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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

Lose Yourself in

The Labyrinth

by Francis Stevens

Author of "The Nightmare," etc.

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. LXXXVI — NUMBER 4

CONTENTS FOR JULY 27, 1918

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

ONE NOVELETTE

EIGHT SHORT STORIES

VERSE

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY
VOL. LXXXVI NUMBER 4
SATURDAY, JULY 27, 1918

The Labyrinth

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Author of "The Nightmare," etc.

CHAPTER I.

BAD NEWS BEFORE BREAKFAST.

RISING to the extent of a supporting elbow, I viewed my early caller with one eye—the other was still asleep. Rex Tolliver had the entry of my rooms at all hours, but it didn't seem nice in him to take advantage of that fact to break my sweet slumbers in the early dawn. So far as I am concerned, that is any time before 11.30 A.M.

"Great Scott, Hil, haven't you any heart at all?" demanded the ruthless one. "I thought she was just about the same as a sister to you."

I shook my head sleepily.

"Numberless booful ladies have promised to be sisters to poor little orphan Hildreth. Which she is it? And why the excitement?"

Rex dropped into a chair.

"Then you haven't heard?"

"I heard that chair. If you love me, spare my furniture. No man of your weight and temperament ought to—"

"Hil, for Heaven's sake! It's Ronny I'm speaking of—your cousin, Veronica Wyndham!"

My eyes opened suddenly.

"What are you talking about? Ronny's all right."

"She is? Then you know what has become of her? Where is she?"

"At home—or at the office, more likely. They have such unearthly ideas about early rising."

"Oh, is she? *Is* she? Well, just glance at those head-lines and then—go back to sleep, since you're so darned indifferent."

He flung a badly rumpled newspaper on the bed and stalked gloomily over to the window, where he stood looking out, his back expressive of condemnatory scorn.

But I was not in the least indifferent to anything concerning the only cousin I ever really loved.

Those head-lines, in which her name appeared in letters of glaring size and sinister hue, got me out of bed and into my clothes quicker than anything else in the world could have done.

VERONICA WYNDAM VANISHES SUDDENLY.

Former Secretary of Governor Goes and Leaves No Trace.

FIANCÉE OF SOCIETY MAN.

Feared She Has Been Spirited Away—Police Search Vainly.

I cast a hasty glance down a whole column of "It is saids" and "Supposed to

haves," but having known a few reporters, I had no desire to waste time in acquiring misinformation. I reached for my clothes with one hand and my shoes with the other, not stopping to ring for Billings. As I projected myself into them I shot a series of Sherlockian questions at Tolliver which disabused him of any idea of my indifference.

His answers were not particularly helpful. The last time he had seen my cousin had been three days previous—that was Monday—and he had taken her to the theater. He went on for five minutes before I realized that what he was saying had nothing to do with her disappearance, but was in the nature of self-reproach because he had disagreed with her about the play. She liked it and he didn't, and it was too Ibsenesque with the Ibsen left out, but now he wished he'd kept still about it, and—

I was dressed by that time. Shaving could wait.

"Never mind Ibsen," I broke in. "Did you see her home that night?"

"Did I—say, Wyndham, would I be likely to leave her in the street? Of course I saw her home, and she was so annoyed over that confounded argument that she would scarcely say good-night. That's what hurts most. We parted in anger, and now—"

"That's how you and I will part, if you can't come down to brass tacks and tell me exactly what has happened. You saw her three days ago—no very long time. How do you know she has disappeared? Maybe she has gone off on a visit or something."

"No, she hasn't. Do you think *she* would leave her work at loose ends, that way? Carpenter kept it dark—confound him! Only phoned me last night, and said he thought she and I might have eloped. The blamed fool! Why the dickens should we elope? It seems she didn't go to the office Tuesday morning."

"You're sure she reached home all right Monday night?"

"Look here, Wyndham, do you think I had her kidnaped? If you do, come right out and say so; don't beat about the bush."

I stared at him.

"No; I don't think you had her kidnaped. I want to know if you left her at the street entrance or went up to the apartment with her."

"Oh! Well, I've been talking with 'steen detectives who have all asked the same question—where did I leave her. It's got on my nerves. I took her up, of course, but Mrs. Sandry had retired, so I didn't go in. Besides, she didn't ask me."

Mrs. Sandry was the nice old lady who shared Ronny's apartment and played chaperon. For all her independence, Ronny was a great little stickler for the conventions. Hence, when she went on her own and acquired an apartment, she also went in partnership with Mrs. Sandry.

"Carpenter called up her place," continued Rex, "when she failed to show up at the office or telephone. Mrs. Sandry told him that Ronny wasn't there—that she had not come home, and was supposed to have spent the night at Anne Lacroix's house. Ronny had told Mrs. Sandry that she and I were to meet Anne and her husband for supper after the show, and that she might go home with them. So Carpenter took it for granted that she had done that, and that something had delayed her. He never called up the Lacroix house till late in the afternoon. Of course she wasn't there. Anne was ill, and they never kept their appointment with us.

"Then, instead of notifying the police, Carpenter went up to see Mrs. Sandry. They talked it over and made up their fool minds to wait another day before starting anything. That is, Carpenter made up his own mind and the old lady's, too. I know what ailed him, and I'll square that account before the finish. He was afraid of any scandal in connection with his precious office.

"Then yesterday afternoon—*yesterday afternoon*, mind you, two whole nights and nearly two days after she had disappeared—he had the nerve to call me up and ask me if we had eloped. Oh—"

"Forget Carpenter. Have you told the police?"

"Have I—say, isn't it in all the papers? Didn't I tell you that I have been badgered by detectives ever since?"

"Well, why didn't you come to me last night? I was here—got in on the 5.10. And why haven't any enterprising journalists been around to look me up? Every one knows Ronny and I are related, and—yes, there it is, head of another column. 'Beautiful young woman is a cousin of the well-known millionaire clubman, Hildreth Wyndham.' Whenever I am dragged into print it's always in the millionaire class. Those boys are so generous. But why haven't any of 'em been around?"

"Hang your egotism! You'll find a dozen reporters drifting about the corridors. That man of yours wouldn't wake you for them."

"Good old Bill—but this time I wish he had. What have the police done?"

"Talked—talked—talked! And hinted things, and asked things, and made insulting insinuations. The only wonder is I didn't turn loose and murder a few of them!"

"Detectives are supposed to ask questions—just like children. I'm going to see Mrs. Sandry."

I had reached the conclusion that nothing useful could be extracted from Tolliver until he had calmed down a bit. In vulgar parlance, he was "rattled," and badly.

"They won't let you see Mrs. Sandry," he asserted with bitter gloom.

"Who won't? Don't tell me they've arrested Mrs.—"

"Of course not. She is in bed with a nurse in attendance. When I went there this morning I met the doctor coming out, and he said her blood-pressure was two hundred and her pulse—some outrageous speed, and if she isn't kept perfectly quiet there is danger of cerebral hemorrhage."

"Poor old lady! Ronny was as dear to her as a daughter."

"Don't use the past tense that way! She isn't—she isn't—"

"No, certainly she isn't. Come along, old man. We'll begin with Carpenter, then."

"You may, if you like. If I go near him just now, there'll be bloodshed."

"I see. Don't suppose you slept much last night? Not at all? I thought so. Your car outside? Lend it to me; I'll drop you at Hanready's, and be around again after you in a couple of hours. Then you'll be fit to help make use of any news I run across meantime."

Naturally my plan, being a sensible one, didn't appeal to Tolliver's mood of frenzy. At last I told him frankly that if he wouldn't fall in with it, I should have nothing more to do with him—at least, until I found Veronica. Then he yielded to reason.

It was not that he had any deep respect for my sleuthing ability. That was an unknown quantity, since never before had I suffered the loss of anything more dear to me than a sleeve-link. No, it was the fact that I was Ronny's nearest living relative. We three had chummed around together a lot ever since he made her acquaintance, which was, by the way, through my friendly and cousinly offices.

So he saw reason at last, and we went down to the street, besieged all the way by the cohorts of Misinformation Row. Their pleas for attention were pathetic. Knowing, however, their imaginative powers, I wasted no time nor sympathy on them. Even if I had had anything to tell, they could have invented something much more exciting.

We reached Tolliver's big touring-car at last, and five minutes later pulled up in front of Hanready's. Rex went in to the Turkish baths with the air of a man walking into the mausoleum of all his dearest dead, but I hoped for the emergence of a saner man when I should return that way.

I hadn't stopped for breakfast, and didn't intend to. "Carpenter first," I decided, springing into the driver's seat, for Tolliver had been driving his own car. "After that—we'll see."

CHAPTER II.

TWIN COUSINS.

MY frenzied friend spoke not beside the mark when he said that Veronica occupied a sisterly place in my affections. She and I had played and quarreled and gone about together ever since

our romper days. For anything to happen to Ronny hit me just about the same as if we had been twins, instead of first cousins.

Our fathers were two English brothers, who came to America in their hopeful youth. They drifted part way West, married and settled down in Marshall City at the mining-camp stage of its career, when it looked as much like the future State capital as a two-mustang-power buckboard looks like a De Luxe-Rollinson Eight. They came in with the "first families," and grew up with the city.

My mother died at my birth, and my aunt mothered Ronny and me without partiality, until she, too, was taken. We were both the only children of our parents, and by the time of which I write, both orphans, though with one more or less important difference.

Dad left me enough of the indispensable to keep me indefinitely from the sorrows of toil. Ronny's father, however, died a bankrupt, a deed of which no one had suspected him capable. My cousin was left with nothing but a heritage of brains, from which not even the bankruptcy courts could separate the poor girl.

Naturally, I went straight to her and offered to divvy up, but all she would take was a loan. On that capital she started to make her own way in the world. Fortunately she had learned stenography and played private secretary to her father for a year before he died. Carpenter & Charles, real estate, took her on at a salary of ten per. One year later she was dragging down thirty, and old Carpenter wondered how he had ever run the business without her.

Charles wasn't around the office much then. He had just been elected Governor on the People's ticket, and before that his duties as State Senator made it necessary for him to leave the business in his partner's hands, to a great extent.

A while after he had taken his oath of office, Charles blew into the real-estate emporium with the melancholic complaint that there was no such thing in the world as a personal secretary who could do one hour's real work in less than three hours' time. He played on his poor old partner's sympathies so that Carpenter offered to "lend" him Miss Wyndham until some one else showed up. Charles had already "hired and fired" six ambitious young men.

Ronny appeared five years less than her reverend twenty-two, and of the ornamental rather than the useful type. Mr. Governor looked his doubts, and of course that settled it for Ronny. She's a thoroughbred. Just tell her, "This is past your abilities," and she'll fly the hurdle or break her neck attempting it.

So a young and fair Wyndham was installed in the executive mansion at the desk six times vacated, and I fancy Charles's doubts were dissipated before the end of three days' tenure. After a while Carpenter wanted her back, but Charles put him off. For nearly a year her successor failed to materialize, and at the end of that time she quit of her own accord.

I was glad of it, for all that year she owned few idle hours to waste on little Hildreth, and I missed her confoundedly. I took it for granted that she left to save herself from nervous breakdown. Clinton Charles was a notorious slave-driver, and that he drove himself harder than any one else must have been small consolation to those around him. So back she went to the real-estate office.

Carpenter was delighted, I was delighted, Ronny herself seemed pleased. Every one was happy, except, probably, the Governor, who had again to take up the elusive trail of an efficient secretary.

During that year I had joined the "Idle Sportsmen." It was the "Idle" which attracted me, I suppose, but the name was a fraudulent misnomer. I was the only member of that club who didn't rise at least an hour before eight o'clock, breakfast, and perform a lot of acrobatic stunts with dumb-bells and exercisers and things. And they all shot, and rode, and boxed, and fenced, and set up physical prowess as their little platinum idol.

Of course they soon found me out. In fact I was such a *rara avis* in their set that they took to me as a novelty. I remained a member and made quite a number of

friends among the strenuous ones. However, the only man with whom I became really intimate was Rex Tolliver, and that was after I presented him to Veronica.

Since she was back with Carpenter, who closes his office at four, gaieties were resumed among the Wyndhams. That is, she accepted my escort to dance, opera, or play; blew around the country in my car, and generally conspired with me to make sad the hearts of a number of young chaps not lucky enough to be her near-brothers—and wouldn't have been if they could.

Veronica did not remain a poor working-girl for lack of matrimonial chances.

