with her in the car, and offered to wait until I had prepared the orders that must be transmitted



to various points by telegraph. I not only rode in the car; I was a guest at luncheon where, in those moments when the charm of her presence failed to beguile my thoughts, I certainly felt like the last of many misfortunes that had entered that stricken house. The sentiment was unnecessary: she refused to regard me as a hound on her husband's trail. In their brief interview he had told her to trust me, and from first to last she treated me as if I were the commanding officer in charge of the defenses of her home.

In the course of this visit I gained a few bits of information which will have an explanatory value here:

First—It was anxiety arising from Edmund's earliest suspicion as to the new German war gas that constrained Alma to abandon her plan of resuming her work in France. There was no other cause. The servants were kept in ignorance of the truth, and they invented various explanations. It was natural that Miriam, a woman condemned by conscience to a kind of convent without walls, should have been ready to imagine in another's breast the hope which she had banished from her own.

Second—Alma had been with her husband and Mrs. Lombard in the study till midnight, had then withdrawn, but had not gone to bed. When Edmund went to his room he found her fully dressed, asleep on a couch. He spoke her name from the threshold, and Holbach hearing it, mistook the situation, and supposed that Alma was just entering the rooms at the front. It was Mrs. Lombard who did that, of course.

Third—When Alma waked, she and Edmund talked for a while about the very serious problems involved in the apparent sale of the neo-*eserine* process to the German government. Finally they both went down to the study to discuss some documents and notes which Edmund had left there. As they were about to return, Alma heard a noise in the hall—probably the closing of the door when Holbach left the house. She went to a window of the drawing-room, but saw no person, and supposed that she must have heard some ordinary sound from the street. She thought so little of the matter that she did not even mention it to Edmund who was putting out the lights in the study.

I was inclined to coincide with her in this opinion. Obsessed by the theory that the

poison had been sprinkled on the bedclothes early in the evening, I was too ready to neglect clues leading to a different conclusion. For a similar reason, it never entered my mind to imagine that Alma herself had been the intended victim of this crime. Who could desire her death? Her husband, and her young brother, then away at school, were her only heirs. She endangered no one in the Devil's Breath affair, because she knew nothing about it except what her husband had told her. She had no coherent theory in regard to it, until I explained to her my own which she immediately adopted—because it cleared Edmund.

And this brings me to a fact which I was compelled to accept against the strongest prepossession: Alma was not very deeply in love with her husband. Perhaps she was too young to entertain a grand passion; perhaps her terrible experience as a nurse in the very worst red center of the war—this, and the shock of her mother's death, and her own illness—may have blunted her sensibilities. More probably, the close accord between Edmund's nature and her own, the best guarantees of their later happiness, was hostile to a passionate love in the heart of so young a woman. The old rhyme, "Your true mate you'll love late," contains more wisdom for the welfare of humanity than any other six words in the language.

There was danger, perhaps not so much as I feared, that Alma's whole life would be spoiled by the ordeal which began almost immediately. Despite my chief's edict complete silence did not fall around this affair. The familiar maxim of the politician, "People will talk, but for God's sake don't let them tell the truth," is easier to enforce than silence.

It was whispered that Edmund was in trouble; that he was in prison. Alma denied it, under orders, and stoutly maintained that he was still engaged in his professional labors for the government, somewhere on the map. My chief circulated the same story through the channels of press agency. But every day, and many times a day, women—more or less known to Alma—from intimates to nodding acquaintances—sometimes strangers indeed, came to offer sympathy, condolence, and advice. A few of them came "to open her eyes," and to advise divorce; some had just heard that Edmund had been shot, and brought the news. They agreed almost never in details, but there was

a concensus of opinion that all men of German blood were alike.

Among the most pernicious of these women was Mrs. Bayne. I grieve to speak harshly of her because she spoke so well of me, especially after the fourteenth of June on which day my earthly fortunes underwent a wonderful and lovely change. I have spoken, heretofore, of having lost my money. This seemed justifiable, because all I had was a large lawsuit against persons who were said to be virtually insolvent already. But unknown to me the world had changed all that, and suddenly my lawyer received a really liberal offer of settlement. My lawyer thought we could get more; I gave him two seconds in which to change his mind; and the next day I had the money, except what *he* got, which was plenty.

If Mrs. Bayne had admired me before, she now adored me—unselfishly, for she perceived our ages to be discordant. What she did believe, and boldly confided to me, was that I am the only man in the world who is worthy of Alma. She had just heard that Edmund had died last week, and though I had seen him yesterday, she still was inclined to believe the other person's report. Furthermore, Alma's marriage had been a mistake; she should have been joined to a person of a certain ancestry—my own.

Meanwhile my admiration and friendly regard for Werner constantly increased, as I had further opportunity to observe his character under severe trial. Possibly I overpraised him to Alma; no doubt I made this error; but there were excuses. Mrs. Bayne was gradually undermining my rational mind and my capacity to tell the truth.

I could not hope to make Mrs. Bayne understand Edmund Werner's character, because it was based upon a profound honesty of heart and mind, and Mrs. Bayne wouldn't have recognized such a quality if she had seen it walking up West End Avenue naked. But I had every hope of holding Alma up to her own proper level of right judgment—helping her guardian angel to do so, at any rate—in spite of the influences to which, in her husband's absence, she was constantly exposed.

At least I might hope to expel from her mind the nonsense about "national character" that was constantly poured into it. In every land to-day there is a wild conglomerate of types, long heads, round heads, square

heads, Heaven knows what! The development of communication has made the earth to resemble a chemist's laboratory that has been invaded by a lunatic who has poured reagents from one bottle into another without plan or reason, and without profit to any but the few plutocrats who value degraded peoples as sources of industrial slaves. Clean up. Get the reagents pure, and it may then be possible to experiment toward some result that will not make devils laugh and angels weep.

Meanwhile, let us remember that a long head, a round head, and a square head may be included in the same nation, the same house or even the same family; they may break the same statute or merit praise as orderly citizens; but they cannot commit the same sin nor disclose to any but an ignorant eye the same virtue. For they are radically and unchangeably different in mind and morals, and to say that national influences or the Almighty Himself can make them like, one to another, is a mere contradiction in terms, void of significance. Mingled with some considerations of sex this is the beginning of the knowledge of men and women, the foundation without which no structure can be built that will stand.

But this is blowing off steam. The simple fact is that a lot of misguided and foolish and occasionally malicious women worked to part Alma from her husband, and seemed likely to do serious harm. While this was in progress I labored to set her husband free, and failed dismally.

Was the sailor found? Oh, yes; he was found almost daily, in every port and many inland cities, sometimes in two or three places simultaneously; but it was never the right man. Pardon me; I should have said every port except Galveston, from which city there came no word, Heaven knows why, but such things will happen in detective work. It must be remembered in this connection that we could not use the newspapers openly in this case; the censors would not permit publication, and, of course, for Edmund's sake I did not desire it. But I wanted to find that sailor.

My search for him is comparable only to the well-known instance of the blind man in a dark room hunting for a black cat that isn't there. I failed to find any trace of him in New York after the crime. Inquiry was made at all railroad stations, but the man was not remembered or the right per-

son was not questioned. In those days there was so much confusion, such rapid shifting of employees, that the failure is not significant.

By pure chance I got on the trail of Augustus Westcott, and was convinced by the descriptions given by officers of the destroyer which had taken him aboard, that he was the man whom I sought. Triumph, like the fiber in a lamp bulb, glowed in the vacuum of my pate till I had made inquiries in Gloucester, and had learned that the rescued seaman did not in the least resemble Westcott and could not possibly have been he. Who, then? The dory in which he was found had certainly appertained to the schooner *Hattie Collins*, but the members of the crew were all accounted for except Westcott and one other—who was a negro.

My search was then extended to other fishing vessels that had been attacked, and finally to the whole fleet, Yankee and Canadian. Many detectives assisted me in this work, but we were completely baffled. We did not learn who the alleged survivor of the *Hattie Collins* was; where in earth, air, or water he had come from; or why he had assumed Augustus Westcott's name.

Meanwhile, I had not neglected my theory as to Mr. and Mrs. Martin Luther Lombard. Pursuing it, I tried to prove that the woman knew of Devil's Breath, in her first husband's lifetime, and that after his death she told Lombard, who managed the sale of the formula. I believed that she knew about the metal box, and where it was kept; Werner carried the only key of the vault.

I learned that Edmund always had the keyring in his pocket, except on evenings when he wore dress clothes. His keys might then be left at home in the pocket of the trousers he had worn that afternoon. Here was a chance for Mrs. Harriet Werner to get a duplicate to be used in the daytime; I was satisfied that the laboratory had not been entered at night. There was always a watchman.

Following this clew I looked up every locksmith within two miles of the Werner house—and very many others. But the trouble was that I did not suspect how long ago the thing was done. My theory was absolutely correct, as I am now aware; but the locksmith whom I sought had moved to Newark almost two years before. The metal box was stolen in the winter of 1915, but I didn't count upon such early action.

I tried also to trace some large payments of money, the price of the secret. We seized all Lombard's books, including the accounts of his wife's estate. Lombard is not an intellectual giant, but as a trick bookkeeper he is second to none. In the penitentiary, where he is at present, if he should count the bars of his cell door three times on his fingers, nobody else could ever afterward count them at all. That is the kind of an accountant that Martin Luther Lombard is. Some of the figures in his books looked very queer, but at that time we could not get anything out of them that we dared to take into a court.

The summer wore away. Edmund was still in a military prison; Jewett was still waiting for him to come out and be tried for murder. Meanwhile, the Germans had failed to accomplish very serious results with Devil's Breath; they couldn't manufacture enough. It required a year to get a supply for an attack on a ten-mile front.

Doubt of Edmund's guilt in this matter had become wide-spread among officers and other persons in high authority who were cognizant of the case. Many indulgences were granted; in October he was free of physical restraint. After a perfunctory final grilling in Washington, he was ordered to remain in that city, nominally under observation, but in fact consulting chemist to a board. It was certain that the government would cease to bother about him as soon as hostilities should be suspended.

A Scotch verdict, "not proven," had been informally rendered, and in those days of kaleidoscopic excitements it was useless to hope for vindication. If there had been nothing worse than this, still it would have meant that his competitors could drive him out of business, and the mob-spirit hunt him from society, with no redress available. But there was something worse—the indictment for murder, which had never been mentioned above a whisper, yet was ready always in the sleeve of Mr. Jewett.

In mid-November came the cablegram from Holbach. I happened to be present when it was delivered to Alma; she had sent for me after a conversation by telephone with her husband in Washington. He had told her that his detention was at an end, and that he would leave for New York within a few hours. Alma perfectly understood what this implied: the barrier was down, and Edmund would be at the disposal

of the State authorities. Terrified, she had pleaded with him to seek safety wherever he would hope to find it; but he had replied that the peril must be faced with courage, and that flight would only make it worse. This was true enough, and I was forced to tell her so.

In a moment of such acute anxiety the news that Holbach had risen from the dead produced only a confused impression on her mind. Not till afterward did she think of him as a lover returning to the bitterest of disappointments. For this reason I was none the wiser for having Alma under observation when she read Holbach's message.

Edmund arrived in New York early that evening, but did not reach his home. Jewett ordered his arrest, and I failed to prevent it. The United States authorities declined to interfere. The best that I could do was to keep Alma from seeing the thing done.

Then and afterward Edmund displayed the same quiet fortitude that had distinguished him since the beginning of his sorrows. Alma was entirely loyal, but was her love unshaken? Studying her, I thought it possible that her emotional nature had been racked too hard; that her affections had been for too long a time associated with pain. Except for her young brother, she had suffered wherever she had loved—father, mother, and husband. These are different loves, but the nerves that ache or thrill with their impulses are closely interwoven.

Love in youth needs time to be happy, otherwise there is danger that in strong natures it will be incurably tinged with sadness, and in weak ones that it will learn to seek happiness alone, and so become trivial and decline from honor. The latter tendency is probably inherent in all mortals, since none of us is built wholly of strong fiber.

Beyond question Alma had tasted bitterness until mere animal instinct craved some sugar with the drug. She had married before she had recovered from personal bereavement, from the immediate contact with war's horrors, and from the depression following the enthusiasm whereby her body had been sustained through a long period of excessive toil. Just as she was beginning to be again capable of happiness, grim tragedy had intervened. Then, after months of harrowing uncertainty and dissimulation, she must endure the shame of her husband's situation, unveiled at last to every eye, and

must look forward to the awful scene in court when he would be tried for his life. Whoever should now come to her with power to refresh her spirit would be offering to the weaker part of her nature a great bribe for affection.

When she rallied from the shock of her husband's arrest, her new courage seemed to come chiefly from anticipation of Holbach's return. Noting this, I was prepared to see her disappointed, for the man was probably a wreck requiring more sympathy than he could give to another. At that time I knew nothing of his character except what Alma told me, which was wholly favorable. I derived the impression of a steady, strong-willed, clear-thinking man, a stanch friend and a good fighter; but I doubted that these qualities would come out of German captivity unimpaired, and I expected no very great acquisition to our defense.

Alma did not inform me that Holbach had been in love with her; I heard it from Mrs. Bayne, and naturally took it for a dream. Persons with her unfortunate attitude toward the truth are very dangerous when they tell it, for the listener rarely sees a sign that they have lapsed from their usual habit. Certainly I entertained no suspicion that Holbach would try to take Alma away from her husband. I knew that Mrs. Bayne favored myself for that rôle of infamy, and I supposed that she had invented Holbach's passion in order to stimulate my jealousy. Perhaps she *did* invent it, and hit the truth by accident; I doubt that any one directly concerned had ever confided in her.

Holbach had not been permitted to cable the news of his sailing, or to send a wireless message from the ship; but through channels available to me I got the vessel's name and the assurance that he was aboard. Private word in the early evening of November 28th informed me that our friend was now a hundred miles east of Sandy Hook. Before twelve the ship would pass very near that spot where Holbach, from the U-boat's deck, had looked toward land, on a night in spring. Doubtless he remembered the experience, and repeated it, but I think he was not the man to wish himself back again for the sake of a cleaner soul.

Alma wished to meet Holbach at the pier, and be the first to answer his questions. What her marriage would mean to him after so long a separation she could not know, but it was better that he should not hear of it,

or of Edmund's terrible misfortune, from an accidental source. She was eager to see Holbach, yet I fancy she shrank a little from that first interview, and would have been glad of the presence of some woman friend on whose right feeling and discretion she could rely. But if she should take any woman with her, it must be Mrs. Bayne—which may be called a *reductio ad absurdum*. This difficulty revealed itself to my groping wits, and I solved it by telling Alma that my influence, upon which she of course depended, would not suffice to obtain admission to the pier for more than one person.

"Oh," said she, and brightened.

In fact I had trouble enough, next morning, in getting past the guards with Alma alone, and much delay resulted. Most of the passengers were off the ship when we came out on the pier. Holbach's steamer trunk had been brought ashore, and he stood beside it with two officials who had thought of one final question that he hadn't answered more than twenty times already. In view of his real situation he must have been in a high state of nervous tension at that moment of release.

A huge motor truck hid him from Alma and me until we were very close; then it drew away, and Alma saw him, and stepped quickly forward. I halted in my tracks.

Holbach was looking the other way. Alma was within three paces of him when he turned. He had not one instant to prepare his mind for the sight of this woman who had been the great desire of his life—who had died by his hand, as he believed.

Reviewing that scene in the light of my present knowledge, I perceive that the man must have had the hardihood of seven devils. Not only the shock but the circumstances must be considered. Every fifth person on that pier was a detective, and many of the others were veiled spies; and Holbach certainly knew it. An expression of terror on a man's countenance, no matter what the cause, might lead to his arrest—actually had done so, more than once on that very pier, under my own observation.

Holbach showed surprise, and for a single moment afterward there was a look on his face that I couldn't classify—a little as if he were dead; the blank mystery of some dead faces. Then the life rushed into it with a flood of perfectly natural rejoicing; that was all I saw; his art was too fine for my discrimination.

He extended both hands to her, and she took them, but gently held herself away while she spoke to him, steadily, quietly, for several minutes. He stood motionless, attentive, his fleshy cheeks with their intensely masculine suggestion paling under the surface tint of red and bronze. She was telling him that she was Edmund's wife, and that both of them had believed him dead. She did not intimate, then or ever, that her own freedom of choice required justification, but the case of Edmund was different, and though she made no reference to this fact she could not in fairness oppose the implication.

"Edmund was the last of us to give up hope that you had been saved," she said, "but even he became convinced——"

"Yes," said Holbach kindly, "that is obvious." And then he achieved the miracle of a smile that positively made his countenance beautiful; pronounced his blessing, as it were, on Alma's marriage, adding a phrase brief and hearty in praise of Edmund, and in testimony of affection for him.

The explanation of Edmund's absence he left to Alma, and she made it, with a sense of sharing an intolerable burden with some one strong to bear it and fully to be trusted. The two were so eloquent in pantomime that though I stood beyond hearing, save for an occasional word, I followed the scene perfectly. I saw Holbach shocked by the news of Mrs. Harriet Werner's death—fancy what that ghastly joke of fate's must have been to him! I saw him repel with prompt, spontaneous loyalty the accusation against Edmund. Who could believe Edmund guilty of such an act? Surely not the man who had done it himself! But from our point of view Holbach was speaking out of steel-true faith in a friend.

He deceived me as completely as any traveling conjurer ever tricked a yokel. On maturer thought I might have admitted that the man did not offer to my eye the exact image of pure virtue incarnate, but he got my confidence, and held it after I had spoken with him, there on the pier, and after we three had conferred long and earnestly, in the car and at the house.

Already he had begun to reestablish his ascendancy over Alma's mind, and by the same method that he had used in the old days. Beyond doubt, he had a great gift of stating the worst of any situation in such a way as to set courage with its back against

a wall, and put all enemies in front where they could be accurately counted and well watched. He drove the ghosts from behind Alma, and filled her with an exalted spirit of pugnacity till she glowed in our presence like an angel. The girl was almost happy, for the first time in many months.

And why shouldn't Holbach have inspired a fellow creature with happiness at that time? He had a plentiful supply in his own bosom. Picture the wonder and the joy that came to him when he learned how marvelously he had been guided. His false friend was in prison facing the worst of deaths. His name would perish with him. What Holbach had thought to be the end of certain precious hopes had proved to be mere gossip of the servants' hall. Alma would not bear Edmund's child.

Holbach, enriched by the restitution of his own property and by the windfall from the late Mrs. Lombard, would sit in comfort, living under the same roof with his friend's wife, and steadily augmenting his control of all her thoughts. Mrs. Bayne might be invited to reside with them for the sake of the conventions, but fortunately she was a fool. Holbach was as well satisfied as Heinrich Heine when he dreamed that he was *der lieber Gott*, and so believing said that at last he had been rewarded in accord with his deserts.

The next day was Thanksgiving, and who could be more thankful than Holbach? His god was the devil, but what did that matter? The blessings had been received, be their source what it might. Despite the shadow over that house, Alma thought the occasion suitable for an observance not entirely devoid of brightness. There were food and wine in plenty, with Miriam to wait at table—the maid's face masked with the externals of peace, her eyes habitually a little raised from sublimary things. Neither the lady nor the maid was troubled by the faintest haunting thought that this same man who made so strong and resolute a figure in their eyes had broken bread with lean and trembling hands under that roof within the year.

Natural forces, an unequaled constitution, scientific treatment, rest and fresh air—all had combined to restore Holbach to his old condition. No one thought him greatly changed. In fact, his healthy, well-nourished appearance got him ill will from some of Alma's acquaintances as contradict-

ing their opinions of the treatment of prisoners in Germany.

For my part, I was as blind as the women. They had almost forgotten the sailor, and I had not, but the difference was nil. The man was unrecognizable. I speak confidently because I have made a special study of personal recognition. I have used disguise far more than is usual in detective work, and have had good results and few failures. But Holbach and the sailor were two men to me, and there was not one chance in forty million that I should ever be the wiser in that respect.

In fact, Holbach was safe; his crime buried beyond discovery. Its rewards were still to be reaped, and they were rich. As the days went by he had always higher hopes, always more cause for self-congratulation. He could not yet invite Alma to be merry. She had feasted him, on his return, but her own dish had been seasoned with tears. Sorrow would pass away. Holbach who had so stoutly endured griefs of his own, could easily be hopeful as to those of another. He would make her happy when the time should come.

Remorse? No. A haunting recollection, a thrill of horror now and then—a glimpse of his own shrunken figure stealing down the stairs or crouching on the steps outside the door. Mere emotions; he would get the better of them soon. He would get everything he wanted. He was safe; he was content.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE SECOND NATURE.

Holbach was not the man to embarrass himself with insincerity when it could be avoided. He found a way to join with us wholeheartedly in Edmund's defense. Our object was to postpone the trial; very well; that was Holbach's aim also. He wanted time to fix up something that would ensure Edmund's conviction, and in the meantime his own status was entirely to his liking. By all means let Edmund languish in prison as long as his most devoted well-wisher could desire. On this basis Holbach and I worked harmoniously for two or three weeks.

In December the intelligence department got in touch with German officers of the old régime, who had unfortunately dropped their pocketbooks while crossing the Rhine the wrong way; and by the use of a little money our men secured a few facts about

Devil's Breath, and a larger measure of fiction. These German officers did not know about Holbach, except through the most vague report. His name they had never heard.

They *did* know where the secret came from in the first place, however, and they sold Martin Luther Lombard into the bonds of servitude in a penitentiary. The war was over or another fate might have befallen him. This, of course, would have been unjust, as he had sold a chemical secret to Germany while his country was still at peace with her. Surely no crime; but he would have suffered all the same. And now it was necessary to try him not for selling Devil's Breath, but for something else which would serve to get him a long sentence from a judge who knew the inside facts. I do not commend such procedure, but I have seen a great deal of it.

Lombard, ostensibly, was convicted of fraud in connection with the estate of his wife. She had not treated him very well in her will, and he had ventured to help himself at the expense of the other beneficiaries. His fine bookkeeping did not save him now, because he was really being tried for the lives of the men whom Devil's Breath had killed.

As to Holbach, the German officers, having no facts, invented a sufficient quantity; they said that the American who had sold some supplementary information about neoeserine had been shot soon afterward. There actually had been an American of the name and description which they gave; he had gone to Germany presumably to sell something, and had never come back. So the story looked veracious, and the intelligence department was satisfied. The case was closed; and again Holbach was saved.

His chief concern was to implant in Alma's mind the desired idea as to the forthcoming trial of Edmund; to encourage her with excellent words so that she would see a brave and cheerful life for herself as a duty not beyond her powers, while at the same time she should be subtly led to view her own future at such an angle that her husband should not be visible therein. A conviction on the first trial, Holbach reluctantly admitted, was very probable, but there would be an appeal, and plenty of time for us to get more evidence for the defense. Ultimate success, said he, depends upon the finding of that sailor.

The rascal was entirely right; I could not contradict him. The case as it stood was a lost battle, and there was no hope whatever except in the direction which Holbach, with veiled and diabolical humor, had indicated. Jewett was preparing to allege that the government had investigated the theory of the sailor, and had found nothing in it; he was going to intimate that we had traced the right man to his grave, and laid a wreath upon it with a card of apology; and, of course we really had traced several men, one of whom had gone to Halifax and died there.

Jewett had every chance of putting it over. Nothing that he could say as to the government's failure in the matter would be too strong. I knew, because I had made the failure myself.

I was worried to the marrow of my bones, the worse because I seemed to be losing control of the defense, so far as the detective work was concerned—and there was nothing else; the lawyers could do nothing without evidence. Investigation seemed to be slipping out of my hands and into Holbach's. Certain performances of his had led me to suspect that he had found an important witness and was concealing the fact. His motive was plain to me; I had waked at last to the knowledge that he was in love with Alma, and was striving to gain favor in her eyes by immense, unselfish zeal in Edmund's defense.

Was that zeal genuine? Was he merely hiding his witness for the purpose of taking glory from me to decorate himself; or was he such a yellow fiend that he desired to keep Edmund in prison, even to increase the deadly peril in which he stood? By this time I had begun to have a comprehension of Holbach's character, and to see what kind of animal he was, beneath the surface show of well-disciplined conduct. I didn't like him; my notion of the brotherhood of man stopped at the outposts of his tribe.

Most of Alma's friends now thought of her husband as a German because he was in an American prison, and of Holbach as an American because he had been in a German prison. Mrs. Bayne saw no difference between them, but she behaved very well to Holbach because she was afraid of him. "He constantly holds the wrong thought over me," said the lady often, in our private conversations; and I would sometimes see her in a corner brewing her own kind of witch-



craft against her enemy, the wielder of wrong thought.

Perhaps my sentiments toward Alma, my serious and increasing dread of the result of Holbach's influence over her, may have heated my animosity against him and served to vitiate my judgment of his present motives. The truth is that he had no hidden witness, in the sense that I supposed. He was being blackmailed by the man—now sunk to poverty and drunkenness—who had been his go-between in the abortive dealings with the German agents. This poor rogue demanded no great sums, and was easily contented, and sufficiently discreet when sober. But Holbach was afraid of him; and, indeed, a blackmailer on a spree is a formidable person.

The wits of this inebriate had never been so disordered by drink that he forgot his promise to avoid Holbach's place of business, and the house on West End Avenue, but the risk was annoying. Personally, I doubt whether any harm would have resulted, for this fellow—Waffenschmidt by name—was at heart a grateful friend to Holbach, and he possessed little information. No more than I did he suspect that Holbach had murdered Mrs. Lombard, or had ever visited America in the guise of a sailor. All he knew was a small part of the truth about the transaction in Devil's Breath, and as to that he had no legal evidence. But Holbach was a striver for perfection, and this small, single hindrance to his peace disturbed and angered him.

Waffenschmidt's favorite resort when in his cups was a bar with a little garden behind it, between Broadway and Sixth Avenue, in the old Tenderloin. Its former name was the Berlin-Bagdad; and in the early days of the World War it had been much frequented by German spies of the lesser grades. Then English, French, and American secret-service men became so numerous there that the proprietor reaped a fine harvest from their expense money, which consoled him for the speedy and total loss of those patrons who had German mischief in their hearts. Eventually, however, the secret-service men became ashamed to be seen by one another in a crib so notoriously empty, and the Berlin-Bagdad—rechristened the Liberty Bell—became the safest place in New York for plotters, if they had only known it.

Shortly after the new year 1919 came in,

with an interrogation mark on its forehead, Waffenschmidt mysteriously disappeared, and Holbach could not trace him. In fact, the man had experienced disgust with his way of life—something in the nature of a conversion. A married sister had written to him from an Ohio city, asking him to come and make his home with her. She had heard distressing reports of him. Waffenschmidt, who was ill and depressed, counted what remained of his last extortion from Holbach; found the sum sufficient for the journey, and set forth without farewells. Influenza already had a hold on him; the drunkard's strength could not resist the attack. Only a few days he halted in the shelter of his sister's home, and then resumed his travels unincumbered by that broken baggage, his mortal body, over which it thus happened, strangely enough, that tears were shed.