Then Rex met her, and that was his immediate Waterloo. The Idle Sportsmen saw him no more, except on such occasions as he could not bestow his company upon my cousin. This did not surprise me, but Veronica's own behavior did. I had seen her pass out charming indifference to so many of my sex that I had begun to think her matrimony-proof.

From the first she seemed to take quite a kindly interest in Tolliver. He was a hale, good-looking young fellow, who took out his surplus energy in athletics, and had so clean a record all around that my brother-cousinly watchfulness could find no fault in him. I had always supposed that if Veronica should marry, she would pick out some human dynamo like Charles, with lofty brows and a fatal inability to loaf. However, opposites, etc., and it wasn't six months after meeting that their engagement was announced.

In Marshall City a girl does not necessarily lose her social position just because she has to work for her living. We are not New York. About fifteen hundred miles far from it. Marshall City society took just as much interest in Ronny's engagement as if her father had never lost his grip, and old Tolliver was delighted. Said he had heard of Miss Wyndham's abilities from Carpenter, and a girl who could handle Clinton Charles's work, not to mention Carpenter's, ought to be an ideal housekeeper.

I don't follow his analogy, but he said it.

My cousin gave notice at the office. Carpenter was heart-broken, but resigned. The minister was chosen. The trousseau was preparing. I was to give away the bride, and Rex Tolliver was the most fatuously happy young dub in Marshall City. That was the prospect of last Saturday, when I had left town for a few days' fishing up-river.

Exactly what were the prospects of this Thursday had yet to be discovered, but as I sailed up Chisholm Street in Rex's car I felt like a very determined little discoverer. Lazy I may be, but there are circumstances which can prod me into desperate displays of unsuspected energy. I was going to find Ronny, if I had to search every home in Marshall City from cellar to garret, and I knew that Rex Tolliver was fully as determined.

CHAPTER III.

DESPAIR AND SUSPICIONS.

As a giver of clues, Carpenter proved a barren failure. I had always thought him a kindly old boy, who regarded my cousin with almost paternal pride and affection. Now I discovered that his pride was that of a man who owns a unique and efficient machine, and rejoices in the envy of his fellows.

He welcomed me with bitter complaints about the "scandal," and how embarrassing it would be for Governor Charles to have such a scandal come up in connection with an employee of his business firm, who had also been his secretary *pro tempore*, and how this scandal would never have got in the papers save for Tolliver's impetuosity.

At the third repetition of the word "scandal" my well-known good humor forsook me. I reminded Mr. Carpenter that Miss Wyndham was my cousin, that she was just about the finest and straightest girl who ever wasted her abilities on the work of a money-grubbing, land-grabbing, soulless bundle of moral cowardice who walked on two legs like a man, and that he had best be extremely careful what he said about the matter. Otherwise the firm of Carpenter & Charles might find itself

facing notoriety of another sort in the shape of a libel suit.

Somewhat breathless and distinctly warm under the collar, I emerged from the Real Estate Trust Building and turned next to police headquarters.

There they were civil enough. When the police have no news and the family come around inquiring, they are always civil. Of course they don't need to go so long on politeness if they have something practical to show for their efforts. I know this now, but then I was at first quite pleased.

The chief was all consideration and assurances that everything possible was being done. They were already, he said, in possession of several promising clues. The nature of these clues he would not divulge, however, lest some one be " put wise " who at present regarded himself as entirely unsuspected.

I did not quite like this talk of a mysterious " some one " in the masculine gender. It hinted at suspicions and innuendos of which I wished, above all things, to keep the case clean and free. I suggested to the chief, somewhat dolefully, that Veronica might have gone down again to the street after Tolliver left her, perhaps in order to post a letter. Then she might have been murdered for her rings and purse and her body weighted and dropped in the Hawkeye River.

Or (and this I considered a rather brilliant inspiration) she might have been kidnaped in connection with some political matter. Governor Charles was at that time engaged in a bitter fight, in which he and the " Reform " party were lined up against the railroads, backed by a coalition of Senators who disgraced the State. Politics are a bore, but no man who read the papers could avoid knowing that much. Might not his former secretary have possessed information which, if it could be extracted from her by terrorization, would be a weapon in the hands of Charles's opponents?

The chief eyed me pityingly. Then he replied that either hypothesis was of course possible, but that they were about equally improbable.

The Aldine Apartments faced on Farragut Place. The street was boulevarded and lined with trees, like almost every residence street in the city. But it was well lighted, and there was a policeman on that beat who swore that no deed of violence could have taken place there between the hours of twelve (when Tolliver left her) and eight, when the patrolman was relieved.

As for political intrigue—well, the chief laughed outright. Acts of violence attributed to low-grade politicians and the " Ring " were mostly worked up by the boys of newspaper row. There was nothing to it. Besides, it was six months since Miss Wyndham had left the Governor. Anyway, was it likely that he would put very important State secrets in the hands of a young lady of twenty-two or three?

Knowing Ronny, I thought just that was possible. And ignorant though I was, no one could hang halos over the heads of our railroad magnates and expect me to believe those halos more refined than pure brass.

However, I saw that to persuade the chief of this would take more time than I had years to live, and would hardly be worth while at that. So I bade him farewell and went straight to the Aldine Apartments.

Tim, the elevator-boy, knew me—naturally. He had seen me there often enough. He reminded me that, since the Aldine did not boast two shifts of employees on its elevator, and since he, Tim, went off duty at 10 P.M., you after that hour walked up —or down, as the case might be.

I had known this, but it had slipped my mind. I might have realized that so important a witness as the elevator-boy—supposing him to have been present—would not have been overlooked by the police.

Common humanity forbade my trying to see Mrs. Sandry. I retired from the Aldine and started the car, just in time to evade attention from an alert-looking young man whom I recognized as Brownley, of the *Evening Bulletin*.

Discovering that my two hours had expired, and not wishing to keep poor Tolliver in suspense, I ran straight back to the baths.

As I swung into Chisholm Street, from its termination a few squares distant the Capitol stared me in the face. It is not such a big building, but beyond doubt it is beautiful. The charm of its gleaming white pillars and the exquisite curves of its dome held little appeal to my anxious sensibilities just then, but the sight of it reminded me of Charles.

Would it be worth while, I wondered, to try for an interview with the Governor? Could he know of anything which might account for his former secretary's murder or abduction?

While not enjoying his personal acquaintance, I had of course more than once seen him, and even attended a couple of banquets where he was a guest. Clinton Charles had not impressed me as a person who would like to be bothered by anxious young men seeking their kidnaped cousins. He had the broad brows and the deep-set eyes of a dreamer, but the squarish chin and firm mouth of a man of determinative action. He fairly irradiated personality, but it was of an energetic sort. I felt that unless a man had business with him very pertinent to the Governor's own activities, he might better keep off and let Charles alone.

Besides, now I came to think of it, the Governor must read the papers. If he knew anything that would be helpful in tracing Veronica, he would surely come forward with it. That would be common decency, and by reputation Clinton Charles was personally a model of all the virtues. Even his muck-raking opponents had never succeeded in "getting anything" on the Governor. No man of that kind would allow his one-time assistant to languish in captivity, when a word of his might free her: or, if she had been murdered, bring vengeance on the criminals.

Not a bit of use bothering Charles, I decided, and just then arriving at my goal, I saw Tolliver coming down the steps to meet me. He did look more himself, but when he heard the negative result of my efforts his face fell. He climbed heavily into the seat beside me.

"I went over all *those* places," he growled scornfully. "When you left me I thought you had something different up your sleeve."

"What could I have?"

"Well, you really know her better than any one else does. Hasn't there been anything in the past which could account for this?"

"Meaning anything, or any one?" I asked in a very quiet, even voice.

"I mean either." Tolliver looked straight ahead of him with a sullen set to his jaw that I did not like. As he said, I knew Veronica; but I had made Tolliver's acquaintance less than a year ago. There might be qualities in his disposition of which I was ignorant. For instance, unreasoning jealousy.

"You had better tell me just what you mean, Tolliver, if you wish an intelligent answer."

"You know what I mean."

"Perhaps—I—do." And with that I stopped the car and jumped out.

"What is it? Where are you going?" Rex forgot his sullenness in dismay.

"Going it alone," I retorted quietly. "I believe I'd rather, since your affection for my cousin is of that quality."

"Why, Hil, old man, what did I say to start you off like that? Ronny is everything in the world to me—you know that. For God's sake, don't misunderstand me. Get back in the car here."

I did, for his protests were so excited that people were beginning to stare at us.

We went on, and Rex proceeded to explain in detail. He had meant only that Veronica might in the past have known some one who was sufficiently crazy about her to abduct or even do away with her, driven to it by her impending marriage.

"That's very unlikely," I pointed out. "If you are going to set the police on the trail of every man who has wished he stood in your shoes, you'll have half the male portion of our set in jail. Don't you realize that such a thing mustn't even be hinted at? Do you want *that* sort of surmise circulated through the papers—about your future wife?"

He turned rather pale.

"No!" he gasped, and I knew that I had shut him up effectually on this score.

After all, Tolliver was reduced to the point of desperation, and having reached that stage a man can't be held responsible for his thoughts. A lover out of the past would be just the torture conjured up by such despair. I forgave Rex, and set my mind at the task of thinking up new coverts wherein might lurk some news of my missing cousin.

CHAPTER IV.

ANOTHER FORMER SECRETARY.

WELL, we skated around all day in Rex's car, both spreading and imbibing gloom among various friends and acquaintances. All of them were considerably excited over the news.

One girl—Janet Williams, it was, daughter of Harrison Williams, who owns every taxicab in Marshall City—had given a sewing-bee for charity on Tuesday night. She had expected Ronny to be present, and when she did not appear Janet "just knew that something awful had happened to her." Wonderful thing, these after-the-event premonitions.

But at least Janet had done something practical toward finding her friend. She had instructed her obedient father to interview every one of his taxi-drivers and question them. If that brought forth no information, each of them was to keep his ears wide open to pick up any scrap of conversation which might be let fall by his passengers in transit. The idea was that the criminals might be run to earth among the giddy patronizers of such vehicles.

I foresaw an alarming series of taxi collisions. A man can hardly drive circumspectly and at the same time keep one ear firmly glued to the little window behind him. Also that if I had to ride in a taxi I was going to be careful what I said.

Her father had consented to offer fifty dollars reward to the man who brought him any valuable information. Tolliver and I looked at each other in disgust. The disgust was for ourselves, not Williams. The obvious wisdom of offering a reward had neither occurred nor been suggested to us.

With a hurried commendation for Janet's enterprise, we hastened to put that matter right at once.

In the last edition of the evening papers any crooks interested might read that "the family" of Miss Veronica Wyndham would be glad to pay one thousand dollars for information which should lead to the discovery of her whereabouts. I, the family in question, wanted to multiply that niggardly sum by at least twenty-five, and Rex was with me to the limit of what he could extract from father.

But just after we left Janet's we met up with one Harvey Jenkins, who discouraged our munificent intentions. Jenkins was chief advertising man for Farlingham, Inc., the mail-order people, and an old friend of dad's.

"You boys have the right idea, but the wrong method," he said when we had told him our plan. "There's a psychology of rewards just as there is of selling stoves and furniture. If a man thinks he can earn, say, five hundred dollars by sleuthing around a bit and investigating his own neighborhood, he'll do it if he has to suspect lifelong friends. But twenty-five thousand, or even ten, will paralyze his imagination. It's like offering to sell him a dining-room suite for fifty cents. He can't see it—thinks there's a trick somewhere. You offer five hundred, and you'll have 'em all working for you."

"But," I protested, "we weren't thinking of amateur sleuths. We were driving at the criminals themselves."

"In the first place, these criminals of yours are supposititious. In the second, if any one is holding her to ransom, then they'll certainly let you hear from them. And if you offer anything enormous to start with, you'll never get off with any twenty-five thousand. Take a tip and start with five hundred."

We couldn't quite agree on that, but compromised on the thousand aforesaid.

Then there wasn't anything to do. The only private detective agency in Marshall City is a joke, and not even a practical one. They couldn't find a lost dog if the unfortunate canine came and howled out-

side the agency door. We didn't bother with them, and so, after offering the reward, as I say, there seemed nothing more we could do. It was horrible, intolerable, maddening, but for the life of us neither Rex nor I could think of a next step.

We had seen all her friends. They knew nothing. An impertinent, prying plain-clothes man had gone through poor Ronny's private correspondence. It was innocent of clues as so much blank note-paper. Mrs. Sandry was still in a critical condition, but she knew nothing. If she had, she could never have concealed it from Carpenter. The dear old lady was no secret-keeper.

Two interminable days dragged past. By Saturday, however, we could have kept busy enough if we had followed up every one of the "clues" which were turned in to me and to the police by those ambitious to acquire that thousand.

Jenkins was right. We began to think that every man, woman, and child in Marshall City was working for us, and also that we dwelt in a city of imbecile optimists.

Some of those clues—but the people were no worse than the police, and I can prove it. Sunday morning Rex came around in the early morn, as had become his habit, and informed me with deep disgust that he was being "shadowed." On looking out the window at said "shadow," I agreed that he was an unmistakable plain-clothes man.

I agreed with Tolliver that this was too much, even though he was the last person to see Veronica. He and I went straight to the chief, and Rex produced so many alibis to account for his every movement after leaving her, and for the next two days, that the shadow was withdrawn—without apologies, for, said the chief:

"You yourself admit that you quarreled at parting. Sorry, but you know we have to suspect every one. Our business. It's the respectable ones who do the craziest things—sometimes."

"Cheer up, Rex," I consoled him later. "At least, he said you were respectable—by inference."

"How the deuce can you make a joke of it?" complained Tolliver. "It seems to me, Wyndham, that you take the whole business very light-heartedly."

That was unkind and not true, but one must make allowances for a man in Rex's place. I let it go at that. Anyway, I could appreciate his feelings.

That was Sunday, and already excitement had calmed down too much to suit me. If Tolliver thought me light-hearted, I accused the world of positive jubilance. Who, except Rex and I, and—yes, probably Mrs. Sandry—really cared about Ronny? To whom else was she indispensable, or who felt that her loss was so intolerable that life might as well stop short because of it? Answer: Nobody. Popularity is all very well, but—

With such melancholy meditations did I while away two hours of Sunday afternoon in my own rooms. Rex was off investigating one of the innumerable clues which our offer had brought forth. The police sorted out a few, and cast the rest aside with professional scorn. This was one of the outcasts. Rex was looking it up more to keep busy than for any other reason, while I stayed at home to receive that longed-for phone call from the chief.

At last it occurred to me that some part of my hopeless depression might be traced to another cause than the indifference of a cruel world to my sorrow. I rang for Billings.

"Bill," said I, "you are letting me starve to death. Is that right?"

"You never eat luncheon here, sir."

"And so, quite naturally, you supposed that I never eat it anywhere. Next time—if there ever is a next time—that I remain with you for any considerable period, you may serve luncheon exactly four hours after breakfast—whenever that may be."

"Yes, sir. I'll have it ready in—"

"No, you won't. I am deeply hurt, and I'm going to the Blue Thimble round the corner. If any one phones while I am out, you may call me there."

Billings looked not the least impressed by my displeasure.

"I'll attend to the phone, sir," he promised. "It certainly is dull waiting around this way. Wish there was anything I could

think of to help you find the poor young lady."

"So do I. If Mr. Tolliver comes in, send him around to the Thimble."

The Blue Thimble is a little cafe where the food is as good as the name is ridiculous. The name suggests sewing circles and tea parties, but as a matter of fact it is a strictly bachelor resort, with a grill and a chef who graduated from the best hotel in paradise, and descended upon earth to bless it.

I found my favorite table vacant, and seating myself, considered the menu. The little cafe was almost empty, as I knew it would be at that hour of Sunday afternoon, and I was glad to see that none of my acquaintances were present. I was tired of shallow sympathy and unmeaning condolences. "It's a shame, old fellow. You thought a lot of her, didn't you? Have you heard that Jim is entering Peterkin III at the bench show? Some bull-pup, Peterkin."

Of course they weren't all that bad, but the spirit was there. They had passed through their brief spasm of emotion over Ronny's disappearance, and now they wanted to be done with it and get on to something interesting and really vital.

So, when I saw Fred Dalton entering, saw him observe me with a happy smile, and then bear down upon my table, I felt less pleased than I should. Of course by the time he reached me said happy smile had been modified to a doleful grin. Good of him to consider my feelings.

"Any news?" he asked, as he seated himself and accepted a menu from the waiter.

"Yes, they say the Governor will veto the Gratz bill."

He looked at me with pained surprise.

"I meant about your cousin—Miss Wyndham."

"Oh! No, we haven't heard anything."

He gave his order, then turned again to me.

"Too bad. But nothing ever hits you very hard, eh, Wyndham? Wish I had your happy disposition."

At least I had headed off the "You thought a lot of her, didn't you, etc."

"Nothing ever hits me at all," I retorted. "I thought you'd be more interested in the Governor himself—having worked with him."

Dalton flushed slightly. He was one of Ronny's six predecessors at the secretarial desk.

"I lasted a month," he said defensively. "I wouldn't have kept on if he had wanted me to. Say, that man ought to have forty personal secretaries, instead of one. Your cousin must have been a wonder to stick it out so long. I hear he almost wept when she left him."

"Yes—the same as Carpenter. Hated to lose a first-class machine. Fine firm, Carpenter & Charles."

"What's the matter with you to-day? It's not like you to carry a grouch. As for Charles, you can't blame him for regretting one person who could keep up with his infernal energy."

Dalton laughed suddenly.

"Tell you what, Wyndham, if any one has kidnaped your cousin, I'll bet it's the Governor. He's probably got her hid away somewhere in durance vile, making her attend to his correspondence."

That was too much for me. I gave him leave to be indifferent, but not to make a joke of it. I beckoned the waiter and asked for my check.

"You haven't finished," protested Dalton reproachfully. "Why, Wyndham, am I driving you away?"

"Certainly not." Dalton's nothing but a good-natured, harmless kid. His reddening face made me feel like a brute. I told him that I was half-sick when I came in and worse now, asked him to dine with me next week at the Sportsmen's, and returned to Billings and the happy occupation of awaiting a message that never came.

Rex didn't show up at all. About ten o'clock he phoned me that he had followed his clue clean out in the country, and run it to earth in the Park View Asylum. The "abducted" lady turned out to be a person of large avordupois and few facial charms, who had gone mad over the death of a cherished pug-dog, her companion of fifteen years' standing.

While touched by this sad episode, I

agreed with Rex that the police were right. The clue had been hardly worth following.

CHAPTER V.

A CALL ON THE GOVERNOR.

THAT night I dreamed outrageously, perhaps because I had eaten so little. I hunted for Ronny through enormous houses, whose corridors had no ending, and whose doors possessed a nasty habit of swinging open to disclose heaps of wormy skulls. I ran miles after a huge black motor-hearse, which I knew contained her corpse; but when I caught up with it there was nothing inside but a crazy pug-dog, with a ticket on its collar: "Consigned to Governor Charles—a first-class working machine."

At last, after other equally charming adventures, I did find Ronny. She was concealed in a secret chamber under the dome of the Capitol and was hammering furiously on a typewriter. Documents and unanswered correspondence were stacked about her to tottering heights, and beside her stood Governor Charles, brandishing what looked like a Herculean club.

I, however, knew it to be the Power of Veto.

Veronica's cheeks were hollow, and her eyes, as she turned to look at me, enormous. She said: "Hildreth, come soon, as I can never finish all these letters."

Just as I was about to spring upon the Governor and wrest away his Power of Veto, without which I knew him to be helpless, the energy summoned up for the attack awakened me. Ronny's words were still in my ears, as if she had been in the room and spoken them. "Hildreth, come soon, or I can never finish all these letters." The sentence repeated itself over and over in my brain with maddening persistency.

At last, in desperation, I got up, took a hot shower, and dressed. Then, lying down with my clothes on, I slept until nearly eight. In my boyhood, when I suffered much from insomnia, I had learned that trick and it almost invariably worked.

No sooner was I awake, however, than that absurd dream recurred to me.

"The 'Hildreth, come soon' part is all right," I observed to Billings, as he served my coffee and omelet, "but the rest is mere nonsense."

"Yes, sir. Mr. Tolliver called up a while ago—"

"What?" I nearly upset the coffee. "Why didn't you wake me? Confound you, Billings—"

"He said not to disturb you, sir. Only to say that he would be at home until noon, and after that you could reach him at the Sportsmen's."

So, even Rex had deserted me. That was the self-pity of nervousness, of course. Aside from our mutual loss, Tolliver and I had little in common. Ronny was the connecting link between us, and if he fancied other society than mine for a change, it was not astonishing. But that morning I was in a mood to find fault with the whole of creation.

My mind has one peculiar faculty—weakness rather. It will occasionally seize upon some trivial idea or notion and proceed to go over it and over it, to the point of madness. Poe wrote about a fellow with a brain like that. Only he was worse than I. He ended, as I recall it, by fastening his attention on his sweetheart's teeth, and when she died he went out and dug her up and pulled 'em all out. Something like that. Cheerful, pleasant fireside companion, Mr. E. A. Poe. I was never *that* bad, but when I read the story I knew what Poe meant.

In this case it was Freddy Dalton who had started it. His fool joke about the Governor's kidnaping Veronica to make her go on with his work had camped right down in the back of my mind, and there it intended to remain. Hence the dream. What Dalton said, and what I dreamed Veronica said, was repeated to the point of nausea. That there was no possible sense in it made no difference. I couldn't get away from it, and I knew I couldn't.

There was only one cure. I had found that out in previous cases. To be rid of the idea I must translate it into action. Just as the poor dub in the story had to go and pull out those ghastly teeth, so I would have to go to Clinton Charles and ask him

—but no, there reason rebelled. I could *not* ask him if he had my cousin shut up somewhere writing his letters.

Still, I could go to him and—oh, inquire if there were any way in which the search could be officially encouraged by him, as Governor. At the worst, he would only think my brain turned by grief. I was going.

Calling up the executive mansion, I found that Charles was in, but would be leaving in twenty minutes for—I didn't wait to find out where. I hung up in a hurry, and a few minutes later was beating it out Central Avenue in my roadster. Since little Hildreth had to make a fool of himself, let him get it over with as quickly as possible.

By good luck—or bad—I drew up at the curb just in time to see Charles coming down the steps. He had two men with him, important-looking dubs, but my impatience did not propose to be thwarted. Just as well to be snubbed here as anywhere else, I thought. Jumping out, I waited on the sidewalk in front of his own limousine.

As the three came abreast of me I stepped forward, lifting my nice, pretty Panama.

"I beg your pardon, Governor Charles—"

He never even looked at me.

"I'm not giving interviews this morning," he threw me, and went on talking to the man on his right.

"I'm not a reporter," I protested, realizing his mistake. "I want just a moment of your time on a matter of private business."

At that all three turned and glared at me. That is, Charles's companions glared. The Governor never found that necessary. There was something of the magnificent about Charles — something big and overwhelming. As if one should meet one of those giants of old romance, "over twenty cubits high." I don't know how high that is, but I presume it is a great deal more than the five feet nine of Charles's actual stature. No, this largeness was not physical; but every time I had seen him I received the same impression. That he was so much bigger than I that my own insignificance had no right to trouble him. And yet, with other men, I'm not famed for self-effacement.

"I have no time just at present, Mr.—"

"Wyndham," I finished for him, and got out a card.

"Oh, Wyndham, is it?"

His eyes left my face, and he stood a moment looking down at the card, and tapping it against the fingers of his left hand. One of his companions—a fat, fussy, side-whiskered individual, whom I now recognized as Senator Comstock, a leading member of Charles's own party—stirred impatiently.

"Can't we go on, Governor? Fairchild will—"

To my complete amazement Charles raised his head and cut the Senator's speech short with: "It is not necessary for me to be present, Senator. You are fully acquainted with my views and, I am certain, can convey them with greater eloquence than myself. I find that I shall be detained for a short time, but I may join you somewhat later."

"But—"

"I ask it as a favor, Comstock. I know that you are more than competent to handle this for me."

Charles possessed a voice as remarkable as his personality. It had a vibrant and at the same time velvety quality. He could, when he chose, give it an almost caressing note that was in some queer way personally flattering to the man or men whom he addressed. Flattery is hardly the word, either. It was something nobler than that. But every one who has heard Charles speak from the platform will know what I mean.

The Senator swelled visibly.

"All right, Governor. I'll do my best—but Fairchild will be disappointed."

"Oh, I think not." Then to the other man: "Good day, Mr. Berger. It was kind of you to come to me so frankly."

"Not at all, sir—not at all." Mr. Berger beamed upon the Governor as if he had never hurled verbal tin cans and bad eggs at him from the political stump.