Fate had extracted the last little thorn from the down of Holbach's couch, and he might rest in pure tranquility, but unfortunately he didn't know it. No exercise of reason could deduce the cause of Waffenschmidt's disappearance. Holbach had seen no sign of reformation in the man, nor ever heard of his sister. A protracted spree seemed probable, but there was a chance that Waffenschmidt had been discovered and sequestered by an enemy, perhaps myself.

It required only a few days for Holbach to make up his mind that he would never endure this anxiety again. There must be an end of Waffenschmidt; and a method naturally suggested itself. An obscure drunkard found dead in a doorway on a winter night would not be examined with sufficient care to detect the action of an agent such as Devil's Breath.

Holbach had no neo-*eserine*, and, to do him justice, he was sickened by the mere thought of it; but that unconquerable determination which adorned his devilish character with distinction that defied contempt, enabled him to choose against his own preference the means which reason told him were most suitable to his purpose. Being now in sole charge of the Holbach-Werner laboratories, he could make neo-*eserine* at no other risk than was inseparable from the substance. He did make it, and he hid a little of it precisely as before, in a glass tube carried in the same pen that had already served him so well. The tube was lightly cemented to the bottom of the barrel, and submerged in ink, so that the pen was

usable—as it had been during the two years that it lay in his desk.

Equipped with the poison so concealed, he continued his search for Waffenschmidt, but with no serviceable clew except the probability that the man would appear some night in the old Berlin-Bagdad. Nothing was known of Waffenschmidt at his lodgings; he had been in debt to his landlady, and had not ventured to remove any noticeable part of his small belongings. There was no sign that he had gone upon a long journey. In fact, he was by this time out of the world, and Holbach needed no poison.

Watching him, I discovered his nocturnal habit of visiting the Berlin-Bagdad, but the reason eluded me. I could not learn that he met anybody in the resort, or did anything whatever except stand in the bar a while, and pay for the privilege by buying a glass or two of liquor—a high price, if he drank it. I was moved to study his proceedings more closely, for no one could suppose that he was seeking mere entertainment.

I have spoken hitherto of my facility in disguise, and though the subject is a theme for jests I desire to be taken seriously. In the line of evidence I will adduce the fact that on a certain night when I came to the door of the Berlin-Bagdad on the trail of Holbach, I encountered a fellow officer with whom I am intimately acquainted, and he took me for a stranger—scanned me carefully for some minutes after we had entered the place, and did not suspect that he had ever set eyes on me before.

Picture me as a man from whom every distinctive mark has been studiously deleted; just a good-sized fellow, dark instead of fair, somewhat round-shouldered, with a plain mustache, a common-looking overcoat, and a black derby hat. Conceive this trivial person leaning against the cigar counter in the bar of the Berlin-Bagdad, and very little interested in anything, surely not in Mr. Holbach who was waiting for his man with that patience of the trained experimenter which became him so well. As for me, I was merely standing around, you would have supposed, in case a friend should invite me to have a drink; otherwise I might buy one glass of beer, and go to the next saloon, or home. I was smoking a cheap cigar from which occasionally I flicked the ash with my little finger into the saucer of a match stand.

By and by Holbach moved in my direc-

tion, and stood beside me looking down through the glass at the cigars underneath. Some men near us moved away, and I heard Holbach whisper, very softly, without raising his eyes:

"Bill"—we were Karl and Bill to each other at this stage of our acquaintance—"is your man here? I suppose you're looking for somebody."

"That's right," I responded, trying to hide my chagrin, "but I'm having no luck."

Holbach remained in the same attitude as before, and whispered like a ventriloquist, with no movement of the face.

"I'll give you a tip, Bill. Your disguise is nearly perfect, yet I recognized you. Shall I tell you how?"

"By all means," said I. "What is the fatal defect?"

"A habit of yours; a little thing, but noticeable. I mention it in the interest of your very distinguished art."

"Thank you, professor," said I a trifle sourly. "Kindly proceed. I am sitting at your feet."

He saw that I did not exact so much caution of him, and he straightened up, and spoke in a more ordinary voice.

"When you flick the ash from your cigar," said he, "you always nod to the ash after it falls, as if you were saying to yourself, 'That was a good shot.' I've seen you do it a hundred times at the house. It's second nature, and you'll have trouble conquering the tendency, but you can do so in time."

"That's a mighty good tip," I said. "I'll remember it, as often as I walk abroad incog."

"A propos," said he, "if you think it prudent, we might drink the health of the Caliph of Bagdad, your great predecessor in mufti."

Seeing that I acquiesced, he moved aside to the bar's end, and, opening his hand, disclosed a half dollar which, with an easy movement but astonishing force, he set spinning on the dark, polished wood. The bartender eyed the whirling coin with admiration.

"Gee!" he said. "I don't see how you get so much stuff on it."

"It's all in the method," Holbach responded, grinning with childish pride in this trivial accomplishment.

I stood aghast, astounded. Memory surged upon me, drowning my conscious

mind. The scene in the Broadway bar came back to me with such bewildering force that for some moments I could hardly see anything that was real. The haggard waif of ocean seemed to stand in Holbach's place, and I saw again the shrunken, feverish cheeks, and burning eyes; the wild joy of triumph in the strange, pallid countenance. Then, at last I looked steadily in Holbach's face, and discovered there the possibility of that transformation; read the fatal secret which, but for the betrayal by habit, he would have hidden to the end of his years.

I glanced aside and saw the officer who had entered with me, watching with a gleam of recognition in his eyes—for I had dropped the mask during that scene. I made a sign to this man, unperceived by Holbach, who was calling for a particular bottle.

"It is habitual with you, Karl," said I; "this trick of the coin. We all have our habits and dexterities. And by the way, perhaps I can show you a trick that will be interesting. Will you put your hands side by side on the rail of the bar?"

He did so, and turned his face toward me. Instantly my colleague obeyed a sign from me, and slipped handcuffs on the criminal's wrists.

"You are under arrest, Holbach," said I, "for the murder of Mrs. Lombard."

The shock must have been almost mortal. The man's face was horrible to see, contorted with emotion. He committed the folly of trying to free his hands from the shackles, and of fighting his captors; but his mind kept a measure of control all the time, and he disguised his acts. It was an ungentlemanly joke which had enraged him; that was what he pretended; and he said nothing to disclose a sense of guilt.

When we had got into a cab and had started for police headquarters he decided to admit that the affair was serious. He demanded my justification for this outrage.

"You say that I killed Mrs. Lombard. Will you tell me why I should have done such a thing?"

I couldn't; I hadn't the shadow of an idea. He had got a share of her property, but that had come to him through the discovery of her secret marriage, not through her death. It did not enter my mind that Alma was the intended victim. There also I was ignorant of the true motive.

But I knew that he was the sailor, and that he must be guilty of the crime com-

mitted in Alma's house. And one other thing I knew, and it gave me boundless confidence. Holbach, an American citizen, had served on a German submarine. He would plead duress, but no man can be forced to such employment; he can always die. There could be no doubt as to where Holbach had been, immediately before he got into the dory of the *Hattie Collins*; and he couldn't have been an ordinary prisoner on the U-boat which had sunk that vessel. She was not the same one, of course, that had captured him originally; and the Germans were not in the habit of shifting prisoners from one submarine to another over a period of two years. He had been a member of the crew, and his life was forfeit.

As we rode to headquarters in the cab I unfolded before the prisoner this view of his past and future, but he was not able to appreciate it. Paroxysms of rage swept over him, so that it was necessary to restrain him occasionally, but for the most part he refrained from futile violence. Rage is really hot, and when it blazes in so powerful a body the effect is amazing. The cab, on that winter night, was like an oven when we came to our destination. Holbach had burned his fuel, however, and was cool enough during the hours till dawn, while he defended himself against a considerable company of inquisitors.

Opportunity for rest was then given him, but I surmise that he remained awake to think. An intellect so well equipped with method could not fail to recognize defeat as inevitable on the present battle line. He knew that, having identified him as the long-sought sailor, we could trace all his dealings with Germany, and his adventures on land and sea. Conditions which had followed the suspension of the war made this investigation possible. Holbach could not prevent a full exposure, if he should give us time to make it. Every voice that spoke in the council chamber of his mind must have bidden him despair and die, yet in such circumstances he found strength to formulate a purpose and to resume the fight.

Subjected to interrogation again, he showed a changed attitude and a disposition to negotiate. He made overtures which could not be entirely rejected, and there ensued a series of deals extending over several weeks, the prisoner being assisted by able counsel—who could get nothing out of him

that was worth betraying to his adversaries. In the end he made a bargain for his bare life, trading on the basis of ability to increase the government's knowledge as to Devil's Breath as an instrument of war, and on some really important information gathered by him in Germany. It was agreed that the case should be left to the State authorities; that Holbach should plead guilty to the murder of Mrs. Lombard, and should receive a life sentence.

Jewett howled to Heaven, for he wanted the advertisement of a long trial during which he could play up the submarine issue, and, of course, secure a verdict that would involve a death penalty. But superior personages did not wish the case to be tried in that way; and if it should be tried strictly on its merits the prisoner might escape. For nobody had yet discovered the true motive for the murder, or had been able to learn anything definite as to how Holbach had obtained the poison with which Mrs. Lombard had been killed. We couldn't go into court with the bare assertion that the defendant must have carried a supply of Devil's Breath in his pocket for two years, waiting for an accident which had given him an opportunity to kill somebody who had never injured him, and whose death was of no tremendous advantage.

So the bargain was made, and Holbach got what he wanted—life, and the hope that some day he could get out of prison and kill Edmund Werner. That hope was the sufficient food of his soul; he was content to subsist upon it in a dungeon.

Two days after the deal was irrevocably ratified, we discovered the neo- eserine in the pen which had been taken from Holbach when he was searched at headquarters. Alma identified the pen as one that had lain in a desk in Holbach's rooms during all his absence; and she told me that shortly after

the murder Miriam had noticed ink stains on some blank paper in the desk. Mistress and maid had inferred that the sailor, after getting his bath in those rooms, must have tried to write a note—perhaps of gratitude which he felt unable adequately to express in spoken words. And they had looked to see that he hadn't stolen the pen, for there was nothing else with which he could have written.

Those stains, of course, were made by Holbach when, with trembling hands, he opened the pen to assure himself that the fatal contents was still hidden within.

"Yes; that was the way of it, no doubt," Holbach said, when I laid these discoveries before him. "I was not aware, at the time, that I had spilled any ink, but I must have done so, while taking out the tube too hastily. Miriam happened to mention the stains to me while telling of the sailor's visit to my room. So I was aware, after my arrest, that if the new tube of neo- eserine should be found in the pen, my life would be lost. You may infer that this lay heavy on my mind at times, during the negotiations which have saved me. Did I give any sign of impatience?"

"No," said I, stricken with admiration; "not one damn sign." Whereupon he smiled, and told me the whole story, as I have given it to you.

The confession was of no advantage to Edmund Werner, or I shouldn't have got it. The fortunate developments of the case had already freed him, and restored him to his place among the world's serviceable men, in which he had given such promise of distinction; restored him to his home, and to the wife who has begun—as I perceive with pleasure which would be complete were I a better man—to value him more adequately and to give him that love which will grow stronger and sweeter.

THE END.



## WHAT ARMISTICE MEANS

**L**ITT MALLORY—rural Virginia's most sagacious philosopher, and veteran of three wars—made this observation:

"Time was when an armistice meant a temporary cessation of hostilities.

That ain't true now. It's a permit to Germans to go home and prove that folks who want to rule the world are the very ones who can't rule themselves."

# The Mole

By Edison Marshall

*Author of "The Last Grizzly," Etc.*

An uncanny quality possesses this tale. It keeps you guessing and gives you a shiver or two. Try it and see.

DOCTOR CLARK was waiting for me in his office. The twilight had come into it. He didn't like bright lights. He always did his thinking in the dusk—he said that the deep shadows and the stillness aided him to concentrate. He was like a creature of the dusk himself—always gray, always subdued. I knew he had been thinking now.

"It's the Billings case," I thought, "or maybe that strange paralysis case out to Freemont."

Perhaps he was going to operate that night, and I was to administer the anæsthetic. As an interne at the great seaside hospital, I did little else but administer anæsthetics. I didn't dream what he really wanted. It is a good thing human eyes cannot see into the future. If mine could have seen, I would have turned through a side door into the street, and left the famous doctor waiting vainly in the dusk.

"Sit down, Long," the gray doctor said. "We're going to give you a week's vacation from the hospital. Miss Padgett has come back to-night. Perhaps you knew of her case in Horton."

I knew the case very well. Miss Padgett was one of our best nurses, a magnificent creature that could lift a full-grown man in her arms and rock him like a child. She had been out to a little town at the outskirts of the city with a rather troublesome case. The great doctor sat looking at me in silence. He has the most curious quality in his eyes—a probing as sure and deep as of his own scalpels.

"Then the man is cured?" I asked. I knew perfectly well that he wasn't. Doctor Clark does not call his internes in his office to tell of cures. Old Farding, out in the village of Horton, was not the case to be cured in the week. I spoke perhaps because I thought I was expected to say something,

and perhaps, because silence in a room with Doctor Clark always becomes embarrassing. A person realizes that unless the doctor is kept busy with talk he will probe and probe with those curious eyes until he finds out all about one's past, most of one's future, and the exact weight and measurements of one's soul. And this is never pleasing to the spirit.

"She says she won't spend another night in the Farding house," the doctor told me, in the same tone that he would use to me if he were discussing the weather. "Not only that, but she's actually hysterical. Fancy it—a one-hundred-and-seventy-pound woman. Miss Padgett of all people! I didn't know she had a nerve in that heroic body. Of course I mean the kind of nerve that makes a woman fall on her face and whoop—of course she's got the other kind a-plenty. No matter what she tells. She has simply deserted—up and left—and you have to take her place."

"I? I am not a nurse."

"It's just for a week, Long, before Miss Dorne is free. It's good training for a young doctor. It's evidently a case a woman can't handle; and it will be interesting to you from a scientific point of view." A rattling skeleton, stepping out for a walk from its sepulcher on a moonlit night would be interesting to Doctor Clark—from a scientific point of view. "There is nothing for you the next week, anyway, in the hospital," he went on, "and I'm going on a vacation myself. So pack your bag and take the eighty-two. It's only a half-hour's ride."

He turned back to his desk, and forgot about me at once. I got up to go, but loitered about, on one foot and another, instead.

"Can't I see Miss Padgett?" I asked at last. "I'd rather like to know what to expect."

The doctor turned with a "you-still-

here?" look on his face. "She mustn't be disturbed," he replied. "What does it matter, anyway? She's full of a cock-and-bull story to make the teeth chatter. You wouldn't be interested in it."

"Considering I'm going to take her place, I'd think I had some slight right to be interested. Did old Farding run amuck?"

"No, he's meek as a lamb. Good Lord, I didn't know that great Padgett woman could be such a fool! I must get to work, Long—and anyway, the details don't matter. They were too vague to make anything of; so don't give them a thought."

This was Doctor Clark all over. His words simply rubbed the wrong way. I began to wonder, very much indeed, just what Miss Padgett had to tell. A trained nurse, knowing the secrets of homes, sometimes has most disquieting opportunities to learn the secrets of life.

"It's just a lot of drivel to which no sane man will listen or give any thought," the doctor went on, careful as always of his prepositions. "It's wasting my time to repeat it, and I don't mean to do so. You are to go out there and do what you can for Farding and his wife. Whatever scared Miss Padgett—something that lived in the cellar, and poked its head out now and then—doesn't matter to you at all. What a hectic yarn it was! Hang the girl, Long! Hang her, I say! But good night, and good luck."

There are a thousand towns in the Middle West like Horton—no better or no worse. I don't think they could be worse. The untidy station, the files of cheap, frame houses, the drabness and the dullness were just as bad as could possibly be.

An old man with amazing whiskers drove me in a ramshackle taxi to the Farding house. One couldn't find more dark or draggle-tailed streets in Tangier or Port Said. There were cobwebbed, cheerless, yellow lights at the corners; but they seemed to have no function other than to attract moths. They certainly gave no light. It was the kind of town that is lashed with rain in summer and banked with snow in winter, and things happen only behind drawn window shades. We creaked about a corner, and drove up a long, still street just a block distant from, and parallel to, the main street of the town. And then we stopped with a jerk before a tall house.

I couldn't tell much about it, except its general outline against the sky. It was of frame, and it had enough lumber in it to build three attractive bungalows. Why any architect from the beginning of the world should devise such a house is a mystery to be ranked with the distances of the stars. It was absolutely hideous. It had neither lines, nor beauty, nor comfort, nor cheer. I immediately felt a great envy for the tramps who might sleep in the barn. In fact, it wasn't a house at all in the true sense of the word. It wasn't even grotesque. It was just an enormous wooden box, with roof and windows, divided into rooms.

It seemed to be three stories high, rather narrow and severely plain. It had a sort of a little stand arrangement that was an excuse for a porch, narrow, unlighted windows, and a neglected patch of yard or lawn. It was the kind of house that the wind dearly loves to howl around—forsaking all the other houses in the neighborhood for a chance to clatter its windows and rattle its boards and whoop in its chimneys. I began to make excuses for Miss Padgett.

"Do you think any one is home?" I asked my driver as I waited for change.

"Oh, yes. Old man Farding—he ain't just right, and he don't go out. His wife don't neither. They're settin' in the kitchen, savin' light."

"Attractive neighborhood," I grunted.

"Not so bad." After much pretense at fumbling in hope of further conversation he at last found my change. "Just a block off Main Street. The back door of this house is just across the alley from the back door of the First National Bank Buildin'—biggest edifice in town."

"Unique!" I observed. Then I left him, and knocked on the door of the Farding house.

I have never been able to put my finger on the exact sources of the impressions I had that first hour with the Fardings. I've gone over every detail of it again and again, without the slightest avail. Nothing really happened. Nothing was really different from what I had a right to expect. And I am not a man of imagination, with any false impressions as to my own shadow.

The house was bleak and bare and unattractive; but it was simply nothing more or less than an atrocity perpetrated by some fiendish local contractor—a mere pile of boards and braces. I'm afraid of neither

of these things. The lights were dim and ineffective; but the darkness was the same that is eternally suspended over half the world, and to which the human race has become more or less accustomed. Old man Farding was no better or no worse than I expected. He was a familiar type among certain wards in sanitariums for the insane—seemingly a gentle, white-haired, scrawny-handed old man, with a far-away fixation about the pupils of his eyes. He shambled when he walked, and he had difficulty in shaping his words; but he was the most harmless type of lunatic. His wife, a semi-invalid, seemed nothing more than a timid, withered old woman, weighed down by the burden of her own and her husband's infirmities. All these were as usual. And yet I knew, from the first moment I entered the door, that something was very seriously wrong with this house of the Fardings.

I felt it, I knew it, and I couldn't get away from it. No one could, who came through the door. It was curious beyond words, and yet it was just as real as the enlarged photographs of the savage old ladies on the wall, or the faded carpet under my feet. I tried to look myself in the eye and call myself something considerably worse than a fool; but the name simply wouldn't come.

Even as I think it all over, step by step, I can hardly explain this impression. I know that the sound of my knock seemed to last a long time. And then I heard the woman's shuffling, limping step as she came to let me in. She seemed to come a long way, down a long, dark hall. And three times on her way to the door she stopped and waited in the shadows—as if indetermined whether or not to answer my knock.

It was a rather curious thing, and it started a curious parade of thoughts through my brain. Then I saw her pass through the hall door with a smoking kerosene lamp in her hand. She halted once more; then opened the door.

"Yes?" she asked. I began to wonder, in the back part of my mind where a person does such wondering, why she seemed so out of breath. Her eyes seemed to be leaping all over me, at my clothes and into my face. "What do you want?"

"I am Doctor Long—and I've come to take Miss Padgett's place for a few days—until a capable woman nurse can be secured."

She stood perfectly still an instant. She did not even flick an eyelash. To stand so very still is some way out of accordance with nature. It gives the effect of a terrifically violent start.

"A man?" she whispered at last. "We can't take a man. We can't——"

Then she paused, and seemed to be listening to some sound I could not hear. It was not particularly comforting. I take it that no man at night and at the door of an unknown house cares to be left out on a sound that his companion can hear. And after that, she led me into the hall.

She halted me again in the shadows, and went in to talk alone to her husband. I could just hear the murmur of their voices, and both of them seemed curiously, unexplainably startled.

"But we can't send him away," I heard her tell him. "We've got to risk it."

Then I heard him warn her to silence; and they whispered together a long time.

Mrs. Farding showed me my room. It was on the lower floor, exactly across the hall from Farding's room. And at the end of our talk she gave me a strong key.

She seemed somewhat nervous and distracted, and at first I could scarcely understand what she was trying to tell me. She did not lift her voice above a whisper. And she did not look me in the face at all.

"You don't want to forget—you mustn't fail to lock your door when you go to your rest," she told me. I had to lean forward to hear her; and then, subconsciously, I followed down the line of her eyes. She was steadily, intently watching a door at the end of the corridor. It seemed to be a plain door of pine that looked as if it might lead to the cellar. And before many seconds had passed I felt that I should like to take her gray face in my two hands and turn her eyes away by force. It's such little things as this that take a man's mind off of his work.

"You don't mean that I should expect trouble from your husband?" I asked.

She leaned forward till her breath was against my cheek. "That ain't it," she said painfully. "But this is a bad neighborhood—and we've had thieves before. We don't want no one to get in—to get in and rob you, while you're at our house. We don't want to have to make up no losses——"

"I'll stand responsible for my own losses," I told her. "I don't need this key."

Of course it was a silly thing to say. It



was no more justifiable than refusing the key that the hotel clerk hands you over the desk. But I had a feeling, somewhere, that to accept the key meant to admit fear: an admission that I had no desire to make.

She thrust the metal object in my hand. "Please, doctor," she urged. "Maybe I'm just nervous—but I do want you to lock your door. Don't make me talk about it any more——"

So I took the key and smiled at her. And I really tried my best to believe that stupendous lie of hers about the burglars.

I talked over his case with Farding before I went to my room. We went into his bedroom, and when my back was turned I heard him click the bolt on the door behind us. But I pretended not to notice. And there were plenty of explanations for their concern about their safety. Both of them were at the frontier of senility, full of delusion and timidity. Perhaps they had their little savings hidden in the walls of their rooms. I resolved to think no more about it.

So we sat and talked, and in between our sentences we listened to the wind that I had known would come. And a half hour later some one shuffled up the hall and knocked at our door.

I rose to open it; but the old man sprang in front. He simply leaped. There is no other word. It was the kind of thing to make a man seek relief in profanity, sudden and violent. Just for an instant his eyes swept my face.

"I'll go," he said. "It's just my wife."

I thought at the time that he was simply trying to hide from me the fact that he had locked the door of the room. It might be that, and it might be—any one of a dozen things. His attempts to unlock the door unseen by me were rather pathetic. It was indeed just Mrs. Farding. She had come to tell her husband good night.

There is just one reason why this little incident was an inevitable link in the drama of the Farding house. To outward appearances it was just a rather appealing excerpt from a domestic tragedy—the good night of an invalid wife to her afflicted husband. It might have been very easily one of those little scenes that cast a luster of justification over all of life. The incident that changed it all was a little motion between them in the shadow, when they thought my eyes were turned away.

She passed something into his hands—something that he quickly slid into his pocket. The motion was unbelievably quick and furtive. It had been evidently arranged between them. Their talk went on without a break. But the light showed me what had passed. Just for an instant I saw it flash, and it left me full of thought and wonder. It was a short knife or dagger—a cruel, white-bladed thing for close work.

Shortly after eleven I helped Farding undress and got him into his bed. I had plenty to think about as I sat beside him. Was the blade a weapon against me, or a protection from some danger that as yet I did not understand? The man did not go to sleep at once. He seemed to be listening to the sounds in the hall, and, although I had not the least desire to do so, I found myself listening, too. The wind whisked down the corridors without reason or sense, and our lamplight shook and danced.

Then a door opened softly, somewhere on the same floor with us. I tried not to hear it; but it simply would not go unheard. It wasn't that I was afraid of opening doors. A full-grown man outgrows such things. It was just that my peace of mind was rapidly going where the wind goes—a place from which it would not speedily return.

The clock in the hall had just struck twelve. It was an hour that the penny-dreadfuls love to mention, but which to a sane man is not greatly different from the hour of nine, or tea time in the afternoon. At first I did not think that Farding had heard the sound. I glanced at him; but the lids were down over his weak eyes. Then in the pause between the gusts of wind, I became quite sure that a loitering, fumbling, unsteady some one was in the corridor, just without the door.

There didn't seem to be any possibility of a mistake. It was just a matter of opening the door and looking out and seeing him loitering in the shadows. Seeing him without delusion, plain and real in the half darkness.

I could not hear footsteps. If I heard any sound at all, other than the wind and the night noises, and the roll of my own blood in my veins, it was a faint rustling and fumbling along the wall of the corridor. I would have thought it was some rodent, crawling along the walls some four feet above the floor, if it hadn't been for the un-

mistakable impression that this thing covered more space, embraced greater distances between his touches, than any rodent that man ever heard of. I was rather sure that it was drawing nearer. Then, abruptly, it ceased. I turned to find old Farding leaning from the bed, and groping with his hand toward his coat.

"What is it?" I whispered as gently as I could. "I am here."

He leaned toward me, and I know it was not fancy that made his face seem so drawn in the lamplight.

"The mole has come out," he whispered. "Don't make a sound. The mole has come out of the cellar."

So it was a simple matter—of a mole coming out of the cellar! I took his lean wrist, and tried to steady him with my eyes. The gaze of two steadfast eyes is usually more bracing than a drink of whisky.

"What do you mean?" I asked. "What is the mole?"

I have never been able to explain why I did not at once accept his words as the raving of a lunatic. It was simply that I couldn't. Perhaps it was the expression of his face, the sincerity that spoke from his eyes.

"The mole," he whispered again. "He always comes out soon after midnight. The mole that lives in the cellar—in the dark, dark cellar. And to-night he means killing. You are here—and to-night he means killing."

"You say this creature lives in the cellar?" And my voice, when I questioned him, held perfectly steady.

"He digs with his claws in the cellar—so dark that you cannot even see his eyes. *Hark!*"

"What?"

"Man, can't you hear?" The whisper seemed to die away. "It's come, that's all. It's just outside."

So we sat, mostly without breath, and listened. There was no longer a shadow of doubt about the reality of the sound in the corridor. It was not the wind. It was not a delusion that one brain will often instill in another. Some living creature was groping down the hallway, something real that halted and crept on and groped and fumbled and halted again. I even could mark the peculiar quality of its motion. It seemed to glide, rather than walk, rather like the motion of a great rodent. One seemed to

know that if it moved faster, its gait would become a scurry.

But this was not the only impression. Its hand, or antennæ, or whatever moved along the face of the wall, seemed to progress with a series of soft, distinct taps. I could only think of one thing that could make such a sound, and the thought wasn't one that a healthy man likes to tell. It was as if the taps were made by the sharp, scratching ends of claws or nails. It was silent just a moment. And then, not because of bravery but for the eternal reason that a danger is usually more safely faced than avoided, I crept toward the door.