I knew Berger, too. He'd been caricatured often enough. "Rotten politics" stuck out all over him like bristles from a porcupine, and he was the acknowledged

tool of our dear old "railroad ring." I was rather surprised to see him here—that is, I should have been if I had retained any astonishment in stock. Could it be possible that Governor Charles was dismissing these men in order to attend to me?

It was not only possible, but true. As the limousine rolled off, bearing the virtuous Senator and his blackguardly companion, Charles turned to me.

"And now, Mr. Wyndham, if you will come into the house I shall be glad to hear whatever you have to say."

"Thank you. You're very kind."

He led the way, walking a few steps in advance, and I followed meekly behind. Ha! I had it! He had mistaken me for some one else. Some other Wyndham, some important, expected Wyndham, should have been going up that walk at the gubernatorial back. Once inside—my real identity established—well, fireworks were due.

I set my teeth. Before I was thrown out I would ask him one question, if I had to barricade myself behind chairs and tables.

He took me straight to his private study, a large, somber, book-lined room on the first floor. There, having closed the door, he laid his hat, stick, and gloves on a table littered with papers, and faced me, still standing.

"Now, Mr. Wyndham?"

Often when most embarrassed or excited I am outwardly most calm.

"I won't detain you but a few moments," I began in the coolest and most leisurely manner. "I came to see you about my cousin, Miss Veronica Wyndham."

"Yes?"

The word came curt as a knife-stab. Nothing caressing about that. But at least he was not astonished, and therefore could not be receiving me under any false impression.

"Yes," I continued, still very leisurely of speech, and increasingly embarrassed under the surface. "You know, for a while she was your private secretary."

What an asinine thing to say! Of course he knew it. But instead of snapping me up as I expected, Charles half-turned away and indicated a chair by the window.

"Won't you sit down, sir?"

He seated himself in a chair facing me, and pushed a small humidor across the table.

"Smoke?" he asked briefly.

In a sort of daze I took a cigar, he helped himself also, and not another word was said until the two Havanas were cut and lighted. Then he answered me, as if there had been no interruption:

"Yes, as you say, Miss Wyndham was for a time my secretary."

He had a queer way of speaking, I thought. Quite rapid, and yet every word distinct and some way—tense. I had never before noticed it was a mannerism of his.

"She has disappeared," I observed.

"I know it."

"She is—very dear to me."

That was inane—sentimental—oh, for Heaven's sake, why couldn't I ask my question and get away? Those deep-blue, visionary eyes of Charles were fixed on my face. Beneath them the contradictory mouth and chin seemed to grow even firmer and more stern.

"Yes?" Again that cutting monosyllable.

"We are trying to find her," I continued, "and I thought you might be able to help us."

"And why, Mr. Wyndham, should you think that I can help you?"

He leaned across and shook the ash from his cigar into a tray on the table.

Suddenly I gave up. I was making a fool of myself with a vengeance. I rose from my chair so abruptly that Charles started.

"Governor," I said, reaching for my hat, and my absurd embarrassment leaving me in the act of defeat, "I had no right to come here and take up your time. Since my cousin went, I have naturally been under a heavy strain, and everything else having failed, I recalled her connection with you. I thought you might be willing to use your influence toward pushing the inquiry. It was most kind of you to grant me an interview, and I fear you put aside important matters to do it."

"That was nothing—a meeting from which I could easily be spared."

Charles rose, too, and I thought he

looked much less stern. Probably my apology had softened him. Then he actually smiled.

"Miss Wyndham was a very unusual young woman. I can hardly blame you for being grieved over her disappearance. I read of it in the papers at the time. I fear there is little I can do to help, but if an opportunity does arise, be sure I shall take it. Nothing else you wished to ask?"

"Why, one question, if you don't mind."

"Certainly not. What is it?"

"Do you know where she is?"

Yes, I asked it. The question slipped out of ambuscade and off my tongue before I could check it. What I meant to say was, did he know of anything in connection with her work of that year which could have any bearing on the case. But my subconsciousness tricked me, and loosed the most amazingly insolent query I could have possibly devised.

Charles started again, and like a flash all the geniality left his face. He looked cold as an iceberg, and unapproachable as the Grand Lama of Tibet.

"Mr.—Wyndham!"

I was quenched—obliterated. And my deadly calmness of embarrassment returned.

"It's a question I ask every one," I drawled. "Sort of habit I've acquired during the last week. Good day, Governor—and thanks, ever so much."

"Good day, sir."

I left the room with a dignity which I knew to be awesomely ridiculous—and left him standing there, staring after me. Somebody—or something, I was too flooded with chagrin to know which—showed me to the door. That was the end of my call on Governor Clinton Charles.

All the way down the walk, as I got into my car, started it, and drove on out Central Avenue, I was conscious of nothing but a rising tide of white-hot rage—a most unfamiliar sensation.

Why—why—why? Why should I allow myself to be so overwhelmed by the mere presence of a man that I could not speak to him intelligently? Why did I care in the least what he thought of me, one way or the other? But why, above all other whys, did I ask that last impertinent, altogether outrageous question?

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. SANDRY READS A LETTER.

REX never came near me that morning, nor did I seek him. I had nothing to tell him, except a humiliating episode which I wouldn't tell to anybody.

The more I thought of it, the less I thought of myself. Clinton Charles, recognizing my name, doubtless, as being the same as his former secretary's, had put off attendance at a meeting in order to grant me an interview. Of course he remembered Ronny, and of course he remembered her kindly. No one could do less.

Then, instead of taking advantage of his courtesy and putting my case to him frankly, I had stumbled and dawdled along, said nothing that I wanted to say, and generally given him an impression of total imbecility. And crowned the effect with an impertinent insult.

What if Charles *were* an important man, of an unusual and dynamic personality? Ronny was just as wonderful, in a different way. Just as important, too, and a darned sight more so, where I was concerned. I had behaved like an awkward schoolboy. Worse, I had lost a possible chance to enlist in the search a man with some real brains and intelligence.

I avoided my friends all morning, but finding my own society intolerable, decided at last to go around to the Aldine and call on Mrs. Sandry. Every day I had sent her flowers, and made telephone inquiries, and I knew that she was sufficiently recovered to see me.

The nurse met me with a professional smile and the information that Mrs. Sandry was out of danger, though still weak. I found her sitting up in bed, a lace boudoir-cap on her snow-white hair, and my last flowers on a table beside her. She welcomed me with tears, and I was so glad to talk with some one (besides Tolliver, of course) who was really afflicted by the same loss as myself, that I found myself enjoying the call.

We talked, and agreed, and discussed possibilities (I had to be hopeful there, for Mrs. Sandry's sake), and eulogized our lost one, quite in the manner of the family when they meet after the funeral. Of course, Mrs. Sandry was not related to Veronica, but if they had been mother and daughter the old lady could have felt no worse over her disappearance.

Finally she pointed at a little desk.

"There's a bundle of letters in there, Hildreth. Letters that she wrote me while I was in the sanatorium last winter. They are so dear. There is one where she speaks of you, Hildreth, and I want to read it to you. Will you bring them over here?"

I was by that time in a condition of maudlin sentimentality where I knew I should weep outright if Ronny had said anything very touching about me—though how she could have done that was a matter for curiosity. However, I went to the desk, selected the bundle referred to, and as I pulled it out of the pigeonhole by the ribbon it was tied with, the ribbon gave way. It had been tightly bound, and its sudden release caused a sort of explosion of letters. Ronny's missives flew right and left, some on the floor, and a couple in Mrs. Sandry's ivory-finish scrap-basket.

I gathered up those on the floor, and reached in the basket after the other two. My hand came up with not only the enveloped letters, but a torn half-sheet of note-paper. There were only a few lines written upon it, and they were in my cousin's upright, firm hand, always clear and legible—so legible, in fact, that my eyes took in the meaning almost without volition.

It was a letter which she had begun, sitting at Mrs. Sandry's desk instead of her own. But instead of finishing it, she had torn the sheet across and cast it aside, doubtless dissatisfied with her opening lines. The detective who, while Mrs. Sandry was too ill to protest, had explored my cousin's private correspondence, had stopped short of raiding Mrs. Sandry's own desk. The nurse probably played dragon at the door. The torn sheet had not been emptied from the basket, because there was practically nothing else in it.

For some obscure reason, as I looked at my cousin's writing, my mind seemed to come to a dead halt — to stop thinking. I knew that those few words were laden with a meaning which was not innocuous; some dreadful import which loomed up like a huge black wave, poised, frozen, held motionless by the momentary numbness of my brain. There was in me a gripping sense of evil—but no thought at all to tell what the evil might be.

"Hildreth!" It was Mrs. Sandry's voice which set my mind going again—and released the black wave. "Is there anything the matter? Are you ill? What have you there in your hand?"

"Nothing — or rather, your letters. Won't you read them to me?"

I walked over to the bed, laid the letters on the coverlet beside her, and myself sat down in a chair. The little table with my flowers was between us.

She searched among the letters for a moment, drew one out, and began to read. What it was about, I have not the slightest idea. My eyes were fixed on that torn sheet of note-paper held on my knee, and concealed from Mrs. Sandry by the table.

While the old lady read, and I sat there very quietly, the black wave was flying over me—choking—strangling.

Said the bit of paper on my knee:

My dear Clinton:

Your description of Asgard Heights was charming, but in the spirit of your letter I prefer to think that you wrong both yourself and me. Should I do as you have asked for such an incentive, surely we should have little regard for one another after the first glamour had worn off. I tell you frankly—as I have always been frank with you—that the very least of your personal arguments carries more weight than all the splendors and luxuries you could devise to tempt me. You must understand—

There it ended. "You must understand—" and there it broke off, was torn across, and cast aside. I did understand—understood with an ever-increasing and abominable lucidity; understood beyond the reach of blessed and merciful doubt.

"My dear Clinton," and "Asgard Heights." There, in my hand, I held the key to the whole mystery of the disappear-

ance of Veronica Wyndham. And I would have given anything—my life gladly—to hurl that key back into oblivion.

Asgard Heights. That was the famous estate in the mountains which Charles had purchased within the last few months. Until that time he had never been wealthy in any large sense—merely prosperous. Then an uncle of his died, and in pride for his nephew's successes and great aims left him nearly the whole of a reputedly enormous fortune. When Charles's first act after receiving this inheritance was the purchase of Asgard Heights, his supporters shook their heads and his enemies rejoiced.

Here at last was a handle, a dangling rope, by which Charles could be pulled down from his popular pinnacle. No man, they said, could own Asgard Heights, with its vast palace of a house, its wonderful gardens, and its square miles of fenced-in game preserves, and go on playing the game of People *vs.* Plutocracy—at least, not on the people's side.

When it became known that not a single American citizen was employed by Charles on the large staff of servants required by the scale of house and grounds, his opponents pounced on that also and exploited it with vicious joy. They ignored the fact that in our State Chinese servants are a commonplace in many households.

The Governor, moreover, though a native of Marshall City, was the son of a missionary. He had spent most of his boyhood in China, spoke two or three dialects, and was known to have played patron saint to more than one strayed Celestial in our midst, fallen into difficulties born of the white man's prejudice against the yellow. He had reason, then, to look among them for loyalty and service, though perhaps I alone now knew the reason behind the reason for this choice.

He ran not one-tenth the risk of gossip-spreading from his probably well-bribed Chinamen that he would have run from servants of any other nationality.

Despite the strenuous efforts of his detractors, what actual effect the Heights would have on his career remained to be seen. I had heard it said that Charles was an exception to the common rule; that he held the people's attention, fascinated them, by his sheer brilliancy and magnetism; that he was not a common man raised by his fellows to be their representative, but a master who commanded and was obeyed by all.

That, of course, was gross exaggeration. But, at least as yet, his popularity throughout the State seemed unaffected.

So, "dear Clinton" had described Asgard Heights charmingly to my cousin? Now, a great many people call me Hildreth or Hil. But who called Governor Charles by his given name? His most intimate friend, perhaps—if he possessed one—and, it seemed, his former secretary. That she should call him so was to me almost evidence enough in itself. Why, he hadn't even a nickname among his enemies or friends. He was Governor Charles—Clinton Charles—damnable, hypocritical, woman-betraying Charles, as I named him now.

I recalled the man as I had seen him that afternoon, with his beautiful eyes, and his fine, strong face and noble forehead. Recalled the charm of his voice, and the enchanting flattery of his manner—when he chose it to be flattering. Recalled the magnetism of his personality, attractive or repellent, as he wished to make it; his amazing abilities, and his immense capacity for concentrated work.

There was the very picture of the man whom I, before Rex stepped in, had prophesied that Veronica would marry.

Yet she had never dropped a hint, even to me, that Charles had offered her any personal attentions. His name and hers had never been connected in that way. Certainly he had never paid her open courtship.

No — open — courtship! But secret, secret— "My dear Clinton—" "Asgard Heights," "Should I do as you have asked for such incentive—" "The very least of your personal arguments carries more weight—" The words of a woman prepared to yield, but striving still to hold about herself some few rags of self-respect. No, I wronged her there. If Ronny had sold herself, it had been for love, and no more ignoble inducement.

But that she—my cousin—my little chum—a Wyndham—

No wonder that, when he heard my name, saw my card, he dismissed his companions, and led me into his house. No wonder he eyed me with the stern expectancy of a man who faces a cocked and leveled pistol. And no wonder he was courteous, and at the same time strained of voice and manner.

He thought that I knew! And when I asked him outright, "Do you know where she is?" his indignant "Mr.—Wyndham!" was no more than the final bluff of a man who is at the point of throwing down his hand.

And I had walked out of there—left him—never pressed the question. But, thank God, there was time enough yet for that.

Carefully folding that scrap of Veronica's writing, I put it in my pocket and rose. I realized that all this time Mrs. Sandry's voice had been sounding in my unconscious ears, and that now it had stopped.

"It was very good of you to read it, mother," I said, "and now I've tired you enough. Good-by."

And, to what must have been her acute amazement, I bent over and kissed her.

"Why, Hildreth!" she exclaimed, and began crying again.

You see, I wanted to bid an affectionate farewell to somebody who loved Ronny and liked me, because I intended to go out and kill Governor Charles.

CHAPTER VII.

A CHANGE OF HEART.

I AM just a common, ordinary, quite indolent and usually optimistic sort of a dub. Certainly cut on the lines of neither an assassin nor a hero. High tragedy and little Hildreth have never been team-mates. At least they never had until intuition, deduction, and general information made me aware that the Veronica I knew, the beloved, comradely Ronny, bound to me by ties not only of consanguinity but the most sympathetic understanding—that this girl had indeed gone from me forever.

That the person who had destroyed her, more surely than by murder, was the man who, above all others, should have held himself straight, firm, true, as his face would have me believe him, even without his puritanical reputation.

And why shouldn't he have married her? Was a Charles so much better than a Wyndham? Snobbishness is a quality I despise, but a man has a right to defend his name when another man casts mud at it, even by inference.

Had Charles been a married man, this thing would have been equally atrocious, unworthy, but at least understandable. But he was not. Somehow, despite his matrimonial desirability, he had reached the Governorship and the age of thirty-five and remained a bachelor. Every one knew that he had no interest in women, though (or perhaps because of it) he was as popular among the feminine voters as among the men.

Oh, no, he had no interest in women! How many others beside Veronica had yielded to that magnetic charm of his, thrown away their happiness, and kept it secret for love of him—to save his accursed reputation?

I had left the Aldine Apartments, and next thing found myself walking into my own rooms, though how I reached there I had no idea. Billings met me, took one look at my face, and the next instant was beside me.

"Lean on me, sir. I'll get you into bed. You're all right, sir. I'll have Dr. Meadows here in—"

I flung his arm off angrily.

"What's the matter with you, Billings? I don't want any doctor."

He hovered around me with the anxiety of an old hen over its solitary, sick-looking offspring.

"I beg pardon, sir. You're white as a ghost and look worse than when you was coming down with typhoid. It's all this strain and worry, sir, and you ought to take care of yourself—you ought, really. If the poor young lady should come home to-day and find you looking so—"

"Never mind the poor young lady, Bill. And don't worry about me. I'm going out

again in a few minutes, and if Tolliver calls up—"

I stopped right there. Until that moment I had forgotten all about Rex Tolliver. Should I tell him? If I did, vengeance would be taken out of my hands. I could be sure of that. During the past week the cheerful, somewhat opinionated, but always fun-loving boy who had won Veronica had changed into a sullen, grief-ridden man, irritable, ready to fly into anger at a word or look. I could imagine the red rage into which this news would throw him; and what form would that anger take?

I had thought to force Charles privately into admission of the truth, then kill him, and take the consequences. No need for the world to know any reason. Let them think what they liked. But Tolliver—how well did I know him? Would not his hatred turn upon both betrayer and betrayed?

To Clinton Charles mere exposure would be a worse punishment than death. In our State such an intrigue would not be tolerated for an instant. Charles was taking a terrific risk for the sake of his selfish pleasure; yet no one could doubt that to him ambition was more than life.

Would Tolliver's vengeance take *that* form?

And thinking of it put a new aspect on my own determination. Was this my boasted loyalty to Veronica? She loved the man, loved him so that, yielding at last to his entreaties, she had been willing to forget honor, friendship, all that had made up her life till then, and go to him in shame and secrecy. And for the satisfaction of my own anger, she was to be cut off from any possible return to the respect of her world and, more important still, herself.

I was ashamed. What worth is a protector who protects by unreasoning violence? I would go to Charles, but instead of assassinating him out of hand, he should have a chance to make such reparation as still lay in his power. Veronica must go away for a time. We would fix up some sort of plausible story to account for her original disappearance. What it would be I could not conceive, but hard-driven invention will work miracles. Then she must openly return, break off her engagement with poor Rex Tolliver, and openly receive the attentions of our honorable Governor. The bitter comedy should end with their marriage.

I no longer stood the least in awe of Charles. It had been fear, not contempt for my insignificance, which had enveloped him in an atmosphere of strain and caused my own unreasonable embarrassment.

And yet, to make my weapons invincible, did I not need evidence a trifle more complete than the scrap of letter in my pocket? I knew, and he would know that I knew. But he might barricade himself behind his great and virtuous reputation, have my cousin spirited away, close the mouths of the Oriental servants with the wealth he now possessed in such plenitude, and laugh at me for a suspicious, presumptuous fool.

The simplicity of my original intention had its virtues. His denial would be small good to me if he died next moment; this other plan involved complications, difficulties.

I had driven poor, worried Billings from my sitting-room while I thought the problem out. Now I called him back.

"Bill, I'm going out. It's four now, and I may not be back till late this evening. If Mr. Tolliver phones or comes here, tell him there's nothing new. That I'll see him in the morning—or to-night, if he cares to wait."

I was going to have my hands full with Rex Tolliver. I pitied him from the bottom of my heart, but Veronica's happiness came first. If I could possibly prevent it, Rex was never going to guess the shameful truth.

Half an hour later I was speeding out the Charlevoix Pike, headed for that charming mountain retreat from the cares of office, Asgard Heights.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN UNEXPECTED COMPLICATION.

MARSHALL CITY, as you may know, lies on two sides of the Hawkeye River and in the center of a wide valley, around which sweeps the curving Pere Marius Range. The iron and copper

district is somewhat to the southeast, and Charlevoix Pike runs westward, ascends Kennett Mountain, and on to Charlevoix beyond the range. It is a hard, broad, well-oiled road, a great favorite with motorists, and that day there were plenty of cars out besides mine.

The afternoon was sunny, but not too warm, and as more than one acquaintance gave me a passing hail, I was sick with memory of the many times that my little roadster had carried Ronny out this way.

Three miles from Kennett I turned off the pike into the branching road which led to Governor Charles's splendid and isolated domain. Since he bought it he had never entertained there.

I knew why now.

Ronny would have plenty of time to be alone with her reflections, for Charles doubtless deigned to visit her only at such odd hours as he could conveniently spare from his political occupations.

I ground my teeth. Yes, I did. Exactly like the regular villain. Indifferent, was he? Charles, the magnificent, with the world and my cousin at his feet! Well, just wait a little—till I had seen her, talked with her, had the evidence of my own eyes to support my story. Then we should have the spectacle of Mr. Clinton Charles on his knees to little Hildreth, begging for a chance to bestow all public honor upon the neglected resident of Asgard Heights.

A picture of him in that attitude came to me, with myself, arms folded in masterful scorn. There was an incongruity about it which brought an unwilling grin to my lips. Nevertheless, something pretty near that was going to happen, or the State would find itself minus one perfectly good Governor.

Just as I reached this interesting stage in my reflections, a loud bang, followed by a whistling sound, brief but ghastly, apprized me that my left rear tire had given up its ghost.

I stopped the car. For a moment haste tempted me to run her off the road, leave her, and walk the remaining distance. Common sense, however, reluctantly assured me that thus I should arrive much later than if I stopped and adjusted the spare tire. I was yet nearly four miles from my destination. Moreover, to arrive on foot, dusty and warm, would give me an appearance which scarcely fitted with my purpose.

So I descended, got out my spare tire—and discovered that the jack was missing. I recalled then having loaned it to a fellow motorist on the road, who had broken his, and who had promised to return it "in a couple of hours, old fellow, when I pass your place on my way back." He might have turned it in at the garage, but it was certainly not in my car.

I glanced back along the road, and was somewhat dismayed to see another motor approaching. It was still about a quarter-mile distant. This road led nowhere but to Asgard Heights. If that were Charles coming, the situation might develop with more speed than I had anticipated. But every one knew the Governor's brown touring-car; this car was bright-red, and I at once determined to hail it and borrow a jack.

It was traveling at considerable speed, but I stepped in the middle of the road and waved my arms. He had to stop or run me over.

He stopped.

"Hello, Tolliver!" I said. "You're just in time to lend me a hand. Tire's busted."

Yes, indeed it was Rex. I'd a good deal rather it had been Charles, or Lucifer, or some one else whom I wouldn't have minded meeting just then. But we have to take what is handed us in this world, and so I had to take Rex Tolliver. Of course, my visit to the Heights was off.

"Out for a spin?"

Tolliver sprang to the ground and came toward me. I thought the amiability of his tone excessive. Since last Thursday amiability and Rex had been perfect strangers.

"I was," said I off-handedly. "Will be again, perhaps, if you'll lend me your jack. Howard Trumbull has mine. Why a man who will spend three thousand dollars for a car should carry a cast-iron jack beats me. However, he's got my good steel one now."

"You don't say so! So your tire blew out, eh?"

"You can see it," I retorted impatiently,

"Come, hurry up with that jack, won't you?"

"Sure—in a minute. Say, Wyndham, why are you going to call on Governor Charles?"

"Governor Charles!" I repeated it as if I had never before heard the name. It was bad acting, but he took me by surprise.

"Ye-es. Or didn't you know this road leads to Asgard Heights?"

"Of course I knew it. But you needn't infer that little Hildreth is going to call on the Governor. In the first place, he hasn't been invited, and in the second—"

"In the second, having seen him once before to-day, why should you bother to come 'way out here this afternoon?"

That made me angry. My own amiability had been worn pretty thin by recent events, and besides, Rex's tone was insufferable.

"What do you mean, Tolliver? Have you been spying on me?"

"I've been trailing you around a bit."

He pushed up his goggles, and I saw that he was watching me keenly, eyes half-shut, suspicion in every line of his tanned, handsome face. My irritation vanished in alarm. If Tolliver had learned anything to make him suspect Charles, then that morning call of mine, together with my presence on the Heights road, was plenty to start something which I might have hard work to stop.

"That's a little bit beneath you," I said with an air of dignified reproof. "I hardly thought you'd do a thing like that."

"No? Well, I don't mind telling you, Wyndham, that I've known all along you had something up your sleeve that you were precious careful to keep me out of. You shut me up mighty indignantly, didn't you, when I suggested—"

I broke in on him sharply.

"Don't say it! I won't pretend that I don't know what you mean. I'm not likely to forget that the man who is supposed to be the most jealous guardian of my cousin's honor insulted her by the basest sort of insinuation. Believe me, Tolliver, I haven't forgotten it at all."

That took him aback. My heart was sick in me, and there was no real spirit behind the words, but he thought differently. He flushed, and looked from my face to the yard of dusty white road between us.

"I'm not — altogether responsible, I think." Then his eyes flashed up and met mine again. "But why are you going to Asgard Heights? And why did you call on Charles this morning? Good Lord, Hil, if you knew all I've suffered, you'd not blame me for suspecting things. Be frank with me. All those months she was working for him—alone with him half the time. Carpenter had no right to send her there, nor Charles to take her. He's not married. No other women in the house but servants. Wyndham, if I'm wrong, kill me for a jealous fool. If I'm right—for God's sake, tell me!"

Nice position for Hildreth, yes. Said Hildreth pulls himself together and remembers that, not being of the G. W. family, he can artistically lie.