The man in the bed behind me cried out a warning. Perhaps it was meant for me, perhaps for the visitor without. I tugged at the knob, forgetting that the door was locked. Then I fumbled at the bolt; and the three seconds that I wasted gave the intruder time to make his escape. The glide of his feet in the corridor was perfectly distinct. Then the bolt slid back, and I peered out into the hall.

It was very still and dark. And down at its end the door I had noticed before swung shut behind the form of some one who had just passed through.

I have no memory of racing down the hall toward the door. I was simply there, as if there had been no interlude of time. And at once any cherished hope that the intruder might have been merely Farding's wife, on some errand of senile curiosity, was completely and abruptly dispelled. The woman herself hobbled from the door of her room and caught my arm.

"Where are you going?" she cried. "You can't go down there? You can't, I say——"

I had opened the door, and for a long instant stood peering down into the black murk below. A little flight of stairs led down and vanished soon into the utter darkness. It was a deep, intense kind of darkness, through which the eyes simply could not peer. We all stood still and listened; but the silence was absolute.

"I'm going to chase down that thing that just tried to break into our room," I answered. "It's the thing to do, Mrs. Farding. Let me go——"

"You can't, I say. You can't go down there. This is our house, and I tell you you can't. You are just the nurse—you have no right——"

Farding joined us then, hurrying down the

hall. The knife his wife had given him glittered in his hand. I whirled to meet him, but the knife was not meant for me. And I don't remember glancing at it again. It was no more grotesque or out of accord with things as they were than any other detail of the past five minutes.

"You can't go, doctor," he said gently. He even smiled a little, a queer, wan, sad smile. "I wish you could—but you can't."

"But why—why? If there's something down there, the thing to do is go down and see. Let me call the police——"

We made a strange picture there at the landing of the stairs that led into the darkness. The only light came from the open door of the woman's room. Both of them shook their heads, as if an immutable fate forbade their assent.

"What's down there?" I demanded. "If I am here to cure you and your wife, my first work is to clear out that cellar."

But they shook their heads again; and slowly, even a little sadly, the woman closed the door over the stairs. Slowly the rift of darkness narrowed, and the mole was left to his shadows.

There was an air of suspense over the house all the next day. I tried to forget it. I worked with my patients, and made exhaustive examinations of their symptoms. But it wasn't entirely a success. There were still sounds, hushed and suppressed, that obviously were not the noise of rats working in the floor; and when an old woman walks the length of the hall with her head turned over her shoulder all the way, it was quite enough to take a doctor's mind from his work.

The Fardings ever seemed to be talking together. They would steal a few, whispered sentences every time I left their rooms. I would run into them in corners, and they made signs to each other when my back was turned. They were not clever at it at all; and I began sincerely to deplore the fact. Any one can see how this would be. If I was not to know what kind of a thing lived in the cellar, the less I thought about him the better. They did not mention the mole again to me, and I did not mention it either.

At twilight a storm broke on the prairie—a wind that rocked the house and whipped the trees, lightning gashing through the sky; and then hushed, strange silence. I resented the whole thing. It seemed to me that fate

was drawing cards from its sleeve as well as from the deck to make my stay in the Farding house as interesting as possible. There was not a whisper of wind when I went to bed. It was the kind of silence that makes a man lay with pricked-up ears, waiting for something to happen; and is highly destructive to the peace of mind. The town might have been one of those dead villages that travelers sometimes see in the Western mountains—places where miners once came in thousands, but from which all have taken their empty gold pokes and departed. The same silence hung over it, the same unwavering shadows.

I went to my room at eleven. But I had no intention of going to bed. Some time after midnight the mole would emerge from his cellar; and I did not wish to be caught unready. The hands of my watch slowly drew to midnight; and the clock gonged in the hall. And all at once I remembered that I was absolutely unarmed.

The realization did not lend to my comfort. On my table was a kit of doctor's instruments; but it was not until the sounds actually began that I even considered them. But my first movement after I heard the click of Farding's door was to draw a long-bladed surgeon's knife from the kit. The incongruity of this instrument of mercy at such an hour was worth neither a smile or a thought.

I had a chair in front of my door, and I tiptoed across the room and mounted it so that I could peer through the transom. Farding, whom I had seen safely in his bed an hour before, had risen again. His door opened, very stealthily, and he slipped through into the shadows of the hall. I saw his gray face in the dim light, and a flash light that he carried in his left hand. And as he tiptoed past, I saw something else. He held an ugly, dark, automatic pistol in his right—pointed square in front.

He stole down the hall; out of the range of my vision. And just as quietly as I would, I opened my own door.

I saw him waiting at the threshold of the dark stairway. Then the shadows hid him as he descended.

For the space of a minute, perhaps, I stood waiting in the hushed corridor. There was nothing else to do. I had no reason for following my patient into his cellar. Under the circumstances, a man may be excused for not wanting to go back quietly to his

room. And perhaps I would have never reached a decision if it had not been for the pistol shot that suddenly shattered to pieces the silence of the hall.

The response to such a violent sound as a pistol shot is never quite instantaneous. There is always a moment's partial paralysis, in which the muscles of the throat seem to contract and the heart stops beating. It was this way now. There were no overtones or echoes. The sound seemed to smash and die, leaving the silence even more profound than before.

Then there were three or four soft sounds that the reeling senses could not identify. They might have been the thrashing of a dying creature on the stone floor: I was inclined to think they were. Again, they might have been the muffled sounds of a struggle. I did not have time to interpret them until the final sound reached me—the sound that ended all indecision as to my next step.

It was a human scream, high-pitched and long and wild: all too nearly like the death scream that most men have heard sometimes in their lives. It streamed up from the cellar maw; and it seemed to me that I leaped to meet it. And then the darkness of the cellar grew round me as I darted down the stairs.

I tripped over something at the base—something that breathed and cried out. I could not see it. The darkness was too heavy. And at first I could not find a match. Then my fingers encountered the broken head of one; and the light that sprang forth as I struck it didn't seem quite real. There are no words for it; except that it was remotely like some kind of an eerie, silent explosion in a dream. The walls stood out gray. At my feet lay old Farding. His pistol was still clutched in his hand, but I could not find the flash light. But he was not dead. The only wound that I could see was a cut on his face, such as he might have received from falling against the corner of the stairs. He had been knocked unconscious.

But I did not have time to examine him further. For it was suddenly evident that the mole was stalking me in the darkness. I felt it as an instinct; and, besides, I could hear the rustle of its hand upon the stone. Farding's pistol felt good in my hand.

At such times one does not stop to conjecture as to the nature of his foe. Whether it was a rodent grown to monster size, or a

human being, or any other creature that might live its days in darkness did not matter. It only mattered that it was a foe, deadly past all things, and that it was ever creeping nearer across the stone.

It came ever so stealthily. I could hardly hear footsteps. Rather it was a dry rustle, as if it were feeling its way with the skin of a hand. There was no use trying to see. So I began to fire with Farding's pistol toward the sounds in the darkness. And after the roar and flame the silence and the darkness closed down around us, seemingly deeper than ever before.

I could not even hear the creature breathe. If it was still stalking me, it came like a cloud comes in the sky, silent beyond the uttermost bounds of hearing. I began to move softly, too, in what I thought was the direction of the flight of stairs. But the darkness had bewildered me. My groping hand encountered the cellar wall.

Then I stood still. Somewhere, near or far I did not know, the mole searched for me in the darkness. It was a reality that could inflict a wound, or drag its hand on the stone. It made no sound at all. All I could hear was the natural sounds of my own body, and what might have been the shuddering breath of Farding below the stairs. Whatever it was, it seemed to be able to traverse that infinite darkness with marvelous agility. It did not stumble at all. And even as I paused, I did not let myself think what kind of a foe this might be. Such thoughts would have taken away the little of my self-control that remained. It was something that had lived long in the cellar. The two old people had known of it, and had lived in constant terror of it. It had turned against one of them at last; and I had no doubt but that old Farding had fired his pistol in a vain attempt to repel its attack. The mole, the old man called it—and a mole is a thing that works beneath the ground. Only a mole could see in such darkness as this.

I had hoped that my eyes might become accustomed to the darkness, to make the conflict more even; but this hope was dispelled at once. The darkness was of too heavy a nature to ever fade except by the actual admission of light. Then I heard again the dry sound of its touch against stone, and I began to feel my way along the cellar wall.

All at once I went forward, flat on my

face. The wall had suddenly ended, and I had encountered a deep cavern or tunnel that had been dug in the stone. I am not quite sure what happened after that. I do not know in just what succession the events came. I was remotely aware that the tunnel narrowed to a passage just large enough for a man to crawl on hands and knees, and that I had fallen over a heavy bag or suit case that clanked and rang. The knife was knocked from my hand. And it was these sounds that gave away my presence. The next instant the mole and I were in furious conflict in the tunnel mouth.

It sprang upon my back; and even then I did not know who or what this enemy was. It had hard muscles, and seemed of my own weight. I could not aim my pistol at first. Some power had locked my arms under me. Then I heard its roar in the darkness, and its flame leaped out twice. I do not know which of us pulled the trigger. I have no memory of it. And all of it seemed like something that couldn't possibly be true, something that I was dreaming and from which I would presently awake. The arms that held me seemed so strong, the darkness so impenetrable, the strength with which I struggled so beyond that of my own muscles. I had summoned all that great store of reserve strength that the human race has acquired in long centuries of crises—the strength that most men, sometimes in their lives, find that they possess. It was no longer a question of terror. There was no longer any space left in my mind for such an emotion as terror. It was just a fight to the death.

My own world, the world where the sun shines in the day and the stars at night, the world of hospitals and surgery and homes and laughter began to seem very far away. I was simply fighting the age-old fight in the darkness. It was as if I were drawn back into a world known only in dreams—wherein life was only just one long war in the darkness, with terror ever spread above like dark wings. It seemed to go on interminably. It was just a matter of seconds; but it seemed already that endless lifetimes had come and died away. And then I felt its cold hands at my throat.

It was a mole, after all. Only a mole could have such claws as these. They seemed so sharp, buried so deep in my throat. They pressed ever harder. The strength began to flow out of my muscles,

a little at a time. And curiously, the darkness seemed to grow less. It wasn't that I could see. Perhaps it was simply flashes of strange, colored lights that passed with endless variance before my eyes. For an instant all my sense seemed abnormally acute.

Yes—the darkness was lessening; but it was too late now. The cellar walls leaped out of the gloom.

Then all at once the hands fell from my throat. And as I lay, sobbing the air back into my tortured lungs, I knew that help had come down to me, even in that pit of darkness. There were men with lanterns and guns—and the mole was caught at last.

It was all amazingly simple, once we learned the identity of the mole. The face that we saw in the lantern light turned out the unquestioned original of a certain photograph that hung above the desk of the little city's chief of police—that of one of the most desperate and savage criminals on the Atlantic seaboard. He was blind, and in the fraternity of crime he was known as "the Mole."

He was a nephew of old Farding and his wife, and the nets of the police had been slowly closing around him when he had taken refuge in their house. Darkness meant nothing to his blind eyes, and he had hidden in their cellar. And because he needed ample funds to escape the hangman, he had burrowed, day after day like the mole for which he was named, out of the cellar and under the vault of the bank across the alley. Only at midnight he came to the lower floor of the house for food. Although the simple old couple had lived in deadly fear of him, the old man had descended to the cellar to make a last attempt to prevent the bank robbery—on the very night of the crime. The rest is, of course, self-evident.

"I suppose you had a quiet night," old Doctor Clark greeted me when I came to report the next day. "Great guns, man! What are those marks on your throat?"

"I caught a mole," I told him, "and here is the bounty." And then I showed him the check that represented the reward for the capture of a famous criminal—the check that meant my days as an interne were over forever. For it was large enough to pay for the visit to the famous clinics in Europe; and after that, the rent of physician's offices for a year thereafter.

# The Green Rust

By Edgar Wallace

*Author of "Companions of the Ace High," Etc.*

(A Four-Part Story—Part Four)

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE LAST MAN AT THE BENCH.

**A**FTER all, it was for the best—Van Heerden could almost see the hand of providence in this deliverance of his enemy into his power. There must be a settlement with Beale, that play-acting drunkard who had so deceived him at first.

Doctor van Heerden could admire the ingenuity of his enemy and could kill him. He was a man whose mental poise permitted the paradox of detached attachments. At first he had regarded Stanford Beale as a smart police officer, the sort of man whom Pinkerton and Burns turn out by the score. Shrewd, assertive, indefatigable, such men piece together the scattered mosaics of humdrum crimes and by their mechanical patience produce for the satisfaction of courts sufficient of the piece to reveal the design. They figure in divorce suits, in financial swindles, and occasionally in more serious cases.

Van Heerden knew instinctively their limitations and had too hastily placed Beale in a lower category than he deserved. Van Heerden came to his workroom by way of the buffet which he had established for the use of his employees. As he shut the steel door behind him he saw Milsom standing at the rough wooden sideboard which served as bar and table for the workers.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," said Milsom, and then quickly as he read the other's face: "Anything wrong?"

"If the fact that the cleverest policeman in America or England is at present on the premises can be so described, then everything is wrong," said Van Heerden, and helped himself to a drink.

"Here—in the laboratory?" demanded Milsom, fear in his eyes. "What in hell do you mean?"

"I'll tell you," said the other, and gave the story as he had heard it from Hilda Glaum.

"He's in the old passage, eh?" said Milsom thoughtfully. "Well, there's no reason why he should get out—alive."

"He won't," said the other.

"Was he followed—you saw nobody outside?"

Van Heerden shook his head. "We have nothing to fear on that score. He's working on his own."

Milsom grunted. "What are we going to do with him?"

"Gas him," said Van Heerden. "He is certain to have a gun."

Milsom nodded. "Wait until the men have gone. I let them go at three—a few at a time, and it wants half an hour to that. He can wait. He's safe where he is. Why didn't Hilda tell me? I never even saw her."

"She went straight up from the old passage—through the men's door—she didn't trust you probably."

Milsom smiled wryly. Though he controlled these works and knew half the doctor's secrets, he suspected that the quantity of Van Heerden's trust was not greatly in excess of his girl's.

"We'll wait," he said again. "There's no hurry, and, anyway, I want to see you about old man Heyler."

"Von Heyler? I thought you were rid of him?" said Van Heerden in surprise. "That is the old fool that Beale has been after. He has been trying to suck him dry and has had two interviews with him. I told you to send him to Deans Folly. Bridgers would have taken care of him."

"Bridgers can look after nothing," said Milsom.

His eyes roved along the benches and stopped at a worker at the farther end of the room.

"He's quiet to-night," he said. "That fellow is too full of himself for my liking. Earlier in the evening before I arrived he pulled a gun on Schultz. He's too full of gun-play, that fellow—excuse the idiom, but I was in the same tailor's shop at Portland jail as Ned Garrand, the Yankee bank smasher."

Van Heerden made a gesture of impatience.

"About old Heyler," Milsom went on, "I know you think he's dangerous so I've kept him here. There's a room where he can sleep and he can take all the exercise he wants at night. But the old devil is restless—he's been asking me what is the object of his work."

Van Heerden frowned.

"He's difficult. Twice he has nearly betrayed me. As I told you in the car, I gave him some experimental work to do and he brought the result to me—that was the sample which fell into Beale's hands."

"Mr. Beale is certainly a danger," said Milsom thoughtfully.

Van Heerden made a move toward the laboratory, but Milsom's big hand detained him.

"One minute, Van Heerden," he said. "While you're here you'd better decide—when do we start dismantling? I've got to find some excuse to send these fellows away."

Van Heerden thought. "In two days," he said. "That will give you time to clear. You can send the men—well, send them to Scotland, some out-of-the-way place where news doesn't travel. Tell them we're opening a new factory and put them up at the local hotel."

Milsom inclined his head. "That sounds easy," he said, "I could take charge of them until the time came to skip. One can get a boat at Greenock."

"I shall miss you," said Van Heerden frankly. "You were necessary to me, Milsom. You're the driving force I wanted, and the only man of my class and caliber I can ever expect to meet who would go into this business with me."

They had reached the big vault and Van Heerden stood regarding the scene of mental activity with something approaching complacency.

"There is a billion in process of creation," he said.

"I could never think in more than six

figures," said Milsom, "and it is only under your cheering influence that I can stretch to seven. I am going to live in the Argentine, Van Heerden. A house on a hill that—"

The other shivered, but Milsom went on: "A gorgeous palace of a house alive with servants. A string band, sybarite feasts, a perfectly equipped laboratory where I can indulge my passion for research, a high-powered auto, wine of the rarest, women about me fragrant and delicate and beautiful—ah!"

Van Heerden looked at his companion curiously.

"That appeals to you, does it? For me, the control of finance. Endless schemes of fortune; endless smashings of rivals, railways, ships, great industries juggled and shuffled—that is the life I plan."

"Fine!" said the other laconically.

They walked to a bench and the worker looked up and took off his mask.

He was an old man and grinned toothlessly at Van Heerden.

"Good evening, Signor Doctor," he said in Italian. "Science is long and life is short, signor."

He chuckled, and, resuming his mask, returned to his work, ignoring the two men as though they had no existence.

"A little mad, old Castelli," said Milsom, "that's his one little piece—what crooked thing has he done?"

"None that I know," said the other carelessly. "He lost his wife and two daughters in the Messina earthquake. I picked him up cheap. He's a useful chemist."

They walked from bench to bench, but Van Heerden's eyes continuously strayed to the door, behind which he pictured a caged Stanford Beale, awaiting his doom. The men were beginning to depart now. One by one they covered their instruments and their trays, slipped off their masks and overalls and disappeared through the door, upon which Van Heerden's gaze was so often fixed. Their exit, however, would not take them near Beale's prison. A few paces along the corridor was another passage leading to the yard above and it was by this way that Hilda Glaum had sped to the doctor's rooms.

Presently all were gone save one industrious worker who sat peering through the eyepiece of his microscope, immovable.

"That's our friend Bridgers," said Milsom. "He's all lit up with the alkaloid of



*Enythroxylon Coca*—well, Bridgers, nearly finished?”

“Huh!” grunted the man without turning.

“We must let him finish what he’s doing. He is quite oblivious to the presence of anybody when he has these fits of industry. By the way, the passing of our dear enemy,” he jerked his head to the passage door, “will make no change in your plans?”

“How?”

“You have no great anxiety to marry the widow?”

“None,” said the doctor.

“And she isn’t a widow yet.”

It was not Milsom who spoke, but the man at the bench, the industrious worker whose eye was still at the microscope.

“Keep your comments to yourself,” said Van Heerden angrily. “Finish your work and get out.”

“I’ve finished.”

The worker rose slowly, and, loosening the tapes of his mask, pulled it off.

“My name is Beale,” he said calmly. “I think we’ve met before. Don’t move, Milsom, unless you want to save living expenses—I’m a fairly quick shot when I’m annoyed.”

Stanford Beale pushed back the microscope and seated himself on the edge of the bench.

“You addressed me as Bridgers,” he said. “You will find Mr. Bridgers in a room behind that stack of boxes. The fact is, he surprised me spying and was all for shooting me up, but I induced him to come into my private office, so to speak, and the rest was easy—he dopes, doesn’t he? He hadn’t the strength of a rat. However, that is all beside the point. Doctor van Heerden, what have you to say against my arresting you out of hand on a conspiracy charge?”

Van Heerden smiled contemptuously. “There are many things I can say,” he said. “In the first place you have no authority to arrest anybody. You’re not a police officer, but only a damned American amateur.”

“American, yes; damned, probably; but amateur, no,” said Beale gently. “As to the authority, why I guess I can arrest you first and get the authority after.”

“On what charge?” demanded Milsom. “There is nothing secret about this place, except Doctor van Heerden’s association with it—a professional man is debarred from mixing in commercial affairs. Is it a crime to run a——” he looked to Van Heerden.

“A germicide factory,” said Van Heerden promptly.

“Suppose I know the character of this laboratory?” asked Beale quietly.

“Carry that kind of story to the police and see what steps they will take,” said Van Heerden scornfully. “My dear Mr. Beale, as I have told you once before, you have been reading too much exciting detective fiction.”

Beale nodded. “Very likely,” he said, “but, anyhow, the little story that enthralls me just now is called ‘The Green Terror,’ and I’m looking to you to supply a few of the missing pages. And I think you’ll do it.”

The doctor was lighting a cigarette, and he looked at the other over the flaming match with a gleam of malicious amusement in his eyes.

“Your romantic fancies would exasperate me but for your evident sincerity. Having stolen my bride, you seem anxious to steal my reputation,” he said mockingly.

“That,” said Beale, slipping off the bench and standing, hands on hips before the doctor, “would take a bit of finding. I tell you, Van Heerden, that I’m going to call your bluff. I shall place this factory in the hands of the police, and I am going to call in the greatest scientists in England, France, and America, to prove the charge I shall make against you on the strength of this!”

He held up between his forefinger and thumb a crystal tube, filled to its seal with something that looked like green saw-dust.

“The world, the skeptical world, shall know the hell you are preparing for them!” Stanford Beale’s voice trembled with passion and his face was dark with the thought of a crime so monstrous that even the outrageous treatment of a woman who was more to him than all the world, was for the moment obliterated from his mind in the contemplation of the danger which threatened humanity.

“You say that the police and even the government of this country will dismiss my charge as being too fantastic for belief. You shall have the satisfaction of knowing that you are right. They think I am mad—but I will convince them! In this tube lies the destruction of all your fondest dreams, Van Heerden. To realize those dreams you have murdered two men. For these you killed John Millinborn and the man Prèdeaux. But you shall not——”

*Bang!*

The explosion roared thunderously in the confined space of the vault. Beale felt the wind of the bullet and turned, pistol up-raised.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE SECRET OF THE GREEN RUST.

A disheveled figure stood by the boxes, revolver in hand—it was Bridgers, the man he had left strapped and bound in the "ambulance room," and Beale cursed the folly which had induced him to leave the revolver behind.

"I'll fix you—you brute!" screamed Bridgers. "Get away from him—ah!"

Beale's hand flew up, a pencil of flame quivered and again the vault trembled to the deafening report.

But Bridgers had dropped to cover. Again he shot, this time with unexpected effect. The bullet struck the fuse box on the opposite wall and all the lights went out.

Beale was still holding the glass tube and this Milsom had seen. Quick as thought he hurled himself upon the detective, his big, powerful hands gripped the other's wrist and wrenched it round.

Beale set his teeth and maneuvered for a lock-grip, but he was badly placed, pressed as he was against the edge of the bench. He felt Van Heerden's fingers clawing at his hand and the tube was torn away.

Then somebody pulled the revolver from the other hand and there was a scamper of feet. He groped his way through the blackness and ran into the pile of boxes. A bullet whizzed past him from the half-crazy Bridgers, but that was a risk he had to take. He heard the squeak of an opening door and stumbled blindly in its direction. Presently he found it. He had watched the other men go out and discovered the steps—two minutes later he was in the street.

There was no sign of either of the two men. He found a policeman after he had walked half a mile, but that intelligent officer could not leave his beat and advised him to go to the police station. It was an excellent suggestion, for, although the sergeant on duty was wholly unresponsive, there was a telephone and at the end of the telephone in his little Haymarket flat, a Superintendent McNorton, the mention of whose very name galvanized the police office to activity.

"I have found the factory I've been look-

ing for, McNorton," said Beale. "I'll explain the whole thing to you in the morning. What I want now is a search made of the premises."

"We can't do that without a magistrate's warrant," said McNorton's voice, "but what we can do is to guard the premises until the warrant is obtained. Ask the station sergeant to speak on the phone—by the way, how is Miss Cresswell, better, I hope?"

"Much better," said the young man shortly.

It was unbelievable that she could ever fill his heart with the ache which came at the mention of her name.

He made way for the station sergeant and later accompanied four men back to the laboratory. They found all the doors closed. Beale scaled the wall but failed to find a way in. He rejoined the sergeant on the other side of the wall.

"What is the name of this street?" he asked.

"Playbury Street, sir—this used to be Henderson's Wine Vaults in my younger days."

Beale jotted down the address, and, finding a taxi, drove back to the police station, wearied and sick at heart.

He arrived in time to be a witness to a curious scene. In the center of the charge room and facing the sergeant's desk was a man of middle age, shabbily dressed, but bearing the indefinable air of one who had seen better days. The gray hair was carefully brushed from the familiar face and gave him that venerable appearance which pale eyes and a pair of thin, straight lips—curled now in an amused smile—did their best to discount.

By his side stood his captor, a station detective, a bored and apathetic man.

"It seems," the prisoner was saying as Stanford Beale came noiselessly into the room, "it seems that under this detestable system of police espionage, a fellow may not even take a walk in the cool of the morning."

His voice was that of an educated man, his drawling address spoke of his confidence.

"Now, look here, Parson," said the station sergeant in that friendly tone which the police adopt when dealing with their pet criminals, "you know as well as I do that under the Prevention of Crimes Act you, an old lag, are liable to be arrested, if you are seen in any suspicious circumstances—"

you oughtn't to be wandering about the streets in the middle of the night, and, if you do, why you mustn't kick because you're pinched—anything found on him, Smith?"

"No; sergeant—he was just mooching round, so I pulled him in."

"Where are you living now, Parson?"

The man with extravagant care searched his pockets.

"I have inadvertently left my card case with my coiner's outfit," he said gravely, "but a wire addressed to the Doss House, Mine Street, Paddington, will find me—but I don't think I should try. At this moment I enjoy the protection of the law. In four days' time I shall be on the ocean—why, Mr. Beale?"

Mr. Beale smiled. "Hullo, Parson—I thought you had sailed to-day."

Parson Homo shook his head. "The first-class berths were all taken, and I will not travel to Australia with the common herd."

He turned to the astonished sergeant. "Can I go—Mr. Beale will vouch for me?"

As he left the charge room he beckoned the detective, and, when they were together in the street, Beale found that all the Parson's flippancy had departed.

"I'm sorry I got you into that scrape," he said seriously. "I ought to have been unfrocked, but I was sentenced for my first crime under an assumed name. I was not attached to any church at the time, and my identity has never been discovered. Mr. Beale," he went on with a quizzical smile, "I have yet to commit my ideal crime—the murder of a bishop who allows a curate to marry a wife on sixty pounds a year." His face darkened, and Beale found himself wondering at the contents of the tragic years behind the man. Where was the wife?

"But my private grievances against the world will not interest you," Parson Homo resumed. "I only called you out to—well, to ask your pardon."

"It was my own fault, Homo," said Beale quietly and held out his hand. "Good luck—there may be a life for you in the new land."

He stood till the figure passed out of sight then turned wearily toward his own quarters. He went to his room and lay down on his bed fully dressed. He was aroused from a troubled sleep by the jangle of the phone. It was McNorton.

"Come down to Scotland House and see the assistant commissioner," he said. "He is

very anxious to hear more about this factory. He tells me that you've already given him an outline of the plot."

"Yes—I'll give you details—I'll be with you in half an hour."

He had a bath and changed his clothes, and breakfastless, for the woman who waited on him and kept his flat in order evidently thought his absence was likely to be a long one and had not arrived, he drove to the grim gray building on the Thames Embankment. Assistant Commissioner O'Donnell, a white-haired police veteran, was waiting for him, and McNorton was in the office.

"You look fagged," said the commissioner. "Take that chair—and you look hungry, too. Have you breakfasted?"