"My friend, if you were any one but the man whom my cousin has seen fit to choose for her prospective husband, I'd take you at your word—or try to. But you are Veronica's choice—and besides, I haven't a pistol handy.

"Now I'll tell you something that I had meant to keep from you until I had proved whether there was any truth in it. Thought you had had enough of false hopes and bad clues. Really, though, you've hardly proved worthy of so much consideration."

"What d'you mean? Don't stop like that! If you've run across something that may lead to Ronny, tell it to me. I'm a dog—a beast—anything you like. But *tell* me!"

I wanted to tell him, all right, but for a minute my inventive powers failed. At last, in desperation, I pitched on the "political secret" idea which I had suggested to Chief Brennan, and had meant to ask Charles about—before I learned the truth. Only I turned it inside out, and hoped that to Rex's keyed-up imagination its extravagance might sound plausible.

"Well, I called on Charles this morning."

"Yes, I saw you."

"You said that before. I called there because I had a notion that in Ronny's work with him she might have been given

some information which could be used by the Governor's enemies. I wanted to ask him straight out if that were so."

I stopped again. Drama—also invention—is helped by artistic pauses.

"Yes? And he said it was possible?"

I might have assented, but that would not have accounted to him for my presence near Asgard Heights.

"He didn't admit it, but some of the things he said aroused my suspicions in another direction. Rex, I shouldn't be at all surprised if she is being held at the Heights to keep her from telling something she knows about Charles—something which would ruin him politically. I came to find out that, and if you'll kindly go back to Marshall City I'll finish the job. No, my dear fellow, one can do it better than two. I'm going up there and say that Governor Charles has sent me out with a message for Miss Wyndham. The very fact that I know she's there will gain me admittance—if she is there. Once her presence is proved, it will be easy enough to get her away, and—"

"Yes, it will!" Tolliver viewed me with gloomy contempt. "First thing they'll do will be to telephone the Governor and ask him if he's sent out a messenger."

That was true enough. But anyway, Tolliver had swallowed my bait—or appeared to.

"I never thought of that," I confessed with a melancholy air. "Then the best thing we can do is to go back to town. I'll have another interview with Charles—"

"You mean *I* will!" Rex's hazel eyes flared with a sudden reddish tinge.

"No, you won't." What with excitement and the strain of impromptu falsehood, my coolness was by this time icebergian. "That is my privilege as her relative, and besides you'd simply go in there, get in a tearing rage, and spoil everything. Let me handle this, Rex. For Ronny's sake!"

It seemed he was going to yield. That "for Ronny's sake" was a nice touch of sentiment—and applicable enough, in all truth. He hesitated, and I thought to clinch his decision by saying: "This is a case for diplomacy, not brute force. The police would laugh at us if we went to them, and if *you* see Charles in your present mood, it will end by her being removed to another hiding place. She's already been somebody's prisoner for a week. You don't want to risk lengthening the time, do you?"

That clinched his decision, all right, but at an unexpected angle. He took one stride forward and grabbed my shoulder.

"Hil, if she's at Asgard Heights, why in the name of sense should we wait to go through all that 'diplomatic' rigmarole? She's your cousin and my promised wife. Aren't we men enough to go up there, find out the truth and take her away—by force, if necessary?"

Yes, we probably were—if she were being held by force. Even at that moment my opinion of Rex's mentality dropped ten degrees below normal. He really believed my story — thought that Governor Clinton Charles had violently kidnaped his former secretary to prevent her revealing some dark secret of the Reform Party. However, the main consideration was not Rex's credulity, but to get him away from this vicinity.

"I think you're wrong, Tolliver. We can't do anything now, just the two of us. The whole estate is fenced in with deer wire — and probably patrolled by his Chinese servants. And they'd never let us in at the gate."

Again he eyed me steadily and long. I saw by the look in his face that an idea was about to spring into brilliant being, and braced myself to squelch it if I could.

"We may not be able to enter by the gate," he said slowly, "nor over the fence. But what if I should tell you that I know a way to get in those grounds without meeting any such obstacles?"

"Airplane?" I suggested intelligently.

"Airplane! No. You and I can go in there, Hil, and no one be any the wiser, unless we choose. Here! The first thing is to get your tire fixed."

He was back at his own car as he spoke, and opening the tool-chest.

"But, Tolliver—" I stopped. What "but" could I advance?

What his plan was I could not imagine. Something wild, no doubt, that would end in our arrest for trespass, and in no glimpse

of Ronny. On the other hand, Fate might not be half so kind. If he did get in—found my cousin, perhaps in the very company of her lover—heard from her own lips that she was there by choice— He mustn't go—he *must—not!*

"Man," I said, "don't be a fool. Whatever your scheme is, it's sure to end disastrously for all of us. Come back to Marshall City and let me talk to the Governor."

By that time he had the jack in position and was working the old tire off the rim. He glanced up with a flash of renewed suspicion.

"It seems to me, Wyndham, that you're darned anxious to keep me away from Asgard Heights. What's the idea?"

"No more than I said. Oh, well, if you want to take the risk, go ahead. Perhaps, after all, it's the best way."

For now I realized that my unlucky "inspiration" had landed me where further protest would only confirm Tolliver in his original suspicion. All I could hope was that Charles's Chinamen were alert, intelligent watch-dogs—or, if we did find Ronny, that I could get a word with her ahead of her desperate *fiancé.*

CHAPTER IX.

"JACOB'S LADDER."

IT was then after six o'clock and, as Tolliver cheerfully remarked, by the time we were within the boundaries of Asgard Heights darkness would lend its concealment to our visit. I thought it also increased the chance of Charles's presence there, which would lessen my opportunity for a solitary talk with my cousin in advance of Tolliver by about ninety per cent. I could hardly advance that as a reason for delay, but I did ask to be informed immediately of the mysterious means by which we were to enter undetected.

"Never you mind, Hil. I've something to show you which will make you sit up. I don't believe Governor Charles knows there's a back door to his new estate—of course, if he does know and has had it blocked up, then the game's off—or rather, it can't be played on the same lines. No, I won't stop to explain here. Take too long. Climb in your little go-cart now, and follow Uncle Rex."

The prospect of immediate action had produced a remarkable change in Tolliver. His old boyish spirit had returned, and if to me his cheerful impetuosity appeared like the enthusiasm of a maniac, rushing headlong over a cliff, that was because I knew the cliff was there and he did not. And the worst of it was that the least word of warning would only precipitate disaster.

Seeing no way out of it, I followed the dust of Rex's touring car, one minute cursing him for a credulous fool to believe so wild a yarn as I had told him, the next praying that his credulity might not give way again to his original and, as Ronny's letter informed me, correct suspicions.

He did not, as I had expected, drive on along the road to Asgard Heights, but started back toward the pike. In a short time we had joined the scattered procession returning cityward. For the life of me I could not reconcile this with his avowed intention to make his investigation that very evening.

A short distance beyond Salvator's, a road-house at whose pleasant open-air tables I had often dined with my cousin, Rex turned aside. Turning after him I found myself invading what might have been considered a road by a pre-Columbian-American of unexacting requirements, but he would have deceived himself. It was not so much a road as a series of hummocks traversed by ravinelike ruts. The natural forest began here, which spread out toward the pike from a spur of Kildaire Mountain, and this road-thing struck inward and upward between the trees.

Tolliver's car is like a traction engine, or one of these armored "caterpillars" that they use in trench warfare. It might refuse to climb a vertical stone wall, unless the stones were rough enough to give tire-grip, and then it would probably go right along up. But my roadster is more delicate and ladylike. At the end of the first forty yards she plunged her left fore wheel in a rut she thought was a bottomless crevasse, gave one panic-stricken sob, and quit. Rex

came back on foot, in response to the yell I sent after him.

"If this car walked on stilts," I said, "she might be able to toddle along here. As it is, she's done. Is it necessary that we invade the wilderness?"

"Of course," he retorted impatiently. "If you would only drive a real motor instead of that wretched— Say, I can't tow you. The grade is too steep, and it's too rough. You'll have to ride with me."

"And leave my car here? She'll be stolen. Come on back to town, Tolliver, and let's go at this thing from a sensible angle—"

"Any man who would steal *that* would deserve—deserve to own her. However, if you care more for your car than you do for your cousin, go back by all means. I can get on alone, I imagine."

I imagined, too. I imagined Tolliver coming upon Ronny and Cl—

"I'll go with you. Give me a hand, though, and we'll put her in the underbrush."

We did, and covered her over with boughs, like a forlorn, deserted babe in the wood. Rex begrudged the time spent, but worse than futile though I knew delay to be, I could not resist holding back as much as possible the hour of our debut at Asgard Heights.

Once in Rex's juggernautal machine, however, matters were out of my hands. We went. I spent most of the time in the air, as we negotiated the slight inequalities of the way—in other words, bumped the bumps—for Rex drove as if he thought he were on the Harlequin track, which is the pride of Marshall City's racing-car owners.

Dusk was laying its gray soft veil across the summer world. Naturally, it got laid first in the forest. Rex lighted his lamps, and by their spreading, rut-exaggerating radiance, we penetrated where foot of man may have trod before, but not the tire of an automobile—I'm sure of that. At last, when I was certain that in ten more cataclysms the inside of that car would drop out and give the "road" its hard-won victory, Rex jumped a ditch—I thought he did, though there may have been a plank or so over it—and we came to a halt.

The lamps showed a rocky, treeless slant directly ahead, ascending at an angle of eighty-five degrees.

"Why don't you go on up?" I inquired. "Run out of gasoline?"

My friend disdained to reply. He sprang out, took off his dust-coat and goggles, bundled them under the seat, and began searching for something in the car.

"Now, where's that torch gone?" he demanded. "Oh, by George!"

The hunt stopped and he straightened up. "Trumbull has it. He borrowed it one night last week."

"Wanted it to look at my jack with, maybe. Now we know why friend Trumbull can afford a three-thousand-dollar car. What did you need it for? Torch-light procession?"

"Never mind. Come along," was his sole reply.

I meekly obeyed, as he started off through the underbrush at right angles to the rocky slant which had, apparently, ended our connection with the automobile.

"Don't you think the mystery could be decently canned now?" I pleaded, as I caught up with him. "I'd like to know what we're doing."

"Going up Jacob's ladder."

"I believe you *are* crazy."

"Thanks. I call the place Jacob's ladder because only an angel could use it conveniently. An angel or a small boy."

As he spoke, Rex ducked and plunged beneath a dark mass which, on following, I identified as the low-spreading boughs of a balsam pine.

Emerging into yet blacker shadow, a match flared in Rex's hand. We seemed to be standing at the bottom of a narrow fissure in the rock. Above the walls drew together, ending far up in a threadlike slit of stars. There were loose pebbles underfoot. Some time a stream had flowed here from out the stony heart of Kildaire Mountain.

"What do you think of the Asgard Heights back hallway?" my friend inquired.

"You'll have to show me. Name the big idea."

And at last Rex condescended to explain. Years ago, it seemed, his people had owned

a summer cottage located some two miles distant. Julys and Augusts Rex used to play happy barefoot kid, and in that capacity he joined a band of desperate brigands (heirs of several neighboring cottagers), to whose captaincy he won by discovery of this very rift in the Heights stronghold.

"I don't believe old Mason ever had an idea where some of his best fruit went to." (Mason was the "iron and copper king" from the heirs of whose estate Charles had acquired the Heights.) "Brigands, you know, are bound to be unscrupulous. He trusted his fencing, but there's a sort of plateau above here and my Jacob's ladder leads up inside the fence. It's not conspicuous at the top, and that good old balsam hides all the lower part. If our mothers had ever guessed the broken necks we risked and the forbidden fruit we got away with, they'd have seen visions of undertakers' wagons or criminal futures for us all right. Gee! We were some desperate bandits!"

I was feeling very sorry for Rex just then. Blindly, almost joyously, he was approaching that before which this folly of secret stairways and stolen apples would be scorched and shriveled to nothing. He evidently proposed to rescue his promised bride after the best style of any serial "movie." How would he face the sordid truth of his betrayal?

If Rex observed in me any lack of response to his own enthusiasm, he made no comment, but turned and led the way yet further into the yawning depths.

Stumbling after, I wondered if I had cold-blooded nerve enough to pitch him off the top of this mysterious "stair" once we were up it. Some such drastic method was needed, it seemed, if I wished to prevent a greater disaster.

But the actual sight of Jacob's ladder, as he had named it, jarred me out of my murderous meditations and recalled to me that I had a neck of my own to break.

The crevice had narrowed sharply, till further progress along the stream bed became difficult. Suddenly I collided with Rex, who had come to another halt.