Beale shook his head with a smile.

"Get him something, McNorton—ring that bell. Don't protest, my good fellow—I've had exactly the same kind of nights as you've had, and I know that it is grub that counts more than sleep."

He gave an order to an attendant, and not until twenty minutes later, when Beale had finished a surprisingly good meal in the superintendent's room, did the commissioner allow the story to be told.

"Now I'm ready," he said.

"I'll begin at the beginning," said Stanford Beale. "I was a member of the United States secret service until after the war when at the request of Mr. Kitson, who is known to you, I came to Europe to devote all my time to watching Miss Cresswell and Doctor van Heerden. All that you know."

The commissioner nodded.

"One day when searching the doctor's rooms in his absence, my object being to discover some evidence in relation to the Millinborn murder, I found this."

He took a newspaper cutting from his pocketbook and laid it on the table.

"It is from *El Imparcial*, a Spanish newspaper, and I will translate it for you:

"Thanks to the discretion and eminent genius of Doctor Alphonso Romanes, the chief medical officer of Vigo, the farmers of the district have been spared a catastrophe much lamentable."

"I am translating literally.

"On Monday last, Señor Don Marin Fernandez, of La Linea, discovered one of his fields of wheat had died in the night and was already in a condition of rot. In alarm he notified the chef of medicines at Vigo, and Doctor Alphonso Romanes, with that zeal and alacrity which has

marked his acts, was quickly on the spot, accompanied by a foreign scientist. Happily, the learned and gentle doctor is a bacteriologist superb. An examination of the dead wheat, which already emitted unpleasant odors, revealed the presence of a new disease, the *verde orin*—green rust. By his orders the field was burned. Fortunately, the area was small and dissociated from the other fields of Señor Fernardey by wide *zanjas*. With the exception of two small pieces of the infected wheat, carried away by Doctor Romanes and the foreign medical cavalier, the pest was incinerated."

"The foreign medical cavalier," said Beale, "was Doctor van Heerden. The date was 1915, when the doctor was taking his summer holiday, and I have had no difficulty in tracing him. I sent one of my men to Vigo to interview Doctor Romanes, who remembers the circumstances perfectly. He himself had thought it wisest to destroy the germs after carefully noting their characteristics, and he expressed the anxious hope that his whilom friend, Van Heerden, had done the same. Van Heerden, of course, did nothing of the sort. He has been assiduously cultivating the germ in his laboratory. So far as I can ascertain from Professor Heyler, an old German who was in Van Heerden's service, and who seems a fairly honest man, the doctor nearly lost the culture, and it was only by sending out small quantities to various seedy scientists and getting them to experiment in the cultivation of the germ under various conditions that he found the medium in which they best flourish. It is, I believe, fermented rye flour, but I am not quite sure."

"To what purpose do you suggest Van Heerden will put his cultivations?" asked the commissioner.

"I am coming to that. In the course of my inquiries and searchings I found that he was collecting very accurate data concerning the great wheat fields of the world. From the particulars he was preparing I formed the idea that he intended, and intends, sending an army of agents all over the world who, at a given signal, will release the germs in the growing wheat."

"But surely a few germs sprinkled on a great wheat field such as you find in America would do no more than local damage?"

Beale shook his head. "Mr. O'Donnell," he said soberly, "if I broke a tube of that stuff in the corner of a ten-thousand-acre field, the whole field would be rotten in twenty-four hours! It spreads from stalk

to stalk with a rapidity that is amazing. One germ multiplies itself in a living wheat field a billion times in twelve hours. It would not only be possible but certain that twenty of Van Heerden's agents in America could destroy the harvests of the United States in a week."

"You will make a European name over this, Mr. Beale," he said.

"I hope Europe will have nothing more to talk about," said Beale.

They passed back to McNorton's office.

"I'll come right along," said the superintendent. He was taking his hat from a peg when he saw a closed envelope lying on his desk.

"From the local police station," he said. "How long has this been here?"

His clerk shook his head.

"I can't tell you, sir. It has been there since I came in."

"H'm—I must have overlooked it. Perhaps it is news from your factory."

He tore it open, scanned the contents, and swore.

"There goes your evidence, Beale," he said.

"What is it?" asked Beale quickly.

"The factory was burned to the ground in the early hours of the morning," he said. "The fire started in the old wine vault, and the whole building has collapsed."

The detective stared out of the window. "Can we arrest Van Heerden on the evidence of Professor Heyler?"

For answer McNorton handed him the letter. It ran:

From inspector in charge. S. Paddington to Superintendent McNorton. Factory in Playbury Street under P. O. [Police Observation] completely destroyed by fire, which broke out in basement at five-twenty this morning. One body found, believed to be a man named Heyler.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### A SCHEME TO STARVE THE WORLD.

"Wheat Soaring," said one headline. "Frantic Scenes in the Pit," said another. "Wheat Reaches Famine Price," blared a third.

Beale passing through to Whitehall heard the shrill call of the newsboys and caught the word "wheat." He snatched a paper from the hands of a boy and read.

Every corn market in the northern hemisphere was in a condition of chaos. Prices were jumping to a figure beyond any which

the most stringent days of the war had produced.

He slipped into a telephone booth, gave a treasury number, and McNorton answered.

"Have you seen the papers?" he asked.

"No, but I've heard. You mean about the wheat boom?"

"Yes—the game has started."

"Where are you? Wait for me, I'll join you."

Three minutes later McNorton appeared from the Whitehall end of Scotland Yard. Beale hailed a cab and they drove to the hotel together.

"Warrants have been issued for Van Heerden and Milson and the girl Glaum," he said. "I expect we shall find the nest empty, but I have sent men to all the railway stations. Do you think we've moved too late?"

"Everything depends on the system that Van Heerden has adopted," replied Beale. "He is the sort of man who would keep everything in his own hands. If he has done that and we catch him, we may prevent a world catastrophe."

At the hotel they found Kitson waiting in the vestibule.

He listened attentively and did not interrupt until Stanford Beale had finished.

"That's big enough," he said. "I owe you an apology—much as I was interested in Miss Cresswell, I realize that her fate was as nothing beside the greater issue."

"What does it mean?" asked McNorton.

"The wheat panic? God knows. It may mean bread at a guinea a pound—it is too early to judge."

The door was opened unceremoniously and a man strode in. McNorton was the first to recognize the intruder and rose to his feet.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you," said Lord Sevington—it was the foreign secretary of Great Britain himself. "Well, Beale, the fantastic story you told me seems in a fair way to being realized."

"This is Mr. Kitson," introduced Stanford, and the gray-haired statesman bowed.

"I sent for you but decided I couldn't wait—so I came myself. Ah, McNorton, what are the chances of catching Van Heerden?"

"No man has ever escaped from this country once his identity was established," said the police chief hopefully.

"I don't quite get the commercial end of

it," said Kitson. "How does Van Heerden benefit by destroying the crops of the world?"

"He doesn't benefit, because the crops won't be destroyed," said the minister. "The South Russian crops are all right, the German crops are intact, but are practically all mortgaged to the German government."

"The government?"

Lord Sevington nodded. "This morning the German government have made two announcements. The first is the commandeering of all the standing crops and at the same time the taking over of all options on the sale of wheat. Great granaries are being established all over Germany. The old Zeppelin sheds——"

"Great heavens!" cried Kitson, and stared at Stanford Beale. "That was the reason they took over the sheds?"

"A pretty good reason, too," said Beale. "Storage is everything in a crisis like this. What is the second announcement, sir?"

"They prohibit the export of grain," said Lord Sevington. "The whole of Germany is to be rationed for a year, bread is to be supplied by the government free of all cost to the people; in this way Germany handles the surpluses for us to buy."

"What will she charge?"

"What she wishes. If Van Heerden's scheme goes through, if throughout the world the crops are destroyed and only that which lies under Germany's hand is spared, what must we pay? Every penny we have taken from Germany; every cent of her war costs must be returned to her in exchange for wheat."

"Impossible!"

"Why impossible? There is no limit to the price of rarities. What is rarer than gold is more costly than gold. You who are in this room are the only people in the world who know the secret of the Green Rust and I can speak frankly to you. I tell you that we must either buy from Germany or make war on Germany, and the latter course is impossible, and if it were possible would give us no certainty of relief. We shall have to pay—Britain, France, America, Italy—we shall have to pay. We shall pay in gold, we may have to pay in battleships and material. Our stocks of wheat have been allowed to fall, and to-day we have less than a month's supply in England. Every producing country in the world will stop exporting instantly—and they, too, with the

harvest nearly due, will be near the end of their stocks. Now tell me, Mr. Beale, in your judgment, is it possible to save the crops by local action?"

Beale shook his head. "I doubt it," he said. "It would mean the mobilization of millions of men, the surrounding of all wheat tracts—and even then I doubt if your protection would be efficacious. They can send the stuff into the fields by a hundred methods. The only thing to do is to catch Van Heerden and stifle the scheme at its fountain head."

The chief of the foreign ministry strode up and down the room, his hands thrust into his pockets, his head upon his breast.

"It means our holding out for twelve months," he said. "Can we do it?"

"It means more than that, sir," said Beale quietly.

Lord Sevington stopped and faced him. "More than that? What do you mean?"

"It may mean a wheatless world for a generation," said Beale. "I have consulted the best authorities, and they agree that the soil will be infested for ten years."

The four men looked at one another helplessly.

"Why," said Sevington in awe, "the whole social and industrial fabric of the world would crumble into dust. America would be ruined for a hundred years, there would be deaths by the million—good God! it means the very end of civilization!"

"It is unbelievable," said Kitson. "I have exactly the same feeling I had on August 1, 1914—that sensation of unreality."

His voice seemed to arouse the foreign minister from the meditation into which he had fallen, and he started.

"Beale," he said, "you have unlimited authority to act—Mr. McNorton you will go back to Scotland Yard and ask the chief commissioner to attend at the office of the privy seal. Mr. Beale will keep in touch with me all the time."

Without any formal leave-taking he made his exit followed by Superintendent McNorton.

Van Heerden had disappeared with dramatic suddenness. Detectives who visited his flat discovered that his personal belongings had been removed in the early hours of the morning. He had left with two trunks, which were afterward found in the cloak-room of a London railway terminus, and a companion who was identified as Milsom.

Whether the car had gone east or north, south or west nobody knew.

In the early editions of the evening newspapers side by side with the account of the panic scenes on 'Change was the notice:

The air ministry announce the suspension of Order 63 of Trans-Marine Flight Regulations. No aeroplane will be allowed to cross the coast line by day or night without first descending at a coast control station. Aerial patrols have orders to force down any machine which does not obey the "descend" signal. This signal is now displayed at all coast stations.

Every railway station in England, every port of embarkation was watched by police. The one photograph of Van Heerden in existence, thousands of copies of an excellent snapshot taken by one of Beale's assistants, were distributed by aeroplane to every district center. At two o'clock Hilda Glaum was arrested and conveyed to Bow Street. She showed neither surprise nor resentment, and offered no information as to Van Heerden's whereabouts.

Throughout the afternoon there were the usual crops of false arrest and detention of perfectly innocent people, and at five o'clock it was announced that all telegraphic communication with the Continent and with the Western Hemisphere was suspended until further notice.

Beale came back from Barking to whither he had gone to interview a choleric commercial traveler, who bore some facial resemblance to Van Heerden and had been arrested in consequence, and discovered that something like a council of war was being held in Kitson's private room.

McNorton and two of his assistants were present; there was an under secretary from the foreign office, a great scientist whose services had been called upon, and a man whom he recognized as a member of the committee of the corn exchange. He shook his head in answer to McNorton's inquiring glance and would have taken his seat at the table, but Kitson, who had risen on his entrance, beckoned him to the window.

"We can do without you for a little while, Beale," he said, lowering his voice. "There's somebody there," he jerked his head to a door which led to another room of his suite, "who requires an explanation, and I think your time will be so fully occupied in the next few days that you had better seize this opportunity while you have it."

"Miss Cresswell!" said Beale in despair.

The old man nodded slowly.

"What does she know?"

"That is for you to discover," said Kitson, and gently pushed him toward the door.

With a quaking heart he turned the knob and stepped guiltily into the presence of the girl who in the eyes of the law was his wife.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE COMING OF DOCTOR MILSOM.

She rose to meet him, and he stood spell-bound, still holding the handle of the door. It seemed that she had taken on new qualities, a new and an ethereal grace. At the very thought, even of his technical possession of this smiling girl who came forward to greet him, his heart thumped so loudly that he felt she must hear it. She was pale and there were dark shadows under her eyes, but the hand that gripped his was firm and warm and living.

"I have to thank you for much, Mr. Beale," she said. "Mr. Kitson has told me that I owe my rescue to you."

"Did he?" he asked awkwardly, and wondered what else Kitson had told her.

"I am trying to be very sensible, and I want you to help me because you are the most sensible man I know."

She went back to the lounge chair where she had been sitting and pointed to another.

"It was horribly melodramatic, wasn't it? But I suppose the life of a detective is full of melodrama."

"Oh, brimming over," he said. "If you keep very quiet I will give you a résumé of my most interesting cases," he said, making a pathetic attempt to be flippant, and the girl detected something of his insincerity.

"You have had a trying day," she said with quick sympathy. "Have you arrested Doctor van Heerden?"

He shook his head.

"I am glad," she said.

"Glad?"

She nodded.

"Before he is arrested," she spoke with some hesitation, "I want one little matter cleared up. I asked Mr. Kitson, but he put me off and said you would tell me everything."

She got up and went to her bag which stood upon a side table, opened it, and took out something which she laid on the palm of her hand. She came back with hand extended, and Beale looked at the glittering object on her palm and was speechless.

"Do you see that?" she asked.

He nodded, having no words for the moment, for "that" was a thin gold ring.

"It is a wedding ring," she said, "and I found it on my finger when I recovered."

"Oh," said Beale blankly.

"Was I married?" she asked.

He made two or three ineffectual attempts to speak and ended by nodding.

"I feared so," she said quietly. "You see, I recollect nothing of what happened. The last thing I remembered was Doctor van Heerden sitting beside me and putting something into my arm. It hurt a little, but not very much, and I remember I spoke to him. I think it was about you," a little color came to her face, "or perhaps he was speaking about you; I am not sure," she said hurriedly. "I know that you came into it somehow and that is all I can recall."

"Nothing else?" he asked dismally.

"Nothing," she said.

"Try, try, try to remember," he urged her.

He realized he was being a pitiable coward and that he wanted to shift the responsibility for the revelation upon her. She smiled and shook her head.

"I am sorry, but I can't remember anything. Now you are going to tell me."

He discovered that he was sitting on the edge of the chair and that he was more nervous than he had ever been in his life.

"So I am going to tell you," he said in a hollow voice. "Of course I'll tell you. It is rather difficult, you understand."

She looked at him kindly.

"I know it must be difficult for a man like you to speak of your own achievements. But for once you are going to be immodest," she laughed.

"Well, you see," he began, "I knew Van Heerden wanted to marry you. I knew that all along. I guessed he wanted to marry you for your money, because in the circumstances there was nothing else he could want to marry you for," he added. "I mean," he corrected himself hastily, "that money was the most attractive thing to him."

"This doesn't sound very flattering," she smiled.

"I know I am being crude, but you will forgive me when you learn what I have to say," he said huskily. "Van Heerden wanted to marry you——"

"You knew he wanted to marry me for my money and not for my beauty or my



accomplishments," she said, "and so you followed me down to Deans Folly."

"Yes, yes, but I must explain. I know it will sound horrible to you and you may have the lowest opinion of me, but I have got to tell you."

He saw the look of alarm gather in her eyes and plunged into his story.

"I thought that if you were already married Van Heerden would be satisfied and take no further steps against you."

"But I wasn't already married," she said, puzzled.

"Wait, wait, please," he begged. "Keep that in your mind, that I was satisfied Van Heerden wanted you for your money and that if you were already married or even if you weren't and he thought you were, I could save you from dangers, the extent of which even I do not know. And there was a man named Homo, a crook. He had been a parson and had all the manner and style of his profession. So I got a special license in my own name."

"You?" she said breathlessly. "A marriage license? To marry me?"

He nodded.

"And I took Homo with me in my search for you. I knew that I should have a very small margin of time, and I thought if Homo performed the ceremony and I could confront Van Heerden with the accomplished deed—"

She sprang to her feet with a laugh.

"Oh, I see, I see," she said. "Oh, how splendid! And you went through this mock ceremony! Where was I?"

"You were at the window," he said miserably.

"But how lovely! And you were outside and your parson with the funny name—but that's delicious! So I wasn't married at all, and this is your ring!" She picked it up with a mocking light in her eyes and held it out to him, but he shook his head.

"You were married," he said in a voice which was hardly audible.

"Married? How?"

"Homo was not a fake. He was a real clergyman. And the marriage was legal!"

They looked at one another without speaking. On the girl's part there was nothing but pure amazement, but Stanford Beale read horror, loathing, consternation, and unforgiving wrath and waited, as the criminal waits for his sentence, upon her next words.

"So I am really married—to you," she said wonderingly.

"You will never forgive me, I know." He did not look at her now. "My own excuse is that I did what I did because I—wanted to save you. I might have sailed in with a gun and shot them up. I might have waited my chance and broken into the house. I might have taken a risk and surrounded the place with police, but that would have meant delay. I didn't do the normal things or take the normal view—I couldn't with you."

He did not see the momentary tenderness in her eyes, because he was not looking at her and went on:

"That's the whole of the grisly story. Mr. Kitson will advise you as to what steps you may take to free yourself. It was a most horrible blunder, and it was all the more tragic because you were the victim—you of all persons in the world!"

She had put the ring down, and now she took it up again and examined it curiously.

"It is rather—quaint, isn't it?" she asked.

"Oh, very!" said the unhappy young man.

He thought he heard a sob and looked up. She was laughing, at first silently, then as the humor of the thing seized her, her laugh rang clear and he caught its infection.

"It's funny," she said at last, wiping her eyes. "There is a humorous side to it. Poor Mr. Beale!"

"I deserve a little pity," he said ruefully.

"Why?" she asked quickly. "Have you committed bigamy?"

"Not noticeably so," he answered with a smile.

"Well, what are you going to do about it? It's rather serious when one thinks of it—seriously. So I am Mrs. Stanford Beale—poor Mr. Beale, and poor Mrs. Beale-to-be. I do hope," she said, and this time her seriousness was genuine, "that I have not upset any of your plans—too much. Oh," she sat down suddenly, staring at him, "it would be awful," she said in a hushed voice, "and I would never forgive myself. Is there—forgive my asking the question—but I suppose," with a flashing smile, "as your wife I am entitled to your confidence—is there somebody you are going to marry?"

"I have neither committed bigamy nor do I contemplate it," said Beale, who was gradually recovering his grip of the situation. "If you mean am I engaged to somebody, in fact to a girl," he said recklessly,

"the answer is in the negative. There will be no broken hearts on my side of the family. I have no desire to probe your wounded heart——"

"Don't be flippant." She stopped him sternly. "It is a very terrible situation, Mr. Beale, and I hardly dare to think of it."

"I realize how terrible it is," he said, suddenly cold, "and, as I tell you, I will do everything I can to correct my blunder."

"Does Mr. Kitson know?" she asked.

He nodded.

"What did Mr. Kitson say? Surely he gave you some advice."

"He said——" began Stanford and went red.

The girl did not pursue the subject.

"Come, let us talk about the matter like rational beings," she said cheerfully. "I have got over my first inclination to swoon. You must curb your very natural desire to be haughty."

"I cannot tell you what we can do yet. I don't want to discuss the unpleasant details of a divorce," he said, "and perhaps you will let me have a few days before we decide on any line of action. Van Heerden is still at large, and until he is under lock and key and this immense danger which threatens the world is removed, I can hardly think straight."

"Mr. Kitson has told me about Van Heerden," she said quietly. "Isn't it rather a matter for the English police to deal with? As I have reason to know," she shivered slightly, "Doctor van Heerden is a man without any fear or scruple."

"My scruples hardly keep me awake at night," he said, "and I guess I'm not going to let up on Van Heerden. I look upon it as my particular job."

"Isn't it," she hesitated, "isn't it rather dangerous?"

"For me?" he laughed. "No, I don't think so. And even if it were in the most tragic sense of the word dangerous, why that would save you a great deal of unpleasantness."

"I think you are being horrid," she said.

"I am sorry," he responded quickly. "I was fishing for a little pity, and it was rather cheap and theatrical. No, I do not think there is very much danger. Van Heerden is going to keep under cover, and he is after something bigger than my young life."

"Is Milsom with him?"

Beale nodded. "He is the weak link in

Van Heerden's scheme," he said. "Somehow, Van Heerden doesn't strike me as a good team leader, and what little I have seen of Milsom leads me to the belief that he is hardly the man to follow the doctor's lead blindly. Besides, it is always easier to catch two men than one," he laughed, "that is an old detective's axiom and it works out."

She put out her hand. "It's a tangled business, isn't it," she said, "I mean us. Don't let it add to your other worries. Forget our unfortunate relationship until we can smooth things out."

He shook her hand in silence.

"And now I am coming out to hear all that you clever people suggest," she said. "Please don't look alarmed. I have been talking all the afternoon and have been narrating my sad experience—such as I remember—to the most important people, cabinet ministers, and police commissioners and doctors and things."

"One moment," he said.

He took from his pocket a stout book.

"I was wondering what that was," she laughed. "You haven't been buying me reading matter?"

He nodded and held the volume so that she could read the title.

"'A Friend in Need, by S. Beale.' I didn't know you wrote?" she said in surprise.

"I am literary and even worse," he said flippantly. "I see you have a shelf of books here. If you will allow me I will put it with the others."

"But mayn't I see it?"

He shook his head.

"I just want to tell you all you have said about Van Heerden is true. He is a most dangerous man. He may yet be dangerous to you. I don't want you to touch that little book unless you are in real serious trouble. Will you promise me?"

She opened her eyes wide.

"But, Mr. Beale?"

"Will you promise me?" he said again.

"Of course I'll promise you, but I don't quite understand."

"You will understand," he said.

He opened the door for her and she passed out ahead of him. Kitson came to meet them.

"I suppose there is no news?" asked Stanford.

"None," said the other, "except high po-

litical news. There has been an exchange of notes between the Triple Alliance and the German government. All communication with the Ukraine is cut off and three ships have been sunk in the Bosphorus so cleverly that our grain ships in the Black Sea are isolated."

There was a knock at the door.

"Unlock it somebody," said Kitson. "I turned the key."

The nearest person was the member of the corn exchange committee, and he clicked back the lock and the door opened to admit a waiter.

"There's a man here," he said, but before he could say more he was pushed aside and a dusty, disheveled figure stepped into the room and glanced round.

"My name is Milsom," he said. "I have come to give king's evidence!"

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE LOST CODE.

"I'm Milsom," said the man in the doorway again.

His clothes were grimed and dusty, his collar limp and soiled. There were two days' growth of red-gray stubble on his big jaw and he bore himself like a man who was faint from lack of sleep.

He walked unsteadily to the table and fell into a chair.

"Where is Van Heerden?" asked Beale, but Milsom shook his head.

"I left him two hours ago after a long and unprofitable talk on patriotism," he said, and laughed shortly. "At that time he was making his way back to his house in South-wark."

"Then he is in London—here in London!"

Milsom nodded.

"You won't find him," he said brusquely. "I tell you I've left him after a talk about certain patriotic misgivings on my part—look!"

He lifted his right hand which hitherto he had kept concealed by his side and Olivia shut her eyes and felt deathly sick.

"Right index digit and part of the phanges shot away," said Milsom philosophically. "That was my trigger finger—but he shot first. Give me a drink, for God's sake!"

They brought him a bottle of wine, and he drank it from a long tumbler in two great breathless gulps.

"You've closed the coast to him," he said,

"you shut down your wires and cables, you're watching the roads, but he'll get his message through, if——"

"Then he hasn't cabled?" said Beale eagerly. "Milsom, this means liberty for you—liberty and comfort. Tell us the truth, man, help us hold off this horror that Van Heerden is loosing on the world and there's no reward too great for you."

Milsom's eyes narrowed.

"It wasn't the hope of reward or hope of pardon that made me break with Van Heerden," he said in his slow way. "You'd laugh yourself sick if I told you—it was—it was the knowledge that this country would be down and out; that the people who spoke my tongue and thought more or less as I thought should be under the foot of the Beast—fevered sentimentality! You don't believe that?"

"I believe it."

It was Olivia who spoke, and it appeared that this was the first time that Milsom had noticed her presence, for his eyes opened wider.

"You—oh, you believe it, do you?" and he nodded.

"But why is Van Heerden waiting?" asked McNorton. "What is he waiting for?"

The big man rolled his head helplessly from side to side and the hard cackle of his laughter was very trying to men whose nerves were raw and on edge.

"That's the fatal lunacy of it! I think it must be a national characteristic. You saw it in the war again and again—a wonderful plan brought to nought by some piece of overcleverness on the part of the super-man."

A wild hope leaped to Beale's heart.

"Then it has failed! The rust has not answered?"

But Milsom shook his head wearily.

"The rust is all that he thinks—and then some," he said. "No, it isn't that. It is in the work of organization where the hitch has occurred. You know something of the story. Van Heerden has agents in every country in the world. He has spent nearly a hundred thousand pounds in perfecting his working plans, and I'm willing to admit that they are well-nigh perfect. Such slight mistakes as sending men to South Africa and Australia where the crops are six months later than the European and American harvests may be forgiven because the German thinks longitudinally, and north and

south are the two points of the compass which he never bothers his head about. If the Germans had been a seafaring people they'd have discovered America before Columbus, but they would never have found the north pole or rounded the Cape in a million years."

He paused, and they saw the flicker of a smile in his weary eyes.

"The whole scheme is under Van Heerden's hand. At the word 'go' thousands of his agents begin their work of destruction, but the word must come from him. He has so centralized his scheme that if he died suddenly without that word being uttered, the work of years would come to nought. I guess he is suspicious of everybody including his own government. For the best part of a year he has been arranging and planning. With the assistance of a girl, a compatriot of his, he has reduced all things to order. In every country is a principal agent who possesses a copy of a simple code. At the proper moment Van Heerden would cable a word which meant 'get busy' or 'hold off until you hear from me' or 'abandon scheme for this year and collect cultures.' I happen to be word-perfect in the meanings of the code words because Van Heerden has so often drummed them into me."

"What are the code words?"

"I'm coming to that," nodded Milsom. "Van Heerden is the type of scientist that never trusts its memory. You find that kind in all the schools—they usually spend their time making the most complete and detailed notes and their studies are packed with memoranda. Yet he had a wonderful memory for the commonplace things—for example, in the plain English of his three messages, he was word-perfect. He could tell you offhand the names and addresses of all his agents. But when it came to scientific data his mind was a blank until he consulted his authorities. It seemed that once he made a note his mind was incapable of retaining the information he had committed to paper. That, as I say, is a phenomenon which is not infrequently met with among men of science."

"And he had committed the code to paper?" asked Kitson.

"I am coming to that. After the fire at the Paddington works, Van Heerden said the time had come to make a get-away. He was going to the Continent. I was to sail for Canada. 'Before you go,' he said, 'I will

give you the code—but I am afraid that I cannot do that until after ten o'clock.'"

McNorton was scribbling notes in shorthand and carefully circled the hour.

"We went back to his flat and had breakfast together—it was then about five o'clock. He packed a few things, and I particularly noticed that he looked very carefully at the interior of a little grip which he had brought the previous night from Staines. He was so furtive, carrying the bag to the light of the window, that I supposed that he was consulting his code, and I wondered why he should defer giving me the information until ten o'clock. Anyway, I could swear he took something from the bag and slipped it into his pocket. We left the flat soon after and drove to a railway station where the baggage was left. Van Heerden had given me bank-notes for a thousand pounds in case we should be separated, and I went on to the house in South London. You needn't ask me where it is, because Van Heerden is not there."

He gulped again at the wine.

"At eleven o'clock Van Heerden came back," resumed Milsom, "and if ever a man was panic-stricken, it was he—the long and the short of it is that the code was mislaid."

"Mislaid!" Beale was staggered.

Here was farce interpolated into tragedy—the most grotesque, the most unbelievable farce.

"Mislaid," said Milsom. "He did not say as much, but I gathered from the few disjointed words he flung at me that the code was not irredeemably lost, in fact, I have reason to believe that he knows where it is. It was after that that Van Heerden started in to do some tall cursing of me, my country, my decadent race and the like. Things have been strained all the afternoon. Tonight they reached a climax. He wanted me to help him in a burglary—and burglary is not my forte."

"What did he want to burgle?" asked McNorton with professional interest.

"Ah! there you have me! It was the question I asked and he refused to answer. I was to put myself in his hands, and there was to be some shooting if, as he thought likely, a caretaker was left on the premises to be entered. I told him flat—we were sitting on Wandsworth Common at the time—that he could leave me out and that is where we became mutually offensive."

He looked at his maimed hand.

"I dressed it roughly at a chemist's. The iodide open dressing isn't beautiful, but it is antiseptic. He shot to kill, too, there's no doubt about that. A very perfect little gentleman!"

"He's in London?" said McNorton, "that simplifies matters."

"To my mind it complicates rather than simplifies," said Beale. "London is a vast proposition. Can you give us any idea as to the hour the burglary was planned for?"

"Eleven," said Milsom promptly. "That is to say in a little over an hour's time."

"And you have no idea of the locality?"

"Somewhere in the east of London. We were to have met at Algate."

"I don't understand it," said McNorton. "Do you suggest that the code is in the hands of somebody who is not willing to part with it? And now that he no longer needs it for you, is there any reason why he should wait?"

"Every reason," replied Milsom, and Stanford Beale nodded in agreement. "It was not only for me he wanted it. He as good as told me that, unless he recovered it, he would be unable to communicate with his men."

"What do you think he'll do?"

"He'll get Bridgers to assist him. Bridgers is a pretty sore man, and the doctor knows just where he can find him."

As Olivia listened an idea slowly dawned in her mind that she might supply a solution to the mystery of the missing code. It was a wildly improbable theory she held, but even so slender a possibility was not to be discarded. She slipped from the group and went back to her room. For the accommodation of his ward, James Kitson had taken the adjoining suite to his own and had secured a lady's maid from an agency for the girl's service. She passed through the sitting room to her own bedroom and found the maid putting the room ready for the night.

"Minnie," she said, throwing a quick glance about the apartment, "where did you put the clothes I took off when I came?"

"Here, miss."

The girl opened the wardrobe and Olivia made a hurried search.

"Did you find anything—a little ticket?"

The girl smiled.

"Oh, yes, miss, it was in your stocking." Olivia laughed.

"I suppose you thought it was rather queer, finding that sort of thing in a girl's stocking?" she asked, but the girl was busily opening the drawers of the dressing table in search of something.

"Here it is, miss."

She held a small, square ticket in her hand, and held it with such disapproving primness that Olivia nearly laughed.

"I found it in your stocking, miss," she said again.

"Quite right," said Olivia coolly, "that's where I put it. I always carry my pawn tickets in my stocking."

The admirable Minnie sniffed.

"I suppose you have never seen such a thing," smiled the girl, "and you hardly knew what it was."

The lady's maid turned very red. She had unfortunately seen many such certificates of penury, but all that was part of her private life and she had been shocked beyond measure to be confronted with this too-familiar evidence of impecuniosity in the home of a lady who represented to her an assured income and comfortable pickings.

"Get my hot water and then you can go for the night," said Olivia.

She went back to her sitting room and debated the matter. It was a sense of diffidence, the fear of making herself ridiculous which arrested her. Otherwise she might have flown into the room, declaimed her preposterous theories, and leave these clever men to work out the details. She opened the door, and with the ticket clenched in her hand stepped into the room.

But faced with the tangible workings of criminal investigation, her resolution and her theories shrank to vanishing point. She clasped the ticket in her hand and felt for a pocket, but the dressmaker had not provided her with that useful appendage and certainly it was not a moment to revert to the employment of stockings.

So she turned and went softly back to her room, praying that she would not be noticed. She closed the door gently behind her and turned to meet a well-valeted man in evening dress who was standing in the middle of the room, a light overcoat thrown over his arm, his silk hat tilted back from his forehead, a picture of calm assurance.

"Don't move," said Van Heerden, "and don't scream. And be good enough to hand over the pawn ticket you are holding in your hand."

Silently, she obeyed, and as she handed the little pasteboard across the table which separated them she looked past him to the bookshelf behind his head and particularly to a new volume which bore the name of Stanford Beale.

## CHAPTER XXX.

## THE WATCH.

"Thanks," said Van Heerden, pocketing the ticket. "It is of no use to me now, for I cannot wait. I gather that you have not disclosed the fact that this ticket is in your possession."

"I don't know how you gather that," she said.

"Lower your voice!" he hissed menacingly. "I gather as much because if Beale knew, the ticket would not be in my possession now. If he only knew, if he only had a hint of its existence, I fear my scheme would fail. As it is, it will succeed. And now," he said with a smile, "time is short and your preparations must be of the briefest. I will save you the trouble of asking questions by telling you that I am going to take you along with me. I certainly cannot afford to leave you. Get your coat."

With a shrug she walked past him to the bedroom, and he followed.

"Are we going far?" she asked.

There was no tremor in her voice, and she felt remarkably self-possessed.

"That you will discover," said he.

"I am not asking out of idle curiosity, but I want to know whether I ought to take a bag."

"Perhaps it would be better," he said.

She carried the little attaché case back to the sitting room.

"You have no objection to my taking a little light reading matter?" she asked contemptuously. "I am afraid you are not a very entertaining companion, Doctor van Heerden."

"Excellent girl," said Van Heerden cheerfully. "Take anything you like."

She slipped a book from the shelf and nearly betrayed herself by an involuntary exclamation as she felt its weight.

"You are not very original in your methods," she said. "This is the second time you have spirited me off."

"The jails of England, as your new-found friend Milsom will tell you, are filled with

criminals who departed from the beaten tracks," said Van Heerden. "Walk out into the corridor and turn to the right. I will be close behind you. A little way along you will discover a narrow passage which leads to the service staircase. Go down that. I am sure you believe me when I say that I will kill you if you attempt to make any signal or scream or appeal for help."

She did not answer. It was because of this knowledge and this fear, which was part of her youthful equipment—for violent death is a very terrible prospect to the young and the healthy—that she obeyed him at all.

They walked down the stone stairs, through an untidy, low-roofed lobby, redolent of cooking food, into the street without challenge and without attracting undue notice.

Van Heerden's car was waiting at the end of the street, and she thought she recognized the chauffeur as Bridgers.

"Once more we ride together," said Van Heerden gayly, "and what will be the end of this adventure for you depends entirely upon your loyalty—what are you opening your bag for?" he asked, peering in the dark.

"I am looking for a handkerchief," said Olivia, "I am afraid I am going to cry!"

He settled himself back in the corner of the car with a sigh of resignation, accepting her explanation—sarcasm was wholly wasted on Van Heerden.

"Well, gentlemen," said Milsom, "I don't think there's anything more I can tell you. What are you going to do with me?"

"I'll take the responsibility of not executing the warrant," said McNorton. "You will accompany one of my men to his home to-night and you will be under police supervision."

"That's no new experience," said Milsom. "There's only one piece of advice I want to give you."

"And that is?" asked Beale.

"Don't underrate Van Heerden. You have no conception of his nerve. There isn't a man of us here," he said, "whose insurance rate wouldn't go up to ninety per cent if Van Heerden decided to get him. I don't profess that I can help you to explain his strange conduct to-day. I can only outline the psychology of it, but how and where he has hidden his code and what cir-

cumstances prevent its recovery is known only to Van Heerden."

He nodded to the little group, and, accompanied by McNorton, left the room.

"There goes a pretty bad man," said Kitson, "or I am no judge of character. He's an old lag, isn't he?"

Beale nodded.

"Murder," he said laconically. "He lived after his time. He should have been a contemporary of the Borgias."

"A poisoner!" shuddered one of the under secretaries, "I remember the case. He killed his nephew and defended himself on the plea that the youth was a degenerate, as he undoubtedly was."

"He might have got that defense past in America or France," said Beale, "but unfortunately there was a business end to the murder. He was the sole heir of his nephew's considerable fortune, and a jury from the Society of Eugenics would have convicted him on that."

He looked at his watch and turned his eyes to Kitson.

"I presume Miss Cresswell is bored and has retired for the night," he said.

"I'll find out in a moment," said Kitson. "Did you speak to her?"

Beale nodded and his eyes twinkled.

"Did you make any progress?"

"I broke the sad news to her, if that's what you mean."

"You told her she was married to you? Good heavens! What did she say?"

"Well, she didn't faint, I don't think she's the fainting kind. She is cursed with a sense of humor and refused even to take a tragic view."

"That's bad," said Kitson, shaking his head. "A sense of humor is out of place in a divorce court, and that is where your little romance is going to end, my friend."

"I am not so sure," said Beale calmly, and the other stared at him.

"You have promised me," he began with a note of acerbity in his voice.

"And you have advised me," said Beale.

Kitson choked down something which he was going to say, but which he evidently thought was better left unsaid.

"Wait," he commanded, "I will find out whether Miss Cresswell," he emphasized the words, "has gone to bed."

He passed through the door to Olivia's sitting room and was gone a few moments.

When he came back Beale saw his troubled face and ran forward to meet him.

"She's not here," said Kitson.

"Not in her room?"

"Neither in the sitting room nor the bedroom. I have rung for her maid. Oh, here you are."

Prim Minnie came through the bedroom door.

"Where is your mistress?"

"I thought she was with you, sir."

"What is this?" said Beale, stooping and picking up a white kid glove. "She surely hasn't gone out," he said in consternation.

"That's not a lady's glove, sir," said the girl, "that is a gentleman's."

It was a new glove and, turning it over, he saw stamped inside the words: "Glebler, Rotterdam."

"Has anybody been here?" he asked.

"Not to my knowledge, sir. The young lady told me she did not want me any more to-night." The girl hesitated. It seemed a veritable betrayal of her mistress to disclose such a sordid matter as the search for a pawn ticket.

Beale noticed the hesitation.

"You must tell me everything and tell me quickly," he said.

"Well, sir," said the maid, "the lady came in to look for something she brought with her when she came here."

"I remember!" cried Kitson. "She told me she had brought away something very curious from Van Heerden's house and made me guess what it was. Something interrupted our talk—what was it?"

"Well, sir," said the maid resigned, "I won't tell you a lie, sir. It was a pawn ticket."

"A pawn ticket!" cried Kitson and Beale in unison.

"You know what was on it," said Beale, in his best third-degree manner, "now don't keep us waiting. What was it?"

"A watch, sir."

"How much was it pledged for?"

"Ten shillings, sir."

"Do you remember the name?"

"In a foreign name, sir—Van Horden?"

"Van Heerden," said Beale quickly, "and at what pawnbroker's?"

"Well, sir," said the girl making a fight for her reputation, "I only glanced at the ticket, and I only noticed—"

"Yes, you did," interrupted Beale sharply, "you read every line of it. Where was it?"



"Rosenblaum Bros., of Commercial Road," blurted the girl.

"Any number?"

"I didn't see the number."

"You will find them in the telephone book," said Kitson. "What does it mean?"

But Beale was halfway to Kitson's sitting room, arriving there in time to meet McNorton who had handed over his charge to his subordinate.

"I've found it!" cried Beale.

"Found what?" asked Kitson.

"The code!"

"Where? How?" asked McNorton.

"Unless I am altogether wrong, the code is contained either engraved on the case or written on a slip of paper inclosed within the case of a watch. Can't you see it all plainly now? Van Heerden neither trusted his memory nor his subordinates. He had his simple code written, as we shall find, upon thin paper inclosed in the case of a hunter watch and this he pledged. A pawnbroker's is the safest of safe deposits. Searching for clues, suppose the police had detected his preparations, the pledged ticket might have been easily overlooked."

"Then do you remember that Milsom said that the code was not irredeemably lost and that Van Heerden knew where it was? In default of finding the ticket, he decided to burgle the pawnbroker's and that burglary is going through to-night."

"But he could have obtained a duplicate of the ticket," said McNorton.

"How?" asked Beale quickly.

"By going before a magistrate and swearing an affidavit."

"In his own name," said Beale. "You see, he couldn't do that. It would mean walking into the lion's den. No, burglary was his only chance."

"But what of Olivia?" said Kitson impatiently. "I tell you, Beale, I am not big enough or stoical enough to think outside of that girl's safety."

Beale swung round at him.

"You don't think I've forgotten that, do you?" he said in a low voice. "You don't think that has been out of my mind?" His face was tense and drawn. "I think, I believe that Olivia is safe," he said quietly. "I believe that Olivia and not any of us here will deliver Van Heerden to justice."

"Are you mad?" asked Kitson in astonishment.

"I am very sane. Come here!"

He gripped the old lawyer by the arm and led him back to the girl's room.

"Look!" he said, and pointed.

"What do you mean, the bookshelf?"

Beale nodded.

"Half an hour ago I gave Olivia a book," he said. "That book is no longer there."

"But in the name of Heaven, how can a book save her?" demanded the exasperated Kitson.

Stanford Beale did not answer.

"Yes, yes, she's safe. I know she's safe," he said. "If Olivia is the girl I think she is, then I see Van Heerden's finish."

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### A CORN CHANDLER'S BILL.

The church bells were chiming eleven o'clock when a car drew up before a gloomy corner shop bearing the dingy sign of the pawnbroker's calling, and Beale and McNorton alighted.

It was a main street and was almost deserted. Beale looked up at the windows. They were dark. He knocked at the side entrance of the shop, and presently the two men were joined by a policeman.

"Nobody lives here, sir," explained the officer when McNorton had made himself known. "Old Rosenblaum runs the business and lives at Highgate."

He flashed his lamp upon the door and tried it, but it did not yield. A night-farer who had been in the shade on the opposite side of the street came across and volunteered information.

He had seen another car drive up and a gentleman had alighted. He had opened the door with a key and gone in. There was nothing suspicious about him. He was "quite a gentleman and was in evening dress." The constable thought it was one of the partners of Rosenblaum in convivial and resplendent garb. He had been in the house ten minutes, then had come out again, locking the door behind him and had driven off just before Beale's car had arrived.

It was not until half an hour later than an agitated little man brought by the police from Highgate admitted the two men.

There was no need to make a long search. The moment the light was switched on in the shop Beale made his discovery. On the broad counter lay a sheet of paper and a

little heap of silver coins. He swept the money aside and read:

For the redemption of one silver hunter, 10-6.

It was signed in the characteristic handwriting that Beale knew so well: "Van Heerden, M. D."

The two men looked at one another.

"What do you make of that?" asked McNorton.

Beale carried the paper to the light and examined it, and McNorton went on:

"He's a pretty cool devil. I suppose he had the money and the message all ready for our benefit."

Beale shook his head. "On the contrary," he said, "this was done on the spur of the moment. A piece of bravado which occurred to him when he had the watch. Look at this paper. You can imagine him searching his pocket for a piece of waste paper and taking the first that came to his hand. It is written in ink with the pawnbroker's own pen. The inkwell is open," he lifted up the pen, "the nib is still wet," he said.

McNorton took the paper from his hands.

It was a bill from a corn chandler's at Horsham, the type of bill that was sent in days of war economy which folded over and constituted its own envelope. It was addressed to "J. B. Herden, Esquire," "That was the alias he used when he took the wine vaults at Paddington," explained McNorton. It had been posted about a week before. Attached to the bottom of the account, which was for £3. 10s. was a little slip calling attention to the fact that "this account had probably been overlooked."

Beale's finger traced the item for which the bill was rendered, and McNorton uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Curious, isn't it?" said Beale as he folded the paper and put it away in his pocket, "how these very clever men always make some trifling error which brings them to justice. I don't know how many great schemes I have seen brought to nothing through some such act of folly as this, some piece of theatrical bravado which benefited the criminal nothing at all."

"Good Lord," said McNorton wonderingly, "of course, that's what he is going to do. I never thought of that. It is in the neighborhood of Horsham we must look for him, and I think if we can get one of Messrs. Billingham out of bed in a couple of hours' time we shall do a good night's work."

They went outside and again questioned the policeman. He remembered the car turning round and going back the way it had come. It had probably taken one of the innumerable side roads which lead from the main thoroughfare and in this way they had missed it.

"I want to go to the *Megaphone* office first," said Beale. "I have some good friends on that paper, and I am curious to know how bad the markets are. The night cables from New York should be coming in by now."

In his heart was a sickening fear which he dared not express. What would the morrow bring forth? If this one man's cupidity and hate should succeed in releasing the terror upon the world, what sort of a world would it leave? Through the windows of the car he could see the placid policemen patrolling the streets, caught a glimpse of other cars brilliantly illuminated bearing their laughing men and women back to homes, who were ignorant of the monstrous danger which threatened their security and life. He passed the façades of great commercial mansions which in a month's time might but serve to conceal the stark ruin within.

The *Megaphone* building blazed with light when the car drew up to the door, messenger boys were hurrying through the swing doors, the two great elevators were running up and down without pause. The gray editor with a gruff voice threw over a bundle of flimsies.

"Here are the market reports," he growled. "They are not very encouraging."

Beale read them and whistled, and the editor eyed him keenly.

"Well, what do you make of it?" he asked the detective. "Wheat at a shilling a pound already. God knows what it's going to be to-morrow!"

"Any other news?" asked Beale.

"We have asked Germany to explain why she has prohibited the export of wheat, and to give us a reason for the stocks she holds and the steps she has taken during the past two months to accumulate reserves."

"An ultimatum?"

"Not exactly an ultimatum. There's nothing to go to war about. The government has mobilized the fleet and the French government has partially mobilized her army. The question is," he said, "would war ease the situation?"

## CHAPTER XXXII.

THE END OF VAN HEERDEN.

Doctor van Heerden expected many things and was prepared for contingencies beyond the imagination of the normally minded, but he was not prepared to find in Olivia Cresswell a pleasant traveling companion. When a man takes a girl, against her will, from a pleasant suite at the best hotel in London, compels her at the peril of death, to accompany him on a motor-car ride in the dead of the night, and when his offense is a duplication of one which had been committed less than a week before, he not unnaturally anticipates tears, supplications, or in the alternative a frigid and unapproachable silence.

To his amazement, Olivia was extraordinarily cheerful and talkative and even amusing. He had kept Bridgers at the door of the car while he investigated the pawnbroker's establishment, Messrs. Rosenblum Bros., and had returned in triumph to discover that the girl who, up to then, had been taciturn and uncommunicative was in quite an amiable mood.

"I used to think," she said, "that motor-car abductions were the invention of sensational writers, but you seem to make a practice of it. You are not very original, Doctor van Heerden. I think I've told you that before."

He smiled in the darkness as the car sped smoothly through the deserted streets.

"I must plead guilty to being rather unoriginal," he said, "but I promise you that this little adventure shall not end as did the last."

"But what is your scheme?" she asked.

"Briefly, I will tell you, Miss Cresswell, that you may understand that to-night you accompany history and are a participant in world politics. America and England are going to pay. They are going to buy wheat from my country at the price that Germany can fix. It will be a price," he cried and did not attempt to conceal his joy, "which will ruin the Anglo-Saxon people more effectively than they ruined Germany."

"But how?" she asked bewildered.

"They are going to buy wheat," he repeated, "at our price, wheat which is stored in Germany."

"But what nonsense!" she said scornfully. "I don't know very much about harvests and things of that kind, but I know that most of

the world's wheat comes from America and from Russia."

"The Russian wheat will be in German granaries," he said softly, "the American wheat—there will be no American wheat."

And then his calmness deserted him. The story of the Green Rust burst out in a wild flood of language which was half German and half English. The man was beside himself, almost mad, and before his gesticulating hands she shrank back into the corner of the car. She saw his silhouette against the window, heard the roar and scream of his voice as he babbled incoherently of his wonderful scheme, and had to piece together, as best she could, his disconnected narrative. And then she remembered her work in Beale's office, the careful tabulation of American farms, the names of the sheriffs, the hotels where conveyances might be secured.

"I told you there was a code." She was dimly conscious that he had spoken of a code, but she had been so occupied by her own thoughts that she had not caught all that he had said. "That code was in this watch. Look!"

He pressed a knob and the case flew open. Pasted to the inside of the case was a circular piece of paper covered with fine writing.

"When you found that ticket you had the code in your hands," he chuckled. "If you or your friends had the sense to redeem that watch, I could not have sent to-morrow the message of German liberation! See, it is very simple!" He pointed with his finger and held the watch halfway to the roof that the light might better reveal the wording. "This word means 'proceed.' It will go to all my chief agents. They will transmit it by telegram to hundreds of centers. By Thursday morning great stretches of territory where the golden grain was waving so proudly to-day will be blackened wastes. By Saturday the world will confront its sublime catastrophe."

"But why have you three words?" she asked huskily.

"We Germans provide against all contingencies," he said, "we leave nothing to chance. We are not gamblers. We work on lines of scientific accuracy. The second word is to tell my agents to suspend operations until they hear from me. The third word means 'abandon the scheme for this year.' We must work with the markets. A more favorable opportunity might occur—

with so grand a conception, it is necessary that we should obtain the maximum results for our labors."

He snapped the case of the watch and put it back in his pocket, turned out the light, and settled himself back with a sigh of content.

"You see, you are unimportant," he said, "you are a beautiful woman and to many men you would be most desirable. To me, you are just a woman, an ordinary fellow creature, amusing, beautiful, possessed of an agile mind, though somewhat frivolous by our standards. Many of my fellow countrymen who do not think like I do would take you. It is my intention to leave you just as soon as it is safe to do so unless——" A thought struck him and he frowned.

"Unless?" she repeated with a sinking heart in spite of her assurance.

"Bridgers was speaking to me of you. He who is driving." He nodded to the dimly outlined shoulders of the chauffeur. "He has been a faithful fellow——"

"You wouldn't?" she gasped.

"Why not?" he said coolly. "I don't want you. Bridgers thinks that you are beautiful."

"Is he a Hun, too?" she asked, and he jerked round toward her.

"If Bridgers wants you he shall have you," he said harshly.

She knew she had made a mistake. There was no sense in antagonizing him, the more especially so since she had not yet learned all that she wanted to know.

"I think your scheme is horrible," she said after a while. "The wheat destruction scheme, I mean, not Bridgers. But it is a very great one."

The man was susceptible to flattery, for he became genial again.

He peered out of the window.

"This is Horsham, I think," he said as they swept through what appeared to the girl to be a square. "That little building on the left is the railway station. You will see the signal lamps in a moment. My farm is about five miles down the Shoreham Road."

He was in an excellent temper as they passed through the old town and mounted the hill which leads to Shoreham, was politeness itself when the car had turned off the main road and had bumped over cart tracks to the door of a large building.

"This is your last escapade, Miss Cress-

well, or Mrs. Beale I suppose I should call you," he said jovially, as he pushed her before him into a room where supper had been laid for two. "You see, you were not expected, but you shall have Bridgers. It will be daylight in two hours," he said inconsequently, "you must have some wine."

She shook her head with a smile, and he laughed as if the implied suspicion in her refusal was the best joke in the world.

"Nein, nein, little friend," he said, "I shall not doctor you again. My days of doctoring have passed."

Bridgers did not make his appearance. Apparently he was staying with his car. About three o'clock in the morning, when the first streaks of gray were showing in the sky, Van Heerden rose to go in search of his assistant. Until then he had not ceased to talk of himself, of his scheme, of his great plan, of his early struggles, of his difficulties in persuading members of his government to afford him the assistance he required. As he turned to the door she checked him with a word:

"I am immensely interested," she said, "but still you have not told me how you intend to send your message."

"It is simple," he said, and beckoned to her.

They passed out of the house into the chill sweet dawn, made a half circuit of the farm and came to a courtyard, surrounded on three sides by low buildings. He opened a door to reveal another door, covered with wire netting.

"Behold!" he laughed.

"Pigeons!" said the girl.

The dark interior of the shed was afficker with white wings.

"Pigeons!" repeated Van Heerden closing the door. "And every one knows his way back to Germany. It has been a labor of love collecting them. And they are all British," he said with a laugh. "There I will give the British credit, they know more about pigeons than we Germans and have used them more in the war."

"But suppose your pigeon is shot down or falls by the way?" she asked as they walked slowly back to the house.

"I shall send fifty," replied Van Heerden calmly. "Each will carry the same message and some at least will get home."

Back in the dining room he cleared the remains of the supper from the table and went out of the room for a few minutes, re-

turning with a small pad of paper, and she saw from the delicacy with which he handed each sheet that it was of the thinnest texture. Between each page he placed a carbon and began to write, printing the characters. There was only one word on each tiny sheet. When this was written he detached the leaves, putting them aside and using his watch as a paperweight and wrote another batch.

She watched him fascinated until he showed signs that he had completed his task. Then she lifted the little valise which she had at her side, put it on her knees, opened it, and took out a book. It must have been instinct which made him raise his eyes to her.

"What have you got there?" he asked sharply.

"Oh, a book," she said with an attempt at carelessness.

"But why have you got it out? You are not reading."

He leaned over and snatched it from her and looked at the title.

"'A Friend in Need,'" he read, "'by Stanford Beale—By Stanford Beale,'" he repeated, frowning, "I didn't know your husband wrote books?"

She made no reply. He turned back the cover and read the title page.

"But this is 'Smiles' Self-Help,'" he said.

"It's the same thing," she replied.

He turned another page or two then stopped, for he had come to the place where the center of the book had been cut right out. The leaves had been glued together to disguise this fact, and what was apparently a book was in reality a small box.

"What was in there?" he asked, springing to his feet.

"This!" she said. "Don't move, Doctor van Heerden!" The little hand which held the Browning was firm and did not quiver.

"I don't think you are going to send your pigeons off this morning, doctor," she said. "Stand back from the table." She leaned over and seized the little heap of papers and the watch. "I am going to shoot you," she said steadily, "if you refuse to do as I tell you, because if I don't shoot you, you will kill me."

His face had grown old and gray in the space of a few seconds. The white hands he raised were shaking. He tried to speak, but only a hoarse murmur came. Then his face went blank. He stared at the pistol

then stretched out his hands slowly toward it.

"Stand back!" she cried.