"Where do we go up?" I inquired.

"Right here."

By the light of another match, I saw that he had seated himself on a projection of the rock and was calmly unlacing his shoes. He stopped to wave an airy gesture toward the converging walls above.

I craned my neck and groaned.

"Jacob's ladder is right. We'd be merry little angels before we ever finished that stunt. You're dreaming, man. Come home."

"Did you expect an elevator?" His tones were injured. "Stay here if you're afraid."

He fastened his shoes together by the laces and slung them round his neck. Then with a straight upward spring he caught at a jutting ledge, found invisible foothold for his stockinged toes, half turned and a moment later was braced diagonally across the chasm just above my head.

"So-long," he called tauntingly. "I'll tell Ronny how anxious you were for her."

Which reminded me.

In a moment Rex was again on his upward way, yielding me room to follow. He shouted down a few words of encouragement and approval, but he needn't have bothered. So long as I had breath in me, I had simply got to stay in the rescue business. It wasn't Charles, though, from whom I expected to save Ronny once we found her.

The ascent proved slightly less difficult than I had expected. After the first the walls were a fairly uniform three feet odd apart. It was rather like going up the inside of a black chimney, where innumerable ledges and projections made foot and handhold possible. In my troubled state of mind I had neglected to remove my shoes, and in consequence slipped more times than was pleasant. But though my muscles may have been softer than Rex's, my weight was considerably less. When he achieved the final edge, I was not far behind.

Climbing by touch is not a method I should recommend to any other amateur mountaineer, but at last Rex caught my wrists and I realized that even Jacob's ladder had an ultimate top rung.

The narrow crack through which we had emerged was closely bordered by under-

brush; prickly, brambly underbrush, as I discovered when we began to push our way through it. As Rex had said, there was a sort of plateau here on the mountain slope, along whose outer edge ran the high deer-wire fence whose winding miles of length surrounded the entire estate. Far down and to the northeast Marshall City glowed against the sky. Ahead there was only the darkness of trees rising against a starry heaven.

"Come along," urged Rex in a low voice. "Don't make any noise. We might run into a gamekeeper."

I hoped we should. A gamekeeper or a grizzly bear or any other formidable being who might check our progress Veronica-ward.

"No one," Rex continued, "shall stop us now. Are you armed, Hil?"

"Lord, no! I didn't leave home with any idea of playing bandit."

"Well, I am," he said with satisfaction. "There are ten good little persuaders in the clip of this automatic."

"Oh, Lord!" I said again, and then—I think—I groaned.

CHAPTER X.

THE STOLEN LADY—A MELODRAMA.

IT took us over an hour to traverse the distance between our point of entry and the formal park immediately surrounding the residence.

I'm no socialist, but I don't think any man has a right to own nearly two entire mountains. If he does, he should be forced to landscape-garden the whole thing and make the going a little pleasanter for trespassers. I fell down gullies, was detestably scratched by briers, and became convinced a number of times that we were hopelessly lost.

Since breakfast I had been living on anxiety and nervous excitement; good stimulants but poor nourishment. An empty stomach added its plaint to my physical discomforts. By the time we caught a gleam from the first ground-lamp, I was hating Charles and Tolliver so impartially that it would have been a real pleasure to see them meet—provided my cousin could have been left out of the consequences.

Having crossed the valley between Kildaire and Kennett, and negotiated a breath-taking slope on the other side, the aforesaid first lamp welcomed us. Tolliver, who had been cursing and grunting along, suddenly assumed the manner of a noble redskin sleuthing it round the teepees of his hated foe.

I had no objection to dropping full length in the underbrush. In a few more minutes I should have dropped anyway, for I was all in. But on his announcing that in that attitude we would snakily writhe the balance of our way, I rebelled.

"Tolliver," I said, "chloroform the boyhood reminiscences and recall that you're over ten years old. You're not going to rob an orchard. You're going to be shot for a burglar. You're an adult, little though one would suspect it. Let us flit from tree-trunk to tree-trunk like sinister shadows, if we must, but this slinky sliding idea of yours doesn't appeal to little Hildreth. I'm no snake—not even a caterpillar."

I think his reply hinted a third alternative—a worm, in fact—but I carefully missed its personal application. In the end he rather sulkily yielded, and it was on our pedal extremities that we proceeded toward where he said the house was.

In the natural forest we had met neither man nor beast, and it seemed as if the more ornamental part of the estate were equally deserted. I was too occupied by my thoughts to appreciate the beauty of those famous grounds. Electric lamps were frequent among the trees and along the graveled walks, but glimpses of level pools agleam with lotus blooms, of blossoming bowers, of fantastically clipped yews and flower-starred vistas bordered by trees like slim green guardian damsels, left me unenthusiastic. In fact, I quote that description from a tourist's guide-book, written when the place was Mason's and occasionally on exhibition. Trees like slim green damsels must be worth looking at, too. To diverge back to my story, we tramped unmolested through about a mile of aforesaid scenic triumphs, and then Rex began to get cautious again.

"We're close to the house," he said. "You'd better stay here, Hil, while I go on and reconnoiter."

"As a reconnoiterer, I'm it," I countered. "You stay here, give me that automatic and let me go ahead. I'm slimmer than you and can hide behind anything from a lath to a beech-tree."

"Not on your life! I'd look nice hanging behind while you rushed to the rescue of my promised wife."

"Your promised wife, but my cousin and chum since birth. Don't be so conceited, Rex. She'd welcome a rescue from me just as gladly as from you."

I thought it probable she would, too. Her dismay at seeing either of us was likely to be considerable.

"All right," growled Rex. "Then we'll go on together, but for Heaven's sake drop that careless air of owning the place you've been striding along with. Remember that we can't afford to be caught. If Veronica has really been brought here and forcibly detained, they'll stop at nothing to prevent discovery."

By "they" I presumed he meant those desperadoes of the Reform Party who had committed the supposed crime. Torn between pity for his mentality and dread of impending revelations, I followed on. In my own mind, however, I had determined that Rex was going to lose his little pal soon after we came in sight of the house, which was still concealed by trees. I should slip away from him, go straight to the door and demand to see my cousin. Beyond that foresight halted, but at any cost Veronica, and Charles, if he were here to-night, must be warned.

We were sneaking along in the shelter of some shrubbery that bordered a broad drive, when with a roar and whir a large car shot past us. Rex had grabbed my arm and pulled me flat on the turf.

"Did you see him—did you see him?" he whispered excitedly in my ear. "That was Charles himself in the tonneau."

"Of course it was," I responded with bitter calm. "He'd naturally come home to welcome us. Rex, can't we choose another night when Charles isn't around—"

"I never thought you were such a—baby. Hil." He had started to use an unkinder term than baby. Well, if I seemed a coward to him, he seemed a fool to me, so matters were equal.

"Duck!" I whispered sharply. Rex had risen again to his feet, and my ears had caught a slight clinking and rustling sound some distance to the left of us away from the drive. He heard it, too. We crouched very still on the dew-wet turf, peering into the darkness of a group of small fir trees on the lawn.

Then a yellow glow silhouetted their Japanesque trunks and boughs. Beneath, peering straight at us, it seemed, we saw a hideous saffron face. It was not five yards distant, and every detail of the features was clear as some grotesque painting—the slanted, slitlike eyes, wide grinning mouth and yellow, hollow cheeks.

We both gasped, caught by the same eery feeling of spectral horror.

The face turned away, and we caught a glimpse of a shining black coiled queue above a dull blue smock. There was a sound of shuffling, retreating footfalls.

"Hmph!" sniffed my companion. "Keep your nerve, Hil. That was only one of Charles's servants lighting up the gardens."

"Is there a lawn fête coming off? Most of the place is bright as daylight already."

"It makes no difference," said Rex impatiently. "It's the inside of the house that interests us. I think now that the best plan will be for us to conceal ourselves until later in the night, when things quiet down. I know the very place."

He was off again and I after him. I couldn't afford to lose him till I knew the whereabouts of this newly proposed ambuscade, so that I could locate him again—after my mission of warning should be accomplished.

We crossed one green alley of trees, at the end of which loomed a majestic portico, a side entrance to the house, I judged. Its imposing size gave one a chill hint of power and grandeur, but the main body of the mansion was merely indicated to our eyes by the gleam of lighted windows through foliage.

Rex approached no nearer. Turning to

the left he led me down a steep terrace, round a laurel hedge, and so to the level of a sunken garden that might have been the pleasance of a wealthy mandarin, rather than a supposedly democratic American.

In the midst was a pool nearly big enough to be called a lake, with a fair-sized island in the center. A steeply curving bridge led across the lotus-starred waters to the door of a scarlet pagoda, whose curved, overlapping roofs, scalloped and fringed with tiny bells, answered the winds' soft breath with a faint and elfin music. (See guide-book aforesaid.) The faint and elfin music didn't attract our consideration half so much as a sound of swift, chattering human speech, emanating from the pagoda, and bearing news that yet others of Charles's Mongolian myrmidons were about.

"Quick!" snapped Tolliver. "We mustn't be seen!"

Soft-footed, he dashed back toward the terrace, but this time on the hedge's inner side. I was at his heels when he dodged beneath a curtain of some kind of yellow-blossoming vine, and I followed him.

We had entered what proved to be an ornamental grotto, though it was darksomely damp enough to have been the mouth of a cavern or cellar. I knocked my shins on a box of gardener's tools, sat down on it to recover breath—and realized that I ought to have dropped my would-be cousin-in-law outside. Now I was going to have the deuce of a time framing up an excuse to leave him.

"Three of us kids," said Tolliver, "foiled old Mason's head gardener by hiding in here one whole afternoon. We got home around 11 P.M., and the neighborhood was out hunting us through the woods with lanterns."

"Those were the happy days," I said sarcastically. "Too bad you ever grew up, Tolliver."

I heard him turn in the dark.

"What's wrong with you?" he demanded. "If we're here on a fool's errand, it's your fault. If we're not, I can see nothing shamefully kiddish in what we are doing."

I couldn't tell him that the kiddish part was in suspecting the Governor of forcibly abducting his former secretary. At the first hint that she was here of her own free will fireworks were due. So I pivoted and said:

"Your way is more dashing than mine would have been, but possibly it's the best. I'm more concerned than I seem, old man. I haven't your patience to lurk here in the dark. I'm going out and—"

"You are not!" His big body barred the way. "Sh!" he added sibilantly. "Some one is coming!"

Close to the grotto a flight of marble steps cut the terrace, and it was a click of heels and slight scrape of descending feet on these which he had heard. Intuition informed me who was approaching. Had it been any other two people, intuition would probably have sounded the same alarm in my then state of mind, but for once the inner monitor was right.

Tolliver had parted the vines which partially screened our retreat and was peering out. I followed his example.

Two figures, a man and a woman, came into view and strolled a few paces along the shore of the pool. They halted directly beneath a great lantern of painted silk, one of the many which lent the sunken garden so Oriental an appearance. It cast a ruddy glow downward upon them. I could feel the eager tremor which shook the man beside me as recognition became sure.

The woman was Veronica and Governor Charles was the man. Fate, which might so easily have been kinder, had led them as directly to us as if by intentional appointment.

My cousin looked very slim, innocent and young, standing there in the rosy light beside her lover. She was dressed in a blue, droopy gown of long, soft lines, with a filmy scarf flung loosely about her shoulders. Hers was a face of tender, almost childish curves, crowned by hair like soft, pale gold. Her brows and lashes, however, were very dark, shading slate-gray eyes—the kind of eyes that give one a fresh little thrill of pleased surprise every time one looks at them. With those eyes, and with her red little mouth, dimpled chin, and

Dresden shepherdess nose, no man would at first sight ever pick Ronny Wyndham for any task more intellectual than choosing a trousseau suited to her charms.

Yet packed in that small round skull under its fluffy adornment were brains of a quality to be respected. Good sense, too, or so I had believed until to-day.

To me, with that scrap of letter burning my pocket, Charles seemed to tower over her, to dominate her. Like a malignant jinnee of the fairest outward seeming, his personality had engulfed that of my poor little cousin and swept her helplessly from home and honor.

As I stared with tingling hatred at the face of Veronica's successful lover, I forgot the cheated man at my side. Reversing the situation as I had foreseen it, it was Rex's hand which restrained me from rushing out to force a precipitate reckoning. His grip brought me to my senses, and at the same moment Ronny spoke.

Throughout the dialogue which ensued, we in the grotto stood just so, and as I listened I realized that for the second time that day all my ideas must be astonishingly reversed.