He jumped at her and she pulled the trigger, but nothing happened, and the next minute she was struggling in his arms. The man was hysterical with fear and relief and was giggling and cursing in the same breath. He wrenched the pistol from her hand and threw it on the table.

"You fool! You fool!" he shouted, "the safety catch! You didn't put it down!"

She could have wept with anger and mortification. Beale had put the catch of the weapon at safety not realizing that she did not understand the mechanism of it, and Van Heerden in one lightning glance had seen his advantage.

"Now, by God, you shall suffer!" he said as he flung her in a chair. "You shall suffer, I tell you! I will make an example of you. I will leave your husband something which he will not touch!"

He was shaking in every limb. He dashed to the door and bellowed, "Bridgers!"

Presently she heard a footstep in the hall.

"Come, my friend," Van Heerden shouted. "You shall have your wish. It is——"

"How are you going, Van Heerden? Quietly or rough house?"

He spun round. There were two men in the doorway and the first of these was Beale.

"It's no use your shouting for Bridgers, because Bridgers is on the way to the jug," said McNorton. "I have a warrant for you, Van Heerden."

The doctor turned, with a howl of rage snatched up the pistol which lay on the table and thumbed down the safety catch.

Beale and McNorton fired together, so that it seemed like a single shot that thundered through the room. Van Heerden slid forward and fell sprawling across the table.

It was next Friday morning and Beale stepped briskly through the vestibule of the Ritz-Carlton, and, declining the elevator, went up the stairs two at a time. He burst into the room where Kitson and the girl were standing by the window.

"Wheat prices are tumbling down," he said, "the message worked."

"Thank Heaven for that!" said Kitson, "then Van Heerden's code message telling his gang to stop operations reached its destination!"

"Its destinations," corrected Beale cheer-

fully. "I released thirty pigeons with the magic word. The agents have been arrested," he said, "we notified the government authorities, and there was a sheriff or a policeman in every post office when the code word came through—Van Heerden's agents saw some curious telegraph messengers yesterday."

Kitson nodded and turned away.

"What are you going to do now?" asked the girl with a light in her eyes. "You must feel quite lost without this great quest of yours."

"Well," he hesitated, "I have some legal business."

"Are you suing somebody?" she asked, willfully dense.

He rubbed his head in perplexity.

"To tell you the truth," he said, "I don't exactly know what I've got to do or what sort of figure I shall cut. I have never been in the divorce court before."

"Divorce court?" she said, puzzled. "Are you giving evidence? Of course I know detectives do that sort of thing. I have read about it in the newspapers. It must be rather horrid, but you are such a clever detective—oh, by the way, you never told me how you found me?"

"It was a very simple matter," he said, relieved to change the subject. "Van Heerden by one of those curious lapses which the best of criminals make, left a message at the pawnbroker's which was written on the back of an account for pigeon feed, sent to him from a Horsham tradesman. I knew he would not try to dispatch his message by the ordinary course, and I suspected all along that he had established a pigeon post. The bill gave me all the information I wanted. It took us a long time to find the tradesman, but once we had discovered him he directed us to the farm. We took along a couple of local policemen and arrested Bridgers in the garage."

She shivered. "It was horrible, wasn't it," she said.

He nodded. "It was rather dreadful, but it might have been very much worse," he added philosophically.

"But how wonderful of you to switch yourself from the crime of that entralling character to a commonplace divorce suit."

"This isn't commonplace," he said. "It is rather a curious story."

"How?" she asked.

"Well, you see, he had already fallen in love with her, and that made his offense all the greater. If you go red I cannot tell you this story because it embarrasses me."

"I haven't gone red," she denied indignantly. "So what are you—what is he going to do?"

Beale shrugged his shoulders.

"He is going to work for a divorce."

"But why?" she demanded. "What has she done?"

He looked at her in astonishment.

"What do you mean?" he stammered.

"Well," she shrugged her shoulders slightly and smiled in his face, "it seems to me that it is nothing to do with him. It is the wretched female who should sue for a divorce, not the handsome detective—do you feel faint?"

"No," he said hoarsely.

"Don't you agree with me?"

"I agree with you," said the incoherent Beale, "but suppose her guardian takes the necessary steps?"

She shook her head.

"The guardian can do nothing unless the wretched female instructs him," she said. "Does it occur to you that even the best of drugs wear off in time, and that there is a possibility that the lady was not as unconscious of the ceremony as she pretends? Of course," she said hurriedly, "she did not realize that it had actually happened and until she was told by Apollo from the central office—that's what you call Scotland Yard in New York, isn't it?—that the ceremony had actually occurred, she was under the impression that it was a beautiful dream—when I say beautiful," she amended in some hurry, "I mean not unpleasant."

"Then what am I to do?" said the helpless Beale.

"Wait till I divorce you," said Olivia, and turned her head hurriedly.

THE END.



More stories by Wallace are on the way. He is doing his best work for the POPULAR.

# The Heathen Chinees *Is* Peculiar

By Bertrand W. Sinclair

Author of "North of Fifty-three," Etc.

Ever since Bret Harte discovered the dominating traits of the Chinaman, others have noted them, too. Sinclair contributes his bit here

A PREACHER begins his sermon with a text. The philosopher expands a premise into a system. The artist's masterpiece takes form from an idea—sometimes. This tale which I shall unfold is based on two indubitable facts: first, a Chinaman never wastes anything, never throws anything away; second, marriage, to the outsider looking in, presents different aspects than to the insider looking out.

Certain of these aspects were troubling Tommy Thaxton as he sat on a pile head, idly watching the vessels come and go in Vancouver Harbor, staring at the ripple of gray-green water under a blue sky hot with a July sun. The gulls were wheeling and crying, carrying on their eternal quest of floating scraps of food. Tommy's eyes followed a northern steamer that slid out past Brockton Point. He wished he was aboard her, with a camp outfit and six months' grub. He knew a valley opening into an inlet north of Rupert that had a ledge or two worth looking at. And he would be sure of just that many months' freedom from problems that vexed him sorely.

But a man cannot run away from certain things. Tommy Thaxton knew that. And so he sat there wondering how he was going to manage to reconcile the irreconcilable, brooding over a small domestic tempest which had grown large by reason of that moody pondering.

Toward him, as he sat upon his pile head there presently came strolling a man, a tall, spare, middle-aged individual with hands thrust deep in his pockets, whistling a little tune—which, when it fell upon Tommy Thaxton's ears, caused him to look up quickly.

"Hello, Ed," said he. "Where'd you spring from?"

"Hello, Tom," the other replied. "I didn't spring from nowhere. I walked. I been kinda sorta lookin' around for you."

"Well, you found me," Tommy returned dispiritedly, as they shook hands. "How goes it?"

"Not too worse," Ed drawled. "How's Kitty and the boy, and married life generally?"

"Oh, pretty good," Tommy Thaxton responded without noticeable enthusiasm.

Ed Burroughs sat down facing him. He took out a calabash pipe with a bowl like the business end of a saxophone, and proceeded to fill this. When he had fired the charge with a match, he looked at Tommy.

"What's the trouble, Tom?" he demanded.

Tommy Thaxton gazed at the sea for a second. Then he looked up at the old *tillikum* with whom he had forgathered in distant places in not too distant years.

"Aw, everything," the flood gates of long-repressed speech loosened at last. "I got more troubles than most farmers has hay. I'm sick of livin' in town, and I can't get away. There's nothin' in it but a steady job. And there ain't even a steady job no more. A fellow goes to work and about the time he gets five dollars ahead of the rent and the groceries and the coal dealer there's a strike. It's gettin' like that regular. It's got on Kitty's mind. When I ain't workin' she's worryin', and things don't go so good at home as they ought to. A woman can't get it through her head why a man's got to stop workin' when the other fellows stop. I can manage on my pay. But lot's uh men can't, the way prices of everything keep goin' up to the sky. Kitty she don't understand that a fellow can't go back on his own crowd. She don't know what it is to be a scab. Damn a town, anyway. It ain't no place for me."

"Get out, then," Burroughs suggested. "You never was a steady job man. But you could always raise a stake. The hills is still there."



"Talk sense," Tommy Thaxton replied gloomily. "A fellow can't drag a woman and a kid around in the hills. I got to take care of 'em. Darn it, I aim to take care of 'em—only good intentions ain't sufficient to keep Kitty and the youngster like I'd wish to."

"Then you got to make some money," Ed Burroughs declared briskly. "That's the idea."

"The idea's all right," Tommy countered. "But you can't go to the bank and draw cash for an idea."

"I got one you can," Ed Burroughs smiled expansively. "I'll declare you in on it, like you did me on them copper claims at the Falls. Lord, we should 'a' saved *that* stake, Tom. Easy come, easy go, those days. But I ain't foolin'. I have got a good thing in sight. Nothin' big. We might clean up a few hundred dollars, though. You can't work so long as this shipyard strike is on."

"Naw," Tommy grunted. "I'm gettin' plumb sick of this job business. For two pins I'd enlist. Only," he concluded mournfully, "I couldn't get by, on account uh that smashed elbow. It don't hurt me none, but you got to be A1 for the army these days. What you got up your sleeve, anyway?"

"I ain't got it up my sleeve," Burroughs grinned. "It's on a little mountain fork of Silver Creek that runs into Roaring Lake. D'yuh know that platinum's a hundred and five dollars an ounce, Tom? And the government hollerin' its head off for platinum."

Thaxton nodded.

"Go on," he said eagerly.

"I put in three months on Silver Creek two years ago, right after you was married," Burroughs continued. "Lots of colors. One place I got coarse gold—made wages for a couple of weeks. Finally I took a look along the bed of this little branch. I struck pay there. Not much. I could 'a' made maybe four dollars a day if I worked like the mischief. So I didn't stay with it long, seein' I was huntin' a stake, not a steady job. What struck me most was that I got as much platinum as gold. It was hard to save, too."

"Well, lately I come to find out that a bunch wintered on Silver Creek, at the mouth of this fork, time of the Cariboo rush, in the winter of '59. That outfit worked this creek bed and took out several thousand dollars in dust. They skinned her, took the cream, and passed on to the big diggin's when spring opened."

"Now," Burroughs sank his voice to a confidential whisper, although the nearest dock lounge was far beyond earshot, "I know them old-timers and the way they worked—and I know placers. I reckon they took a lot of platinum along with the gold. They did other places. Lots of 'em thought the white stuff was native silver. Take the Tulameen. They're gettin' platinum there now. Most of 'em worked about the same. You know how they use mercury to catch fine gold. It makes an amalgam. You know platinum don't mix with mercury. When they got too much of the white gold them days they saved the gold with mercury and threwed the platinum away. Generally they made this clean-up in the cabin, and dumped the platinum on the dirt floor. It was only worth fifty dollars a pound them days—and no market much. She's a hundred and five dollars an ounce now."

"You get me? They've made big money in the Tulameen pannin' out the dirt floors of them old cabin sites. If we can locate the foundations of them old cabins on Silver Creek there's a chance, a good chance, them old floors would show a lot of platinum."

"Sure, I get you," Tommy said. "By gosh, it's more'n a good chance. And a fellow could make wages on the creek, anyhow."

"Why, yes, if he worked," Burroughs replied. "Let's go tackle it. Do you good to get into the hills for a while. Matter of fact, I hunted you up a-purpose for that. I was out to your place. Kitty said most likely I'd find you hangin' around the docks. I can go it alone, but I'd rather have you for a partner."

"I wish I could," Tommy muttered. "Don't see how I can, though. I got to get work pretty quick. I ain't but two jumps ahead of bein' broke. Folks has got to eat. And," he finished hesitatingly, "I don't reckon Kitty would like it much."

"Aw, hell," Burroughs said largely. "I got a couple a hundred dollars. A hundred'll grubstake us. Give Kitty the other hundred. You'll have more for her when she needs it. You ain't workin' now. By the way things shape up you won't work for a while. I tell you something," he paused to eye Tommy shrewdly. "You got a darned fine little woman. But you don't want to let her get away with the idea you ain't nothin' but a human meal ticket."

Thaxton's face flushed. No one on earth but Ed Burroughs could have said that, ever so gently, to him. He would have slapped any other man's mouth for such a suggestion. But Ed was in a class by himself. He was privileged. And he had only put into words a feeling that had dimly troubled Tommy Thaxton very much of late. Tommy was tremendously fond of his plump, brown-eyed wife, of his toddling son, and he knew that Kitty was equally fond of him. But Tommy was growing conscious that Kitty was—well, to put it plainly, inclined to assert her will in matters beyond her province.

Kitty would buck a proposition like this. Kitty would protest any undertaking that wasn't safe and sane—like a steady job at five dollars a day. But, a man ought to use his own judgment. And maybe—maybe if he went off to the hills and left her to herself for a few weeks she would be glad to see him back, whether he had a pay check in his hands or not.

Things like that rushed meteorlike across Tommy's mind for a little while after Burroughs delivered that friendly thrust.

"All right." He lifted his head with sudden resolution. "I'll go you. If we don't make out, I guess I'll be able to pay back that hundred some time."

Ed Burroughs looked blandly pleased as he counted ten tens out of his wallet.

"Don't let them few dollars bother you none," said he. "I ain't got no family to keep, so it won't hurt me to wait if I have to. Only I'm plum certain we'll make something up there."

When Tommy joined Ed Burroughs at the train next morning, his blankets and clothes in a bulky pack, he was still a little red in the face from something besides exertion. And he sat by Ed in the smoker, his eyes glued to the window, glumly silent. Tommy wasn't carrying a very pleasant set of recollections on that journey. In fact, his parting with Kitty had been nearer recrimination than they had ever come before. Kitty distinctly disapproved of the undertaking. Kitty was a town product, pure and simple. She had been a waitress, then cashier in a restaurant, from the time she was sixteen until she married Tommy Thaxton. Her horizon was bounded by streets and big buildings, her farthest excursions into the unsettled places had been berry-picking among suburban stumps, up into

Capilano Cañon on a Sunday, neither of which was beyond the radius of interurban trolley lines. Tommy had prospected all over the Northwest. Tommy was no analyst. It did not occur to him that in big Western towns like Vancouver there were thousands of people bred and born there, who might as well have grown up in New York or London for all they knew of the West, of the vanishing frontier that lies at their very doors.

To Tommy, pay dirt—when you could locate it—mineralized rock, gold-bearing quartz, copper stain, galena, were just as concrete a proposition as six dollars a day in a shipyard was to Kitty. And to Kitty the notion of going out into the hills and picking gold and platinum out of sand and gravel in a creek bed was an incredible manner of making money. If Tommy had proposed to go to work in somebody else's mine at going wages she would have discerned real wisdom in the act. As it was—

So Tommy was rather glum. The glumness did not wholly depart from him until they quitted the train at Hopyard, took an auto stage five miles through heavy timber, and were set at last on the southern shore of Roaring Lake.

Tommy faced the lake and drew a long breath. It was a forty-mile stretch of grayish-hued water, now that the glacial streams at its head were running milky white. It spread away northerly in a boomerang curve. Great stretches of heavy woods banked green on the lower slopes. Beyond the slopes great peaks lifted hoary heads high above timber line. It was like a homecoming to Tommy Thaxton, to see the hills, to smell the cedars, to see the water ripple in the sun, to know that no blast of a shipyard whistle would call him from this to fetch and carry for a boss.

Silver Creek opened out of a deep gash showing distinctly—twenty-four miles up the lake. Transportation was a problem very simple to solve by these two, to whom primitive going was no more involved than boarding a street car is to a city man. There were Siwash Indians on the lower end of Roaring Lake. Wherever there are Siwashes in western British Columbia there are bound to be dugout canoes. Ed Burroughs parted with five dollars and a Siwash parted with a dugout within the hour. And shortly after that Tommy and Ed were plying pad-

dles northward, a month's grub and their blankets stowed aboard.

They landed at the foot of the first rapid in Silver Creek by noon of the next day. From there to the little creek Burroughs sought it was a two-milk hike. They cached the canoe in a thicket, shouldered heavy packs, and were on the ground by two o'clock.

"Well, we're here," Burroughs said when they reached the edge of a creeklet two men could shake hands across, but which leaped over ledges and brawled around boulders with a tremendous racket for its size. "There's the remains of an old shack on the other side. I guess we can fix ourselves a shelter there. It *might* rain."

They crossed. A small flat lifted twenty feet above the creek bottom. Some time in the long ago a few trees had been felled, and in the midst of this clearing, now thick with brush and young trees, there rose the four log walls of a small cabin. It may have had a roof once. It stood open to the weather now. The lack of roof Thaxton and Burroughs set about supplying. They cut poles, peeled sheets of cedar bark off young trees, supplemented this with bark from a clump of hoary birches, and with this material spread a reasonably water-tight top. A split-cedar door sagged on wooden hinges. The window spaces were empty. But it was summer. They would have fared well enough under a tree, except for the promise of rain. The main thing was to organize an orderly camp—for a prospector hates to get either his grub or his blankets wet, and he likes to put things where he can find them either day or night. They spent the rest of that afternoon and most of the next day establishing themselves. By then they had a roof on, the door in working order to keep skunks and possibly curious black bears from meddling with their grub. When these things were done they began to talk of the real business in hand.

"I don't know if this is one of the old miner's shacks or not," Burroughs said. "She don't look quite ancient enough. But she might be. Cedar lasts a long time. I found a lot of old foundations on the next flat above. An old fellow at Port Moody told me, too, that them miners wintered on the second flat. But this might be one of the old places. We'll make a start on her for luck. Pan out the floor dirt to-morrow, eh?"

"Uh-huh," Tommy Thaxton grunted. Lying flat on his back on a mattress of fern and hemlock boughs, Tommy was not thinking of either gold—or platinum at a hundred and five dollars an ounce. He was thinking about Kitty and little Tommy Thaxton. He wondered what they were doing to-night, if Kitty was still angry at him for "wild-goose chasing around with that fool of an Ed Burroughs when you ought to be hunting a job!"

In the morning they set to work on the floor. Panning is slow work, only good in the richest sort of ground. In fact, the gold pan is mostly a tool for testing ground, not for actual work. If good pay shows, a miner goes after it with a sluice box, or at least a rocker. But Tommy and Ed tackled the floor with their pans, carrying it down to the creek side and washing it there. There was only a small amount of material and they had to work it carefully. They peeled not more than eight or ten inches off the surface. The platinum was either near the top or there was none.

It took them about two days. When they finished they had a fraction over half an ounce of platinum, and perhaps five dollars' worth of gold in grains the size of wheat berries.

"This creek must 'a' been good," Ed Burroughs commented. "They spilled that coarse gold. Well, 't ain't no fortune. But it's mighty good wages. It shows we're on the right track. Maybe the next'll be richer. We might strike a little streak they overlooked in the creek, too, when we finish with the shacks."

"I won't kick if she don't go no worse, believe me, Ed," Thaxton replied fervently. "That creek might be better'n you think."

"I sampled her pretty good two years ago," Ed returned. "They skinned her pretty close. I gamble more on the cabin floors, myself."

"Of course that's the big chance," Tommy agreed. "But when we get through with the cabins, if I can make four dollars a day in the creek, I'll—I'll——"

He did not say what he would do. But he thought. If he could do that, and if Kitty could just once see the hills through his eyes! Tommy Thaxton was a plain man with all a plain man's limitations—but something deep in him always stirred when he went abroad in the hills. The poets are not the only men with a sense of beauty.

Most of us are receptive enough. Only we are dumb.

Tommy came whistling down to the cabin one day nearly a week later to start a dinner fire. Ed Burroughs followed a few minutes later to find Tommy carefully examining the ground about the cabin.

"What is it?" Ed asked.

"I thought I saw a fellow make off when I was comin' down," Tommy said doubtfully. "But I don't make out no tracks."

Now, these two were not suspicious men—rather the reverse. But that week's work had been fairly fruitful. They had located the sites of half a dozen moldered cabins on the flat above. Out of the floor dirt they had so far garnered over two ounces of platinum and an odd bit of coarse gold.

"I guess we'd as well pack that platinum in our jeans," Burroughs suggested.

They did this, when they set off to work again. And that evening when they entered the cabin once more both men were struck with a similar idea—that some one had been inside that afternoon. Nothing had been taken. But certain things had been moved. They grumbled and wondered until they fell asleep. And when they got up in the morning they took a casual survey of the small flat. This revealed no sign of any surreptitious prowlers. The only thing they discovered was the rotting foundation logs of another small cabin about a hundred feet from their own. It was pretty well grown over with grass and sallal brush. At one corner of it they thought to detect freshly disturbed dirt.

"Somebody is around here, all right," Tommy said. "Now what d'yuh suppose he's after? What does he want to sneak for?"

"Might as well be a bear as a man," Burroughs remarked thoughtfully. "You can't tell whether that's claw work or a shovel. They ain't a sign of a track."

Tommy pointed out that tracks were very hard to see on that sort of ground. It was either bare rock, or earth overlaid with moss and deep leaf mold:

"Hang it, as long as our stuff ain't touched we should worry," Ed Burroughs said finally.

It would be an exaggeration to say they worried. Nevertheless, they took to casting glances down from their labor on the flat above. But they saw nothing, heard nothing. And still they became convinced

that some one or something haunted the place. There were marks and signs, faint, readable only to a woodsman's eye. The small excavation on the site of the other old cabin was disturbed again, dug deeper.

Three days of this brought them to an extremely irritable state of mind. The thing was incomprehensible. They were not nervous men. They had no enemies, no great treasure to be stolen. But they gradually grew wary and watchful, listening intently to ordinary woods noises, waking in the night to rise on elbow, sleeping with Ed's carbine handy.

"This fellow," Tommy Thaxton said at last. "We'll say it's a fellow, anyhow—he dug around that old cabin last night. He don't come here at night. He comes in the daytime when we're out at work. I'm gettin' filled up with this. Let's lay for him."

Ed Burroughs nursed his chin. Tommy awaited the results of this reflection.

"I tell you," Ed said at last. "I got an idea. If he comes around that place diggin' to-night we'll get him."

This was about sundown. When dusk closed Ed Burroughs took a coil of light rope and made a noose in one end. Also he got a ball of twine out of his kit and gave one end of this to Tommy.

"Let it unravel as I pull," said he.

He slipped out into the dark. After a lapse of minutes the string tightened in Tommy's hands and then fell slack. Presently Ed came back, bringing the end of the rope in with him. He handed the rope to Tommy.

"Give me the string," he sank his voice to a whisper. "I got it fixed so he can't do nothin' in that hole without movin' the string. I got the rope spread good and wide. When I say, you jerk. Jerk hard. Take up slack quick, and hang on tight. I'll run up and get the drop on him. Sabe?"

Tommy nodded. Burroughs stood his carbine against the door casing. Beside the gun he laid a small flash light.

They sat waiting. The woods ringed them like a dusky sea under a velvet sky speckled with stars. The little creek sang its noisy tune. The woods were hushed and dark, brooding. Tommy Thaxton had watched that same sky and darkling woods by many a far camp fire. He almost forgot what he was waiting for. From the hushed night in the forest his spirit was reaching out to Kitty and the boy in a distant town. He

was snapped back to the immediate, tense present by a sibilant command from Ed.

"Jerk—Jerk!"

Tommy reefed on the light line, taking up slack hand over hand like a sailor bringing home a cast-off mooring line. He felt a solid weight, a live resisting something that sent down through the twisted manila the same electric thrill the angler feels when a big trout strikes. Coincident with Tommy's stout haul on the rope there rose a wild shriek, a scream almost inhuman in its squealing treble.

Ed Burroughs grabbed his gun with one hand, his flash light with the other, and dashed out. Tommy hung tight. On the other end of the rope something struggled wildly. Tommy half expected to hear a shot. He could not imagine a man screeching like that. He didn't know what it could be.

But in a moment more he heard a voice, voices, to be exact. Ed Burroughs shouted.

"Ho, Tommy," he called. "Slack away."

Tommy let go. He stepped outside. He could see the beam of Ed's flash light. It shifted toward him. A figure moved ahead in the glare of the light.

Burroughs, carbine in hand, drove up to him a young Chinaman, a very small Chinaman, boyish-faced, dressed in a comparatively new suit of overalls.

"Well, I'll be damned," Tommy Thaxton exploded. "Is *this* what's been pussy-footin' around here?"

"I guess so. It's what you snared by the legs, anyhow," Ed chuckled. "He ain't talked yet, only to jabber in chink when I flashed the light on him."

He motioned his captive into the cabin. Tommy lit a lantern. By its yellow gleam they took a close survey of their prisoner.

"I think pe'haps I have made a mistake," said he slowly. "I did no ha'm, though. I was looking for something—that is all."

"What were you lookin' for," Tommy persisted, "that you had to be so foxy about it?"

The Chinaman hesitated a second.

"Platinum," he said briefly.

The partners laughed.

"But look-a-here," Ed Burroughs said mildly, "you ain't got no right to look for platinum on our ground, you know. You wouldn't find any, nohow, messin' around the way you have. But we've staked claims

here. Sabe? This is our ground as long as we hold her down. Any minerals on this ground belongs to us."

"Yes, I suppose that is so," the Chinaman admitted.

"I guess you can move on, chink," Burroughs said casually. "Only, for the love of Mike, if you got to come around here, walk into camp and show yourself like a human bein'. We ain't so savage that women and kids and Chinamen has to hide from us. By heck, I was beginnin' to think this place had spooks."

The Chinaman smiled broadly.

"Yoh pletty decent," he said. "I believe yoh would give a fellow a squa' deal whetha' he was a white man o' a Chinaman."

"Why not?" Tommy Thaxton asked.

"I have a ploposition," the Chinaman said suddenly. "A stlange ploposition, pe'haps. I make it, anyway. But I like to have my buddah heah. You mind if I call him?"

"All right, let's have a look at him," Tommy Thaxton said. "Eh, Ed?"

Burroughs nodded assent. The Chinaman stepped to the cabin door and called. There was immediate answer in that funny, sing-song tongue. The Chinaman at the cabin yelled in English and his brother in the bush replied in Chinese. And presently there appeared in the doorway a Chinaman who, so far as the partners could distinguish, was a double of the first. These two immediately set up a rapid-fire exchange of conversation that was a mixture of gobbles and snarls and whines for all the two prospectors could make out. It was soon cut short, however, and when the Chinese brothers did finish their duet, the first one turned to Thaxton and Burroughs.

"My name is Sam Kee," he said. "My buddah's name is On Kee. He dlive's a delive'y wagon in Vancouveh. I have small fruit stob on Callal Stleet. I am a business man. You ah minehs. My faddah he was a mineh, too. He passed through this count'y in the time of the Caliboo lush. He wintehed on this cleek in 'sixty."

"Darned near sixty years ago," Tommy Thaxton commented. "He was sure an old-timer."

"Velly old man, now, my faddah is," Sam Kee stated gravely. "Well, now suppose my faddah he left something heah? Would that belong to me o' to you?"

Sam Kee made a motion with his hands.

"I put it anotheh way," said he. "We

don't want to jump you claims. Oh, no. We ah not foolish. But I think I know something you do not know about this glound, although neitheh my buddah no' myself is a mineh. Suppose I show you weh is something velly valuable—you take it all, oh you give us half?"

"If there's a cache here, and you root it out, we'll split fifty-fifty whether it's ten dollars or ten thousand," Burroughs said to Sam Kee. "It's our ground, and I suppose, legally speakin', we could claim all minerals, loose or otherwise, that's on it now. But fifty-fifty goes."

Thaxton signified assent.

"All light," Sam Kee said briskly. "We shake hands on that."

And so the four of them quite gravely went through this time-hallowed form of binding a bargain.

"Now you give me a shovel," Sam Kee said. "I spoil youh flo' a little."

A shovel being at hand, Sam Kee looked casually over the floor space and began to dig at a point near the center. Tommy Thaxton and his partner watched silently. They weren't sure what was coming, but they were willing to be shown. A hole in an earth floor was nothing much one way or the other. Sam Kee dug like a badger, steadily. The sweat soon started on his yellow face. When he was down two feet in an excavation about three feet across he paused to lean puffing on his shovel handle.

"I may be long," he said. "If I am theh is one mo' chance. Theh was thlee cabins on this flat. My faddah gave me a map—but I am not suah which is the light one. We may have to tly the oddah."

He resumed digging. In about ten minutes the blade of the shovel clicked an something hard.

"Look," Sam Kee grunted. He heaved out all the loose dirt, exposing a stone. To be exact, when Sam Kee got down on his knees and cleared away all the loose earth with his hands, he bared a cluster of small rocks.

In the middle, like an egg in its nest, he disclosed a lump about the size of a clenched fist, which was neither rock nor earth. When he brushed the soil off it showed the dull gray of lead foil—the sort of stuff once used to wrap packages of tea.

Tommy handed over the washbasin. Sam got out of the hole, and set the basin on the rough table. His brother and the two

miners crowded close at his elbow as he opened the covering.

He bared a loose metallic substance that looked very much like the average run of placer gold—except that it was a dull white, something the color of crushed steel, or dull native silver.

"By heck, it is platinum," Ed Burroughs breathed. "And, by heck, there's a good many ounces in that there little pile."

"And plat-num is one hundred and five dollahs an ounce," Sam Kee took up the strain. "You got scales? We divide this light now."

They had a small spring scale. Tommy Thaxton held it. Sam Kee weighed. The others watched the precious stuff like a mother looking on her sleeping babe. There was eleven pounds net, avoirdupois. They split it by weight.

"Well, evelybody satisfied, I think," Sam Kee grinned broadly.

"How the hell did you know that stuff was there?" Tommy Thaxton said at last.

"Oh, I fo'got to tell you, did I?" Sam Kee returned. "Ouah faddah was a velly young man when he went on the Caliboo lush. He and two oddah Chinamen winteled heah on theh way across the mountains. Many white men, too. But my faddah and those oddah Chinamen stay all summer and wo'k this little cleek. They got quite a bit of gold. Plat'num was not wo'th much then. They didn't believe it wo'th anything. But a Chinaman—especially Chinamen like my faddah, in those days—neveh waste anything, never thlow anything away. He saved the white gold and buly it heah when they go on to Caliboo. Those oddah two Chinamen ah dead long ago. My faddah velly old and feeble. Neveh goes outside the house now. But he lemembahs well.

"Sixty yeahs is a long time. My faddah was not suah which cabin he bulied the platinum in. He made us a little map. We find two places all light. We dig in one. We ah afraid to dig heah, in yoh cabin. Oh, well, evelything tu'n out all light anyway. We ah satisfied. Ah yoh?"

Tommy Thaxton looked up from the treasure in the washbasin, and from pleasant visions of ways made easy by its power.

"Say," he said, "before you fellows light out to your own camp, what's the matter with us startin' the fire and makin' a pot of tea? Holy Moses, we got to celebrate this somehow!"

# "Here, You Little Fellows!"

By James Hay, Jr.

*Author of "The Good Old Days are Gone—Hurrah!" Etc.*

How short men more than make up for lack of stature. Genius is no respecter of sizes. A giraffe is the tallest of animals, but for intelligence give us the dog.

**W**HENEVER I want to fill a job that calls for grueling work and quick, original thought, I pick a little man. The little fellows never quit; and they're human buzz saws when they're up against hard knots."

The man who told me that was more than six feet tall, with the muscular development of an athlete and the physique of a giant.

"Yes, sir!" he put emphasis into his statement, "I've been employing men for over ten years; and what I've learned about them has led to this: if a little man and a big fellow apply for the same job, and if their records show no blots, I'll take the little man every time. Many other employers do the same thing. Like me, they know the little chap will outlast the two-hundred-pounder nine times out of ten.

"I'm certain I'm right in my judgment, but I can't explain it. What's back of it? Why do the small fry stick so long without a whimper?"

William H. Taft had expressed a similar opinion a few days before:

"Have you ever noticed that little fellows, the physically small, are the greatest keep-at-it men you can find? I often envy their inexhaustible energy. They never give up."

The former president was discussing the disadvantages of excess weight.

"You hear every day," he continued, "such expressions as 'He's little but he's loud,' and 'He's not much for size, but he can lick his weight in wild cats!' The little men say those things about themselves, and other people repeat them. There seems to be in the popular mind a belief that shortness of stature indicates unusual ability and force."

Mr. Taft was right. And that idea is in the public mind because it is founded on fact.

"For your real brains and power," say the boys who crane their necks to acquire an extra sixteenth of an inch, "watch us! The big hulks are lazy and slow. But we're sharp as briers, keen as a razor's edge—and we think! Little men make the world and run it."

In spite of this pride in littleness, however, it is the men of short stature who brush their hair pompadour, to seem tall; and wear high-heeled shoes; and argue with their tailors as to how long in the back a coat must be to give the idea of increased height, or how short in order to prevent the wearer's looking absurd.

Camouflage of that sort answers the employer's query and explains the facts Mr. Taft admired.

Little men work hard and refuse to give in because their lives, as a rule, have been, and are, incessant artifices, everlasting battles, to prove to themselves and to the world that they are not inferior to tall men.

From their earliest years they have recognized that they carried the burden of what was a defect, or what was considered a defect. They received the news from every direction. Their playmates handed it to them with gibes and jeers. Their nurses informed them of it. Sometimes they overheard their parents discussing it. Scrutiny of their reflections on the surface of the old swimming hole confirmed the criticism.

They were called "runts," or "sawed off and hammered down," or "short pieces of bloated string," or "brownie," or "no bigger than a minute;" diminutive endings were put on their names; they were told that they could not do some of the things done by other boys of the same age; and, sometimes, they were "licked" by playmates.

With what result? At first, they denied the inferiority; then they admitted it, to



themselves, with tears and rage; then they considered themselves disgraced; and finally, for their own peace of mind, they reached the fierce resolution to show to the world that to be little and "runtlike" and "sawed off" was not a handicap.

From those boys came the men who persuaded a former president of the United States that little fellows were to be envied. From them also came the workers who taught the employer that smallness of stature was a credential.

Carrying in their hearts either rebellious dissatisfaction with their physiques or the resultant purpose to overcome their defect, they developed brain and courage to such a point that they were, in the last analysis, the biggest men in town.

When the employer had considered this explanation, he declared in a burst of enthusiasm:

"By George, that's right! They're sensitive to their last breath, and they're glut-tions for work to their last days. Hereafter, I'll respect more than ever the fellows who are short!"

His enthusiasm reached this point when the psychology of the situation had been demonstrated as correct by his memory of little men's achievements in everyday life. Among the many names he reeled off were:

Carter Glass, secretary of the treasury, just a little over five feet tall and "skinny;" Charles P. Steinmetz, the electricity wizard of the world, not much over four feet high; Marcus Loew, the five-foot-six-inch owner of more than two hundred theaters; the late E. H. Harriman, financier and railroad king; John Burnett, until a few months ago the four-and-a-half-foot chairman of the committee on immigration in the House of Representatives; and John Hays Hammond, who worked in every quarter of the globe and drew the biggest salary ever paid a mining engineer.

The giantlike employer had gone back into history for the "little but loud" performers, starting with Socrates and St. Paul and working down to Napoleon. It was the Corsican who, while conquering Europe and a slice of Africa, paused to remark: "Imagination rules the world."

In that sentence he explained how he and other little fellows have walked away with the lion's share of success. Their minds are

sharpened by the necessity for disproving their inferiority. Deprived of imposing stature, they are forced to think.

Good news, this! You little fellows, and you who have overcome defects and handicaps—you have the best chances when employers are looking for "good men for good jobs." The men who do the hiring prefer the midget to the colossus.

Nor is this a passing fad. Science has corroborated the findings of both Mr. Taft and the six-footer quoted in this article. By painstaking analyses of men in every walk of life and laborious checking and rechecking of data on the human being, eminent psychologists have discovered the little man's ability and its origin.

Here is an important point: a little man's nervous energy is merely the result of his desire to conquer. Spurred by his old fear of inferiority, he develops amazing force because he would rather die than fail.

In all this, he fulfills nature's law of compensation. The blind man develops remarkable powers of hearing. The loss of one eye frequently improves the good eye. Disease of one lung will result in unusual development and enlargement of the other. Any human organ which is defective or weak is urged and aided by nature to right itself, to complete itself. By the same law, the handicapped man can make a similar struggle if he has the will.

But it is not all physical. Milton, the poet, has testified that his blindness increased his imaginative powers. Every physical weakness adds activity or strength to the mind. This never fails.

There are, of course, many instances of this increased power being misused, but that is a question of morals; the added strength is there, nevertheless.

It is often assumed that little men are born with superior brains and that an afflicted man automatically develops additional mentality. Nothing could be wider of the mark. They rise above their handicaps solely by their inflexible resolution.

The blind historian wrote his histories; the deaf inventor perfected his phonograph; the legless newsboy, resolute to reach the top of Mt. Hood, a climb which had turned back athletes, accomplished it by flinging

his body a few feet upward at a time with the strength of his abnormally developed arms.

That is, the little fellow, or cripple, reveals to his normal brother the secret of success. He proves that on the wings of will any man may leave forever the depths of failure. The small fry never give up, because they have made persistence their nature. They have practiced it since their earliest games and play. They know no other life. They have come down the years, always driven by their fear of bigger men.

Although they do not realize it consciously, that fear of being a second-rater is in the subconsciousness of each of them. It remains the great motive power. It is the benign shadow of childhood's hatred of being outclassed.

Similarly, the big man is more prone to quit, to "lay down," because life has always been a less complicated affair for him. Never having known the bitterness of weakness or the self-scorn of inferiority, he has been free of the compulsion to "lick his weight in wild cats." His reserves of abil-

ity are untapped; he has done too much "resting."

"That fact," a psychologist explained, "disproves Nietzsche's claim that the little and afflicted should be wiped out, and only the 'supermen' left. If that happened, we'd soon have a race of giantlike loafers. They would 'rest' too much if they were relieved of the necessity of meeting the indomitable competition of those who, even if they can't see over a yardstick, are on their way to the heights of success."

That reminded me of the smiling reply of Doctor James J. Walsh, of New York, when I asked him for a list of man's impossibilities. The doctor, famous for his shrewd estimates of human nature, said:

"What are the things impossible to little men—or big ones either, for that matter? Does anybody know? I confess I don't. All sorts of men are doing the impossible every day."

They are. And, as Mr. Taft remarked, the little fellows never know when to quit. They are always busy making themselves "the biggest guys in this man's town."



## SURVIVAL OF THE DELPHIC ART

**A**MONG the ancient Eastern races evasion reached the level of a fine art when diplomats usually reached decisions of Delphic obscurity, which might be interpreted in many ways. In social intercourse in those days, a delicate evasion of the direct truth was also common in the codes of etiquette practiced.

There are cruder forms of evasion, too, in private life, which were common among newer races later on. One extreme instance of this was furnished some time ago when an Irish squire had private matters to look into at home one day. Summoning his confidential manservant, he said:

"If any friends call, don't say I'm not in, but give them an evasive reply, if you know what that means."

"Lave it to me, sor," responded the man. "I'll attind to that."

In the evening the man reported to the "masther" that only one friend had called, and added:

"'Is the masther in,' sez he, but I gev him an evasive reply. I axed him if his grandmother was a monkey. He didn't wait to hear any more."

The replies made by Germany and her colleagues to her terrible arraignment by the civilized world have been evasions almost as crude as that of the Irish manservant. They are the centuries-old excuses of the bad boy, who grossly ill treats a companion and pleads in justification when brought up for punishment, mythical stories impossible of belief, as to what the other boy did. This is what the representatives of Germany and the countries in league with her have been persistently doing during the war and since her surrender.

# The Master of the Mercenaries

By George Bronson-Howard

Author of "Norroy—Diplomatic Agent," "The Black Book," *Etc.*

## II.—SABLE WINGS

OLD Yuan leaned back and laughed. The man who entered was so different from him he had expected. When the lines of their lives had first crossed there was little of Strangitharm's face to be seen except his eyes and his beard. It was a complete metamorphosis.

You and I and everybody else who has ever been in China, I expect, know by this time how Strangitharm flashed meteorlike across the Chinese Customs: the old Imperial Maritime in the days when Sir Robert Hart was collecting its revenues to indemnify the Allies for the Boxer "pidgin." The clipper ship *Loonsang*, three months out of the Golden Gate, brought him along with the story of how his methods—"pure mathematics" Strangitharm had said shyly—had brought about Medean justice on the ship's murderer.

Strange deeds, dark as deadly nightshade and as dangerous, were being done in those days in the shadows of Shantung province. The Customs had its quota of potential criminals. Sir Robert had hunted Strangitharm out of the King Edward and up to the Shameen where his remarkable feat in the case of Faience, the man who "died twice," had put him beyond any probability of a peer.

Since then those who had smuggled in arms and opium, or smuggled out rice and "Mex," or warned the pirates of Whampoa when big booty was to be had from the Pearl River boats—all had reason to remember a certain swift Customs cutter which, whenever it was in their wake, gave them a tolerable impression of how little they were going to like the coming of the Angel of the Lord.

He threshed out a very fair crop of grapes of wrath on and about the shores of the Shameen, did this Strangitharm. They knew him well, all the traffickers in trickery, from the respectable side-whiskered

Victorian old gentlemen with business fronts on Victoria Road and villas in Kowloon to those malefactors whose multifarious activities made Macao second only to Monte Carlo. *The South China Daily News* found frequent reasons for mentioning his name. The statuesque, uniformed Sikhs, with bucketlike heads swathed in turbans and putted legs like Corinthian columns, cheerfully came to attention and compelled all traffic to stop when Strangitharm's horse came swinging along toward Hongkong harbor.

Old Yuan had seen this happen one day. He was not generalissimo and afterward first president of all the Manchus, Tartars, and Mongolians for nothing.

"By the gods, there is a man," he had muttered, as there passed on a street black gelding a straight-shouldered, saddle-backed, heavily bearded figure in red shirt and breeches of pongee, spurred boot of shining black outlining the shapeliness of his legs.

The Sikh's answer to the question put by Yuan's *mafoo* was the immediate step in the great generalissimo's eager investigation. When it approached the last stage, Sir Robert groaned in anticipatory anguish.

"That's the way. I find them, train them, and just as I begin to need them, old Yuan requires a new aid-de-camp."

"Trouble is, he does," answered the little hunchbacked Californian who was Yuan's chief of staff, and who had come to beg the master Englishman for his best man. And when Sir Robert had heard why, and sighed over that oft-repeated "good of the service" for the last time, Yuan's ambassador returned to him with words that brought about one of those rare smiles from the old Red-Girdle Manchu.

Now a month or more since, Yuan was smiling in a totally different way. Most assuredly, the typhoid had done its Delilah-work to this Samson in a most competent manner. As he stood, slim and shorn, in

the tightly fitting tunic of imperial yellow, the crucifix-hilted sword of his captaincy, girded to his middle and falling flat across one thigh to where the shining black boot met his knee, the peacock's feather of the mandarin cap that completed the outfit of an imperial guard officer of the Inner City, drooping over one shoulder, he looked like a youthful Galahad just returned from certain knight-errantry that included certain wounds that had wasted him.

"Young," Yuan muttered meditatively, "but one does not need to be old to be wise. And you have been wise. You will be seated, captain, for you are weak, as yet. I am sorry you left your bed too soon, but my sorrow is of small help to you. You need a woman now to care for, tend you, and do the things men will not let other men—servants or no—do for them. You are not married? No?"

He thought it strange Strangitharm should not speak. When he had entered he had saluted. Now he only shook his head sadly, Yuan was soon to understand how the sadness bore upon Strangitharm's silence. As it was, he saw the sadness and it was enough.

"There is no need for man to be alone—in China," quoth Yuan, still meditating.

And then his eyes shone. Here was one upon whom depended many things Yuan had always meant to do. As every one in China who knows anything knows now, he intended Strangitharm for his organizer and the first head of that great military intelligence that even the Huns must admit, ten years later, made their Koenigratzerstrasse staff look fairly average silly.

Just now it was important that the man Yuan meant should build up this great system of espionage, should have those things he needed to bring back brain and body to the efficiency at which he excelled.

So Yuan's eyes continued to shine. He was contemplating a great sacrifice—for China.

He brought together hands taloned like a hawk's claws, the long curving nails protected by tiny gold guards. Apparently from nowhere in particular appeared a felt-slipped Oriental whose blue blouse bore certain red ideographs that told of the position he held in his master's household.

To him he spoke thus in pure Pekingese:

"The new women for my *yamen*. They have been brought? How many? You will

have them here one at a time—the most comely first. The eunuchs will remain beyond the portal."

"Excellency," the hands that came out of the blouse protested, although the voice remained expressionless, "the women for the great one's *yamen*?—In the presence of the Foreign Devil?"

"In the presence of the mandarin, yes! You observe my captain wears the peacock's feather of the fifth order. You recall the penalty for disrespect includes the beating of the bamboo while the disrespectful one hangs suspended by his wrists from the cross bars. Where see you a Fengqui, excellent Kling?"

"There is no Fengqui here, great one. May my grandfathers' prayers for the safety of their grandsons whose eyes have sinned in seeing, be efficacious to protect me from your just wrath. Meanwhile, I obey!"

Expressionless as he had entered, he slipped away and the shadows of the great gray silence swallowed him up. Still Strangitharm said nothing. The great burning eyes looked out of his pale, cold face toward the gaunt grayness of the high roof where prayer papers, long streamers like the pennons of dead knights in some cathedral of the dead and gone years, rustled like the leaves of a dead forest. He could not see their crude colors, magenta, chrome, even scarlet, any more than he could feel the upper reaches of air that stirred them. Everything seemed remote in that great gray chamber of silence, where what light there was came from nowhere in particular, filtering somehow through curtains that seemed sable, although there was no black about anywhere.

He did not know then that where Yuan wanted light he had it. And that what there was, hung like a luminous cloud over the great high-backed settle where he, himself, sat, just as over Yuan's seat brooded profound shadow.

"You have disdained our convenient friendly system of Chinese wives, my captain," he purred at him, and was suddenly shocked out of his composure by the passion of a whisper that could yet sound like the cawing notes of corncrake crows.

"I know nothing of women, sir. I want to know nothing of them. Were I to use the voice God gave me, you would hear the broken, squeaky one of a boy when it is about to change. Because of that, I ever

was ridiculous among men. I took a sailing ship to China that I might grow a buccaneer's spade beard so bushy that no one would dare mock me again because of my voice. I learned, too, to make myself distinct in this sort of croak. But it was hardly intended for the pledging of vows, was it, sir?"

Yuan held up one of the hawk-talon hands.

"You are in China, captain," he said tolerantly. "Observe me! You will consider me Dead Sea fruit so far as my personal attraction for women is concerned. Occidental women! But here we arrange matters—well—differently. You are about to observe the new inmates of my *yamen*. It is a year since I visited the women's quarters of this place. Those who have borne me sons have the honor they deserve: will have it always. They are apart. The others—a certain allurements was lacking. I gave them their freedom and made some sketchy suggestions to one who is apt always to catch my meaning accurately. Since then he has scoured the slave markets from the Irwadi to the Yangste; from Formosa even to the desert of Gobi, he tells me. He has purchased from fathers, brothers, and *nakodos*. From every one except husbands. You are to have a privilege never before granted to any man—let alone of your color. You shall see them before I do—and she who stirs those enfeebled pulses of yours back to life is—yours!"

Strangitharm's pulses seemed anything but enfeebled if one might judge by the flaming scarlet in his cheeks.

"Since you have mentioned my color," he croaked hoarsely in such Chinese as he could master, "I may say that I am from a Southern State where miscegenation is a misdemeanor. If I knew I must go without the love of women forever, I might still say, sir, that when I mate it will be with one of my own color."

The silence was of a dangerous quality now.

"You are a brave man, Captain Strangitharm," mouthed old Yuan's lips.

"All men are brave who can do nothing but win even when they lose their lives," was Strangitharm's sullen response. Old Yuan did not frighten him.

It was then against the curtains that seemed sable in that murk of gray that a little fragile toy woman tottered forward

on distorted feet. To Yuan's eyes they were "lily feet" and infinitely precious. Precious, too, the high cheek bones, the liquid eyes that looked at him obliquely from under lashes as spiky with cosmetics as her lips were thick with carmine. She was a child only in years.

Strangitharm had risen. In his stiff Southern way his heels came together, his body bent from the waist. His appraisal, Yuan saw, was one with sentiments already expressed.

The old generalissimo cut short the sing-song of the servitor who, out of sight, extolled the extraordinarily expensive virtues of this, his prize purchase. But Yuan was not verifying his agent's argument. He was watching his man.

"Take her away. I will see her in my good time. Now, we arrange to please his excellency the mandarin, my guest. The next!"

He sat down again, but only to arise immediately, for another flower, and yet another and another and another, one following the other swiftly, but not as swiftly as Yuan barked "Away!" at a sight of his intelligence officer's eyes. Until finally there came a hiatus during which the eleven who had appeared had no successor, and the voice behind the curtains sang on at length.

"There is but a single one remaining, excellency, and if I dare to insult the eyes of the great one, and the woman insults his ears besides, what of his humblest slave who has but done his best? It was for her I traveled to the great Gobi-Shamo fair, having word of the dealers that a maid whom the Huhamet camel men called a 'peri of Paradise' had been on sale there at the fair of the past year. The great Red Girdle had bidden me bring him at least one woman who was of exotic type; of the East, yet Western also, like the white women of the flat feet with clothes hard to the touch—Making the journey, excellency, I found what you shall see. But what is the beauty of the body, Great One of the White Banner, when the mind is distorted with hate? With the aid of a mixture of opium and hemp, the slave-dealers' drug furnished me, and which he must use upon her always to keep her tame, I brought her here. Even now the eunuchs hold her tightly though her feet and wrists are in chains. If you would see her even so, Great One, extend the clemency of your thrice-venerated ancestors to

a slave who would lose his chance of Nirvana sooner than your favor."

Yuan was frowning heavily now.

"You are needlessly prolix concerning goods you have but to show. Exhibit your untamed tiger with no more words."

The curtains trembled violently: parted as the great sail of a ship flaps forth in a sudden adverse wind, and a figure Strangitharm was never to forget almost fell upon her face before him. Her chains were jewelers' chains. But for all that they were of steel and had cut into the tender flesh so that blood stained her wrists and bare ankles.

But immediately she stood erect, facing Yuan. Her scarlet slit of a mouth seemed to split out hatred at him.

"Old, fat, and loathsome man!" she cried in a barbarian dialect with deep, throaty but withal childish notes in it. "I hope you have paid high for me, for that means you will lose more. I am a chief's daughter, and a free woman, and no fat old man shall have me. I hate you! Now kill me."

But Yuan, watching her with inscrutable eyes, was watching Strangitharm, too. And he thanked his private gods, for the woman he would not have to kill after all.

"There——" He pointed to where the little luminous cloud seemed to hang over Strangitharm. "There! You are for him. If you can speak his tongue, tell *him* to kill you. It was for me you were bought, but it is for him to say whether he will have you or whether you shall die. Behold the man!"

For the first time she saw the tall, straight figure in the imperial yellow, the cold, white, young face in which were set, like rubies in platinum, the burning eyes.

They met hers. And of a sudden there leaped between those two a devouring flame.

There was never any one fairer to see than she. I, for one, should like to have seen her then in robes half torn from her, patches of her skin showing through like rose upon old ivory. The eyes were only obliqued enough to make them distracting. The nose was tiny when she ceased to breathe defiance through it, when her breast suddenly ceased to heave and she clutched her torn robe about her. Her mouth, too. Even her body, one saw, was small and perfectly formed when she stood on her rosy heels instead of in the attitude of one calling down fire from heaven. As she shrank and be-

came just a girl, a very young girl, and very little and pitiful and defenseless, something very like a sob burst from Strangitharm and his stiffened hand fell hard upon the crucifix hilt of his heathen sword.

"You wish to kill her?" asked old Yuan in bland English. "Do so, if you will. She is yours."

"Mine?" croaked Strangitharm.

"Twice yours," said old Yuan.

It was true. Her eyes, rounded now, appealed, besought, implored.

"Twice yours, my captain; I give her you, she gives you herself. Look!"

But he did not have to look. She had stumbled and was putting out little hands that fluttered like frightened butterflies. When Strangitharm sprang to catch, two tiny palms held her up against him. Into the little trembling lower lip was set two teeth like Orient pearls, the eyes were frankly wet now.

A moment later she was on her knees, and it was Strangitharm's eyes that were wet. With a sudden primitive cry, he drew her up, held her tightly to him with an arm that crushed the breath from her body. And, was it accidental that his hand again fell on his sword hilt? Yuan did not think so.

"When I return from the American consulate to report for duty, sir, it will be with my wife," said Strangitharm.

When because of her chains she stumbled, he caught her up as one might the tiniest child, and, with one great stride, sent the curtains bellying before him.

At Yuan's smiling command, the armed guards gave him elbowroom.

## II.

Old Yuan leaned back and laughed. Again, five years later, he was expecting his able aid-de-camp. Again there entered a man he had not expected.

If any one had reason to be supremely satisfied, it was Strangitharm. He had not been disappointed: people never disappointed Yuan, only *the* people. It had been his intention away back in his Oxford days to make a republic of China. That was why ever after he had seemed more ardent in his imperialism. Meanwhile, he was making a man machine for himself, not for the Dowager She-Devil, for China, possibly, certainly not for the empire.

To do this thoroughly he had known he

must have his Ohkrana. The most difficult thing to do was to find him who could head it: one at once able, intelligent, fearless, honest, loyal. One to whom everything was nothing to lose if one retained one's self-respect.

Little by little, Yuan had allowed Strangitharm to have more power than any feudal lord ever dreamed of having.

Why, then, should such a one seem, as he did to-day, old, broken, listless; with the soured mouth of one to whom the apples of the tree of life have turned into Dead Sea fruit?

"What ails my prince this morning?" said old Yuan, trying to keep the uneasiness out of his smile. They were on the eve of great things, and this was no time for his adjutant to doubt his ability.

"I have failed," said Strangitharm simply.

Yuan cocked an interrogative eyebrow. He knew well enough what Strangitharm meant, but he was too wise to anticipate information it was another's privilege to give him.

"There," said the other, and opened a stiff, crackling text of Chinese ideography. A carbon copy of an English translation fluttered to the floor. Old Yuan, with thousands to play servant to him, lifted his huge bulk to reach it sooner than have Strangitharm serve him so.

"Sit and rest, my prince," he smiled.

"I do not like your satire, sir," said Strangitharm stiffly.

"Satire?" The other eyebrow went up.

He arose with the gesture of one who has omitted some trivial formality, and pinned something on the right breast of Strangitharm's imperial yellow tunic: something that glittered in the single ray of sunshine that found the high-backed chair. As ever, Yuan sat in shadow.

"And here—the grant from his imperial majesty which makes it possible for you to have your palace and the usual retainers."

Strangitharm sat staring stupidly at the tiny slip of ivory on which, painted with all the loving care of great portraiture, were set forth certain single characters that said incredible things about sixty thousand Haifong taels and rank beyond that of mandarins. For him, the Foreign Devil, the Fengqui!

It was impossible. Especially now! He arose and saluted, then suddenly felt the futility of such formal respect.

"Sir!" he faltered in Chinese. Then he fell on one knee near Yuan's chair. "You are so great a man, Father Yuan, that you see greatness where there is only a lack of littleness. You must exalt me no further. I am not worthy. I have failed. Read! There have been fifty murders since the New Year: deliberate, unhurried, carefully planned. Here in Peking under our noses! And I know as little now who it was who planned them as I did a month since before I placed a thousand spies here, there, and everywhere."

For the first time in his life, old Yuan touched another man's hand. His eyes, kindly, patient, but always potential, held his favorite's.

"My son," he said slowly, "I thought you had killed them yourself."

"I?"

All love and reverence gone from his tone, Strangitharm sprang up, the stiff Southerner of yester-years.

"Son," said old Yuan in his caressing Chinese, "my very dear, white, spirit son, give me your hand again. I have had sons I could not love. Now for five years I have had you. You might have hurled me from my place long since with the very power I placed in your hands. I love you, Kara-Chi-Mana—Black Strong-Arm, White Great-Heart, son of mine. Sit—here!"

He, who had never before suffered any save women to sit beside him, drew the American down to the viceregal seat.

"See—you share with me—China! The China of the future! The oldest of intellectuals functioned anew by the youngest of souls. Out of America, land of ideals, often altogether wrong, but always idealistic! America! Land of rebel, outlaw Anglo-Saxons, who denied their bodies that their souls might live and carved a country from a wilderness! The Angle in America, the outlaw soul; such as the crass world has, the soul of the world.

"Secret, strong, sinister! must be the real slayer, a veritable devil. If he, too, sought the ideal in his slaying, would he not be welcome among us? Otherwise, he slays only because he has the power to slay and, therefore, we must find and slay him. Not so?"

"I have failed," said Strangitharm sullenly.

"Be more secret, even sinister. Laugh, lose your listlessness. Believe again you



cannot fail. You will not fail. Enough now. Adieu, my prince, my son."

He gave the American his hand. No hawk talon now; so benignly placed, it was like the soft, rounded one of a bishop pronouncing his benediction.

Instinctively Strangitharm bent and brushed it with his lips. Then, as usual, ashamed of emotion, he hurriedly withdrew.

It is useless to attempt to describe the indescribable. Rua Strangitharm was that. Paris, Vienna, London, New York—all know her; the most proficient pens have been plied in futile attempts to do what I am astutely avoiding.

But I must ask you to attempt to conceive her as Strangitharm saw her when his great black gelding swept around the curving path that led to the old Manchu palace within the red lacquered walls of the Forbidden City. The jasmine bushes in serried hedgerows climbed the curving hill, it would seem, with bright faces reared hopefully toward her. She had heard his horse's hoofs and had come forth from her summer pavilion, lute in hand.

The slanting rays of the Easter sun fell slantwise across the golden-green of the jasmine bushes and seemed to bring with it all the perfume and light of a world about to rest, its good-night kiss.

Strangitharm's heartstrings tightened, his throat became constricted as he saw her standing there, her arms held out toward him.

She knew just how to time all this, so that when she came into full view on the bridle path below, Strangitharm had dismounted, his *mafoo* had taken over his horse, and he was free for her.

Her ancestry is pretty well established by this time; the daughter of a Polish prince, a political exile who had escaped from Omsk; a Tartar mother, the daughter of one of those swift-riding Tamerlanes who swept like one of their own devastating desert winds upon these glittering tea caravans that wind like great bespangled snakes across the yellow sands of Gobi. Her early life had been spent under tents, amid swift attacks and alarms, and the strident call to arms. Her father, it would seem, had organized the outlaw band into which he married into some semblance of a crack camel corps. He himself had been of the French Foreign Legion before Fate tempted him

home to Poland again; desert fighting à la mode was second nature to him. Besides, he came of that race of puissant Polish princes, the Sobieskis; all of whom claim direct descent from John the Great, who stopped the Turks at the gates of Vienna and saved Europe from the heathen.

In her soft belted robe of cherry-pink, the spray of plum blossoms in her hair, she looked into the eyes of her lord. For once she tried to kiss away their troubled look in vain.

The little scarlet mouth was drawn down, the corners of it trembled. One fluttering butterfly hand came to rest, warm and vivid, in his cold, taut one as it encircled her waist and they walked to the stone colonnade of the palace, past the protecting Dogs of Fo—hideous mythical monsters—part griffin, who guarded one against evil spirits—to the great swinging doors on which a great sprawling ideograph "Sho"—long life—was emblazoned.

These parted before they reached them: a blue-bloused soldier stood behind each one, and the two passed along the lofty stone hall into the great room at the rear that he had contrived into some semblance of a library. Books in every language lined the walls; these and the plain dark shelves on which they stood along with the great writing desk shaped like a harpsichord, and set by the widest window—these, and the maps on the walls were his contributions. The couches everywhere covered with bearskins, tiger skins, the skins of mountain cat and mountain lion, and piled with pillows in the softest, rarest Chinese blues—blues that matched the otherwise matchless Ming porcelain and silken rugs from Samarcand—these were hers. She loved to lie on couches: she never sat: you had to see her standing stiff, erect and angry to realize she had a backbone at all. At other times she seemed one undulating curve.

She threw herself on the nearest couch to his writing table now, as lithe as had been the leopard upon whose skin she lay. But for the first time he gave no heed to the arms that would have drawn him down to her; but went his way to his safe and then sat him down to compare with certain documents taken therefrom the latest reports of his baffled spies.

Suddenly he groaned and put both hands to his temples; then laid down his head on his folded arms. His shoulder shook.

"My love, my love," came from her like a bird call, and she was at his side whispering the endearments of all the mothers in the world.

As he quieted down, she said she must know. He must explain. But he only shook his head. It was seldom he spoke, even to her. His voice had remained ever the same. The years had not changed that. So he spoke seldom to any one. And before, she had been content to read his emotions in his eyes. Meanwhile, there had been much for her to do: she had learned the English of English gentlewomen: not only to speak but to write and read. And then French and the language of the Latin. And then their child had come.

After that, she had followed her husband's faltering footsteps through the mazes of classical Chinese—a life study in itself. Of this Strangitharm knew nothing until one night, she plucked from her little lute a strain that Debussy might have written during his earlier experiences with the chromatic scale, one of the lyrics of which to know in the original implies an education unknown even to fairly educated Chinese.

Myrrh borrows from thee fragrance its odor to exhale,  
And all the airs of ambergris through thee perfume the air.

She smoothed the crispy dark hair away from the high forehead above the tired blue eyes.

"Blackbird of mine," she cooed in the mandarin tongue. "Acquaint me with the reasons for thy dolor. I, thy little humming bird, demand to know."

"Beaten," burst from him hoarsely in English. "Beaten at every turn. Beaten by one so far beyond me, I cannot guess even at his identity. See them here—fifty men, princes, mandarins, Red Girdle, and White Bannermen. All high of place and all dead."

Swiftly her eye scanned the names.

"Guarded in their great *yamens* every one by soldiers, eunuchs, slaves without number," he went on hoarsely, slipping into the softer Chinese.

"The Omi angel spreads sable wings where he listeth," she quoted, "cot or palace, peasant's or prince's. What gates can the body build to keep out those of the spirit? How did they die?" she added suddenly in English.

"No one knows," he answered despair-

ingly. "They retired, they slept, they did not awake—that is all. The night has a million eyes, they say, and here in Peking so have I. Not a million perhaps, but besides my eyes I have arms, a thousand arms, arms to prevent and protect. Scholars of the universities who live like coolies that I may know what happens—princes, mandarins, soldiers of every rank. My lord Yuan has sent them to me from everywhere, and I have sent them back—everywhere. Some I shall never see again, but always, every hour of the day, swift messengers remind me that they live to look for the day—the great day. Yet not one can throw light on these happenings. So I have failed. Today Yuan asked me—asked *me*—if it was not I who killed these men myself. Who else could have done so? he wished to know."

"As well he might," she said stonily, looking past him into the shadows. "For every one was an enemy. Every one!"

"What do you mean?" he croaked harshly in English.

"Reactionaries you call them in your English books," she answered in the same language. "Stumblingblocks to progress. Enemies of the new order! Slave dealers!" she whipped out suddenly, and so saturnine did her face become it lost all look of loveliness.

"Hear this, Blackbird," she said swiftly in Chinese. "They caught me, a wild, free thing of the desert, these fat, slave-dealing men. And because I would rather die than live the life for which they esteemed me of value, they drugged me with their hashish opium and stood me on the slave block chained while fat men like these came to buy. I was too desirable for the common market where ordinary men come to get them housewives and such. For me, the courtyards of the viceroys, the princes; never less than a *taotai's yamen*. Where perfumed waters play in the porcelain fountains, drugged and chained, I must stand while they appraised me. Their ugly fat fingers pinched my flesh. But when they leered up at me and saw the hatred in my eyes, they dared not buy: my eyes told them they would be damned if they did. *Ohio-hee!*" her voice rose in triumph. "They did not dare! Even my lord Yuan would not have dared, had he been the purchaser, himself. How I hated them, these who stood for a people's slavery! Not one who

stands on your list but would have bought and slain me had he dared. Not only slain but sent his victim to the House of Death through the Gateway of Pain. Not one but has slain a slave whenever his rage demanded a sacrifice. And you weep for them! Do not, my Blackbird, they are well and truly wiped from an earth they lived only to smirch and soil."

He stared at her in amazement. Finally, he said:

"You do not realize."

"Better than you think. Conspiracies are on every side of you——"

"Those I can handle: those I understand. Against those I am guarded. But this—swift and sudden slaughter——"

"Of enemies—enemies—enemies! Bless the hand that sped them and sorrow no more," she said fiercely.

He reached up a hand that was like a child's in its weakness now and his face was only wistful as he said:

"Cannot you see that if as part of those I am to protect, I cannot guard them now, how may I successfully plan their overthrow when the time comes for that—the day! For five years my lord Yuan has given me the right to build up a gigantic listening machine, one that would read in the very murmur of the spring breeze amid the boughs, the tongues of the trouble makers, the treason plotters, the traitors. Four hundred millions alone are here, as many as all the rest of the world contains, and mostly men unafraid to die for that life holds so little for them now. Against the eager alacrity of Japan to lead these hosts, against the awful new efficiency of an even newer empire, balked by the brooding greedy beasts who have held the land so long, the lord Yuan has pitted his great listening machine. And if it cannot hear even the fluttering of the Omi angel's sable wings when they are folded above our own city of Peking, what use, think you, it will be when the storm breaks, and the storm birds' wings beat about the bow. That is why I have failed."

Again his tired blue eyes looked across the desk in nothingness. Dusk was deepening. There were only shadows everywhere.

But she did not smooth the crispy black hair above them again. When it sank on the flat enfolded arms, she stole softly into the shadows and away.

### III.

In those same shadows, that were the same by dusk or day in that great gray chamber, old Yuan sat and listened. It was an easy matter to have audience with him: easy, that is, to get in, not so easy to get out. Now when Kling brought him news that an Imperial Guard officer and a Tartar prince sought admittance and audience, the fact that Kling did not know the officer although he was Imperial and of the Guard; nor yet the Tartar, although he was a prince, was enough to arouse old Yuan into unrest.

"At once," he ordered, and crossed his fingers twice as a signal for the number of soft-footed soldiers who were to be disposed about somewhere in the shadows, close at hand.

The officer, entering, was cloaked, heavily cloaked; wearing, too, his field-service cap pulled down over hidden eyes, instead of his mandarin cap of rank. He wore no sword or side arms of any sort. The Tartar, huge, heavily chested, hirsute, dwarfed the smaller figure at his side.

The officer gave the Guards salute; the Tartar kotowed to one of superior rank. Then both stood like stone figures.

"We await the moment of confidence, father of a great people," boomed the Tartar. He used the mandarin dialect with the burr usual to those from the upper Yangtze reaches or the Giami-Tchu mountain country. He might even have been of the Tibet border folk. "You perceive: we are unarmed. Withdraw those whose breathing is most perceptible to desert folk, those who come from the great wastes, though sight of them is honorably denied us. We come upon a matter that touches your own honor through that of him who of all men you have most highly esteemed. The counseling of your honorably wise ancestors will have shown you such matters are not for ordinary ears."

Yuan raised his hand, the fingers reversed the command that had placed the soldiers in the shadows. Their withdrawal was as silent as it was circumspect, but the almost pointed ears of the huge Tartar heard.

"And now——"

Swiftly the slender young Guards officer slipped across the floor and knelt within reaching distance of the hawk-talon hands. Slowly the cap came off in the little gloved

hands. The mutinous mouth was like a scarlet line above a dimpled chin that had suddenly lost all its curves. The eyes were obliqued until only pin points peered out through their triangular slits. But for all that it was Rua—the Princess Rua—Rua Strangitharm.

“My lord Yuan,” she whispered, “are you sure that no one hears but you?”

Again old Yuan leaned back and laughed, but again it was a different laugh from any any one had ever heard before. He raised the left hand, four of the gold guards on the curving nails reaching skyward. The little finger—longer than the index of any other hand—was flipped across the sere and wrinkled palm. Only in the almost unearthly earshot of the stonily standing Tartar was the sound of felt slipping across velvet even palpable.

“Kling has gone,” said Yuan simply in English.

“I could only come to you like this, because of your country’s laws about women, sir,” she said in the same tongue. “My husband must not lose face in your country. And you and you alone can tell me what it is that I must do. It would seem that I have hurt where most I would have helped. And now I cannot tell what it is I must do. You must decide.”

She motioned to the statuelike Tartar to come nearer.

“When I was trapped by the slave dealers and carried off; after the caravan men had fallen upon our tribe from north and south, this, my halfbrother, and I, alone remained of the rulers of our race. He, being second son, had gone as a child as do all our second sons to acquire merit for the family. From the great Giami Lamasery, where he had been monk since early childhood, through the Khan Lamaseries, he went his way until that time he should be sent to the Grand Lamasery in the Secret City. When there came to him news that all the chief’s sons were dead save he, himself, the Grand Master could only release him from certain of his vows and permit him to return to his people, to take a woman to wife and beget a son that the tribe should again have one of its ruling race.”

The Tartar made the sign that gave him the absolution of which she spoke. Old Yuan nodded.

“When the scattered remnants of our tribe

were brought together, there was one who, dying as he was, had dragged himself back to the desert from Peking whither he had followed me until the gates of your *yamen* closed behind me.”

Old Yuan turned sharply to see what it was the giant Tartar had said. But his face was stony, although the great muscles of his arm rippled, shaking his silken sleeves.

“Now it is not with us as with you where women are concerned. Our women are free women. When the tribe is decimated, a woman may have many husbands, even. Her sons, if she be a chief’s daughter, may rule the tribe. Only as a free woman may she be taken by, or take a man. My brother could not understand how it was I had entered your *yamen* alive. So he came to kill me—and you.

“He brought with him his knife men, his secret poisoners. We have a great art with steel and deadly drugs, handed on to us from ancestors mighty at such secrets. My brother, too, had the secret orders of the lamaseries to do his bidding, for is he not of the Grand Lamasery? When he found me honorably the wife of a great chieftain and by my own desire the mother of his child, he knew he might go back to Lhasa without using his absolution. There was no need for him to wed when I had borne a child to one I loved.

“Would to God I had let him go.”

Her dusky coils of hair were all that were to be seen from the dais now.

“But now that the father of my child was of our tribe, what secrets the lamaseries yielded were his to be served with, and my brother knew of the Order of Fifty who plotted your destruction, my lord Yuan and his—my husband. And so, with such knowledge as I had of my husband’s secrets, with that only yielded to those of the Grand Lamaseries besides, and with those secret arts of knife and poison—we slew the Order of Fifty that one of our tribe might achieve further merit, the father of my son. That those who would keep men and women slaves, the fat men who pinch the arms of women on the slave block as they would blood one of their beeves, who want slaves forever for free men and women would not serve them—over their *yamens* sable and silent, the Omi angel swooped with a sword. And that is all. Yet it is not all!”

She paused and sobs shook her frame.

"Because of their silence and mystery, because these deeds were done in darkness, his thousand eyes may not penetrate; he has called himself beaten, lies even now believing himself undone. Were it so simple, such is my love for him, I would stand before him and say: 'Blackbird. It was I who slew them. For you! But if I do, I must lose him. And if he loses me, there is only unhappiness for him. What then must I do that he may again believe himself strong and fight for the day that comes apace? Counsel me, my lord Yuan."

There was silence, the silence that seems to hold some of the qualities of blackness in it. Back of the shadows light seemed to struggle vainly against the all-encompassing dusk of this great gray chamber.

"I," boomed the Tartar suddenly in his uncouth outland Chinese, "I serve God, the one God of all. He who rules all the littler gods of the littler folk. If I serve him best as sacrifice, let me be so. It was done in his service. It is for my lord Yuan to say."

"I," she patterned after him, "serve him I love. He is flesh of my flesh and father of my child. If I serve him best as sacrifice, let me be so. It is for the lord Yuan to say."

And so they sat and stood and knelt supine before the judgment of old Yuan. And suddenly, once again, Yuan leaned back and laughed. And once again it was a laugh no one had ever heard before.

#### IV.

Back in the shadows of the old Manchu palace, his crispy dark head upon the flat of his arms, Strangitharm still sat, his hidden eyes looking into a future that revealed nothing. He had failed—failed! He did not remember that he had not eaten that day; he hardly remembered how long it had been since those warm, rosy fingers had pushed the crispy dark hair back from the tired blue eyes. Hours, perhaps, he did not know!

When he felt the fingers again, they were cold. He started up.

"A viceregal messenger from my lord Yuan," a cold, still voice was saying. "He

awaits any answer you may have to give him."

Why did she stand there like that? It was as if she were chained again. Swiftly he recalled the picture of her as he had first seen her, the blood about her bare ankles.

"Read and answer," she was saying.

How could he know that whatever it was that had moved Yuan to laughter was in that letter: that he had spoken no word; only written a few and bidden her take his sealed word to his chief of intelligence and await his answer.

Two little palms, not rosy now—two little hands like a cold ghost's kept him back.

"Read and answer," she droned monotonously.

With a puzzled frown and choking back unspoken words, he rippled the long, stiff parchment with a single thrust of a finger that sent bits of wax flying. Inside was only a single row of ideographs.

He brought the paper closer to his eyes. When they met hers, the girl's were big, inky-black pools of horror. So they sat until suddenly he flung the paper from him and tore her from her place and into his arms, where she clung like a frightened child.

"My dearest, my own; how can you care so much for me?" he croaked hoarsely. "To fear so greatly—for me. Your eyes—just then—of what are you afraid? The danger is over. It is all past. It was Yuan, Yuan, himself, using the same machinery to teach me—to teach me——"

They turned to the paper that lay on the floor. It read:

My prince, and son of mine: Lest you should think our processes as yet perfect, I have used certain secrets you have yet to learn to remove from the head of that sleeping dragon which is China certain tons of rock that lay heavy upon its head. The Council of Fifty have been counseled by the only counselor to whom they would listen. The secrets are yours for the asking, yours for the using. Come to me on the morrow. There is one with me of the Grand Lamastery who joins with me in felicitating the prince with the perfect wife on whose head my honored ancestors would have peace descend. Thy father and hers, Yuan.

"Father, indeed," she said. "Father, indeed, my Blackbird."



The fall program of the POPULAR is to be a starry one. Be sure you do not miss the forthcoming numbers.

# A Chat With You

**WE** have an idea that when we read things with the conscious idea of improving ourselves, we generally get very little out of it. We often wonder how many hundreds of thousands have had their literary tastes injured, if not ruined, by the things forced on them at school.

As we remember it, there was no study that made an especial hit with us. Mathematics was a subacute torture, while English literature was a sedative and soporific they handed out afterward to soothe down the jangled nerves. It seems, looking back, as if we only studied literature on sunny June afternoons when it was hard to stay indoors with the warm light filtering through the yellow shades without falling into a pleasantly drowsy condition.

**U**NDER these circumstances we studied a variety of things, but they all seemed to bear a strange resemblance to each other. Whether it was Portia, in "The Merchant of Venice," or Ichabod Crane, in Irving's story, or the various creatures in Goldsmith's "Deserted Village," they all seemed the beings of a dream rather than of actual life. We read the plays and stories through, verse by verse, without ever realizing that they were plays and stories. Imagination never went so far as to conceive any one interested in them on their own account. They all belonged to that strange, drowsy, unreasonable long-winded world of lessons. They

hypnotized us into an inconceivable dullness and stupidity. The literature we learned at school, and analyzed and paraphrased and made abstracts of, is the literature we know least about.

**WE** can't believe it was the fault of the teachers that these things that should have been so interesting became suddenly so deadly dull. It was just the hypnotic effect of the schoolroom and the idea that we were reading these things, not because we chose to, but because they were "classics." Years afterward we rediscovered a lot of things that used to make us yawn. We found that they were alive and interesting, and we marveled at our own stupidity. We suppose there is no other way of teaching English in the schools, and that for generations to come the child will regard Shakespeare not as a humorist and romancer, but as a moralist who wrote a queer and crabbed dialect, and will think that Washington Irving and all the rest instead of being writers of light and entertaining fiction were ponderous scholars and intolerable pedants. As a matter of fact, they scared us away from a lot of the really good stuff, instead of teaching us to like it.

**H**ERE we have one of the real advantages of a popular magazine. No matter how good the stories are, no matter how exquisite the English, how inspired the characterization, how true the picture of life, we don't have to be

**A CHAT WITH YOU—Continued.**

smothered by the feeling that "we are being done good" when we read it. Every now and then some one is kind enough to write us and say that THE POPULAR is full of real literary merit. We are always delighted to hear it. But the literary merit, the style, the artistic quality are by-products. We are sure to get them if we get the best of what we are looking for and what we are trying to get into print. What we want is the story that the average man likes to read, as well told as humanly possible. We don't want the freak story that poses as literature. We don't want the brutal tale that poses as "real life." We want the normal, the sane, the sound, and at the same time the stirring and exciting. They are the hardest sort of stories to write and the best when you get them written.



PEOPLE are likely to be interested in stories about the things they themselves are interested in in actual life. One man is interested in dogs, and so a story about a dog always finds an especial place in his heart. Some are interested in horses, and always are glad to read about them. Others—a considerable number—are interested in girls, and the story in which the girl looks alive and promising always has a better chance with them.

In view of this it is interesting to note that the full-book-length novel which appears complete in the next issue of the magazine and which opens the number is entitled, "The Girl, a Horse, and a Dog."



THE novel is by Francis Lynde. Ever since "The King of Arcadia" and "The Taming of Red Butte Western"

appeared in THE POPULAR, Lynde has been famous as a novelist and has lived steadily up to his reputation. We think the new story is the best yet. It is the tale of a man who went in search of a girl, a horse, and a dog under the provisions of a strange will. It is one of those stories that deal with the everyday happenings of life and yet have woven into them the threads of romance and adventure. It is a whimsical, jolly, light-hearted, fast-moving story. It has excitement, hard work, hard fighting, and the right kind of an ending. It is long enough for a serial and better than nine-tenths of the books that used to cost a dollar and a half, and are now rated from a dollar seventy-five up. It is certainly worth a great deal more than the twenty cents that THE POPULAR costs. Order your copy now.



THERE is a corking funny story with the scene laid in Syria, and with a cast of characters embracing a young American and the famous "Najib." It is called "On Strike," and is by Albert Payson Terhune. There is a wonderful sea story, one of the best in a wonderful series, "The Flat-Footed Road," by Frederick Jackson. There is a great mystery novelette, "The Murder of John Van Alstyne," by the man who has studied actual murder mysteries closer than any one else in America, Charles Somerville, the famous journalist. There is a grim and gripping story of the winter woods, "Death in the Pot," by Ben Ames Williams. These are only a few of the features of the next issue of THE POPULAR. As we remarked before, it will be safer if you order your copy now.



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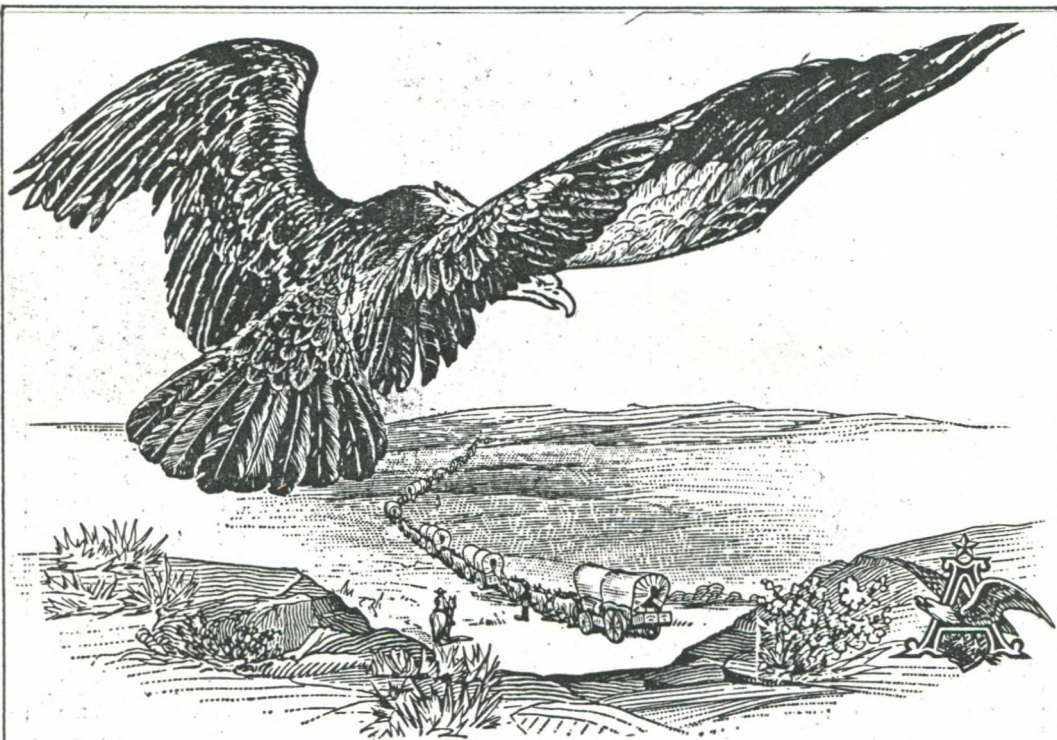
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