Well-nigh too astonishingly, in fact. Though I could place but one construction upon the words uttered, all the while I had the oddest feeling that what I heard could not be true. Or that some other truth underlay it, as the real life of an actor underlies his stage presentation. Perhaps the theatric background of colored lamps and reflecting pool played a part in that impression.

"When is this folly to end?" Ronny turned with an impatient gesture from contemplation of the scarlet-pagodaed islet. Her tone was as unsentimental as the question. "You have held me here for a week. Don't you yet realize the hopelessness and the madness of what you are doing?"

"The end rests with you," Charles responded quietly.

"It won't rest with either of us soon. Every day increases your risk of discovery. And when you are found out, don't you think I have friends who care enough for me to see you punished? Haven't you any regard left for your own — I won't say honor, but for your ambitions? Why, the very position that saves you from suspicion—"

"Will make the crash bigger if I'm found out," he broke in, with grim acquiescence. "And the love that risks a sacrifice like that means nothing to you!"

"Love and sacrifice! Those are beautiful words. They're not fit for a man like you to use! What happiness can you imagine would come of it, if I should surrender? Do you want a wife who hates and despises you? Why, when I was walking beside you just now I wondered how you could endure the company of a person whom you have so wronged."

"Yet you came out with me to-night."

"You said you had something to tell me. I was foolish enough to hope that at last your manhood had awakened and you meant to let me go. I won't be your wife—no! And if you don't free me soon, you will have to keep me cooped up here the rest of my life—if you can succeed in doing it. Let me go now, and I'll keep still—that's the price I offer, and you will be wiser to accept. You are behaving like a Chinese mandarin, who wishes a slave, not a wife, and I would as soon be married to one." She glanced scornfully about the garden. "These surroundings are very suitable to your idea of love."

He laughed, but with no amusement.

"I didn't design these gardens, though I heard that Bartoli regarded them as some of his best work. I did think that their beauty would please you. As I've said often enough, I only bought the place for you, Veronica. Till you came into my life I never knew the purpose or need of beautiful lands and flower and jewels. I would like to give you every beautiful thing there is in the world. You don't really hate me as you think. You cannot — must not! No other man could care for you as I do."

"I hope not." Her tone was icily unresponsive. "To have seen the beast and tyrant aroused in one man is more than sufficient."

"Stop!" That controlled, flexible voice of his quivered slightly. His face went suddenly darker in the lantern-light. "Have I harmed you? Have I so much as

touched your hand since you came here? If you really believed me beast and tyrant, you would not dare call me so!"

Ronny's dimpled chin went up in that defiant fearlessness which was so incongruous to her appearance and so exactly expressed her inward spirit.

"At heart you are precisely what I said! You are afraid to touch me because you are afraid to drive me through the one door of escape you have left open!"

He drew back, with a slightly ironical bow. "Aren't we verging the least bit on melodrama, Veronica?"

"A courtship that includes a kidnaping can hardly escape melodrama." Suddenly she laughed, and her mirth had a ring of sincerity. "The situation is so preposterous that I can hardly even yet believe that it's real. You—the Governor of this State, a man of your reputation and standing—"

"To love so deeply that nothing counts beside. No doubt it is amusing."

"But you don't love me. If you loved me, I should be at home this moment. The simple truth is that you set your will against mine, and when I declined to be mastered by you, you resorted to trickery and violence rather than have your will crossed!"

"You can put it that way, but—"

"It's true. If you really want me to believe differently, let me go home!"

"I can't do that. Will you walk further? Or do you hate the night and the flowers for my sake?"

"Let me go!"

"Not yet—never, if I can hold you so long."

"Now!" whispered Rex in my ear, and the two of us, one in purpose at last, burst through the curtaining screen of vines.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

Her Unseen Loveliness

by Oscar Wilson

A "DIFFERENT" STORY

"BAH! Horrible! Absolutely horrible!"

I turned to the beginning of the tale and noted the author's name; then, with the remark, "I shall avoid your stories in the future, my friend," I threw the book from me in disgust.

"Were you addressing me, sir?" inquired a pleasant voice at my elbow.

I turned. In my absorption I had failed to notice the stranger who had quietly seated himself beside me.

I was in one of the little parks which dot the city. Before me stretched a half block of shady trees, beautiful flowers, winding paths, and well-kept lawn, with numberless rustic benches. Its boundaries were traced by a neatly trimmed hedge about six feet high, beyond which was a substantial, comfortable-appearing dwelling.

"Were you addressing me, sir?" again asked the stranger pleasantly.

"Pardon me, if I startled you," I replied. "I was merely thinking aloud—venting my displeasure at an author for deliberately misusing his talent."

"What were you reading, if I may ask?"

"One of those revolting nightmares—the tale of a mysterious, bloodthirsty creature, invisible to the eye, but real to the touch, in form like a misshapen man, as was revealed by a plaster cast taken of it. It attacks a boarder in a so-called 'haunted' house, and is captured. It neither eats nor speaks, and finally dies."

"Ah, I know the tale: a gruesome, repulsive thing."

"That is what I am objecting to. As some one has said, a writer must imagine in order to create at all; then why not imagine the beautiful? Even if one's inventiveness turns toward the supernatural—the invisible—still why not invent delightfully instead of horribly? At least it would leave a better taste in the mouth of the average reader.

"Why," I went on, warming to my subject, "since such a creature is purely imaginary, should it necessarily and always be vicious, hateful, murderous? Why not a lovely being, say of the opposite sex, friendly, kind, even loving? Lord! How the imagination should soar with such a theme! An acquaintanceship ripening into friendship; then love, the relationship growing closer day by day; with a culmination—well, the climax need be limited only by the writer's imagination and the prescribed limits of good taste in the printed page.

"Such a situation certainly should appeal to the general reader far more than the offensive thing. And," I added as an afterthought, "it would be no more improbable than the horror idea."

Having thus forcibly relieved my mind, I gave attention to the stranger to whom I had spoken. About thirty years old, tall, neat, and of inviting presence, his most striking feature was his eyes. Of the deepest blue, they were—eyes that seemed to gaze into one's innermost soul; honest, confiding, serene—the most beautiful eyes I ever saw in a man's face. His other features were in harmony; his entire face bespoke perfect contentment. Here, I said to myself, is an interesting character, one to whom life has been kind.

"You are right, sir," he said, tapping idly at the graveled walk before us with his cane. "I have often wondered why, when there is so much that is beautiful in the world, our writers continue to depict ugliness. And, not even content with the ugly side of realism, which they might feel in duty bound to portray, they must needs make even their romanticism repellent.

"But such a situation as you have in mind is by no means improbable," he continued. "It might interest you to know that I could relate an experience very similar to what you have suggested."

"You what!" I demanded in astonishment.

Was the man mad? I moved nearer to my end of the bench, determined to avoid any unpleasantness, and resumed my inspection of his face. The first glimpse reassured me; my fears subsided immediately. Visionary he might be—a dreamer, a mystic, perhaps. But violent? Never! Not with those eyes; though, now that I looked into them more closely, I fancied I could see a hint of the enthusiast in their depths. A colossal liar, then? Hardly. If ever a face mirrored truthfulness, his did.

The stranger appeared to read my thoughts.

"I assure you I am perfectly sane," he smiled. "You no doubt remember the words of the bard: 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in our philosophy.' The poet knew whereof he spoke. It is given to some men to have very unusual experiences in this world, and I am one of them. Would you like to hear my story?"

"I certainly would," I responded.

He gazed with a far-away look into the purple haze beyond the trees, as if to visualize the incidents of his tale, while I settled myself more comfortably on the bench to listen.

"How well I remember the first time she came to me," he began. "It was four

years ago, in midsummer, in the late afternoon. I was sitting in my garden, smoking, my mind lost in contemplation. My philosophy of life has always been that beauty far outweighs its antithesis in this world, and that evening I was in communion with the infinite. My pipe slipped through my fingers and fell to the ground, unheeded, until suddenly I felt the warm bowl laid gently in my palm again. I saw nothing, heard nothing, mind you; but a delicious fragrance, as from another, higher sphere, came to my nostrils. Startled, I called out, but heard no response, though it seemed I could almost hear the faintest trace of a sigh. Blindly I thrust out my hands and groped about me, but my fingers closed on emptiness. The presence was gone. Unusual, was it not?"

"Remarkable!" I responded. "Disturbing, too, wasn't it?"

"In a way, yes, though I felt no fear—only a vague sense of wonder. You see, from childhood I had felt a nearness to things hidden from my mortal eyes, and had lived in an atmosphere of imaginative speculation; hence the visitation seemed not altogether unnatural.

"She came again within the week. I was sitting, as before, in my garden; in those early days she came to me only there. The breeze had blown my hair, which I wore long, down over my forehead. Before I could push it back I felt a delicate touch, light as down, on my brow, and the straying lock was replaced. At that same time, though I saw nothing, a shadow passed over my face, as if something had come between me and the sun, and somehow I knew it was she. Again I reached out my hands, again I called; but, as before, my fingers clutched nothing, no sound came to my ears but a slight, wistful sigh. Then she was gone, leaving only the same dainty, alluring redolence in the air."

"You speak of the visitation as 'she,'" I interrupted. "Did you identify her sex that early? And how?"

"I seemed to sense it, in some way," he replied. "From the very first something in my physical nature responded to her presence.

"The next day she came again; and the next, and the next. Always there was some little touch that made me aware of her coming; always the same tender, wistful sigh, nothing more, in answer to my call; always the same delicate trace of exquisite perfume. Try as I would I could not touch her; she always left me at the first attempt. But I soon grew to expect her coming, and to look forward to it with increasing pleasure—almost with affection.

"Suddenly the visitations stopped. Then I realized how dear her coming had been to me. I was heart-sick. Had I unwittingly offended the adorable creature who had so favored me with her notice?—for adorable I knew she must be, if only my human eyes could discern her loveliness.

"Two weeks passed; two miserable weeks that were as an empty void to me. I grew restless. I slept but little. In my dreams I visioned her, beautiful, ethereal; in my waking hours I longed for her. Gradually it dawned upon me that I was in love—in love with a strange being whom thus far I had never seen.

"At last, one evening, as I sat in the dusk, my depression became so heavy that I could no longer bear it in silence. I stretched out my arms and cried: 'Oh, sweet creature from some otherwhere! Oh, dream of unseen loveliness! Why have you left me desolate? If, by word or thought, I have offended, I pray you, have pity! Forgive, and come back to me!"

"She came. Without turning my head I knew that she was by my side. Timidly I reached and laid my hand on the bench near where I knew she must be, and waited. Soon I felt a touch, as of dear little fingers stroking my hand. The stroking continued until, grown bolder, I essayed to take the fingers in my own; but she eluded me, and the next moment I knew she was gone.

"After that she came almost daily, always in the cool of the evening. Once, having been detained, I reached the garden long after the sun had set. She had been there: a faint trace of perfume still lingered in the air; but I had missed her. That night I tossed, sleepless, until the dawn. But she was there again in the evening, and paradise reopened to my soul.

"It was that evening she first permitted me to touch her. I actually got her fingers in my clasp, and she left them there, warm and pulsating, for a moment. My heart swelled with rapture. Invisible she might be, but to me she was no longer a presence merely, but a substantial, corporeal being. It seemed to me, in my great longing, that surely now she must materialize before my vision, and I strained to the utmost in my efforts to behold her. I think it was then that the full realization came upon me that I must be content never to see her. I spoke to her softly, gently, but she made no response. Presently the fingers were withdrawn, and again I was alone."

He paused, looking off into the distance, his face aglow, and I knew he was living those days—imaginary or otherwise—over in his mind.

"Ah, those wonderful hours!" he mused. "Who was I that I should be so especially favored out of all the millions in the world? At times it seemed that it could not be real—that it was all a vivid, sweet dream, too ecstatic for reality; and I dreaded the rude awakening to the commonplace. But it *was* real, thanks to the power that had seen fit to create such a being as she.

"As the summer waned we grew closer to each other daily, little by little, touch by touch. At times I felt her fingers upon my cheek; at others a faint sweet breath upon my brow. One day I seized her hand and held it fast in one of mine. With the other I endeavored to draw her closer to me. She resisted, fluttering, and would have again left me, but I held her fast. By degrees her reluctance vanished, and, yielding at last, she lay in my arms, her head pillowed on my shoulder. You cannot imagine, sir, the joy of that moment. To feel that warm, quivering form against mine, her flesh soft and melting to the touch, was paradise itself. I gave myself over fully to the witchery of the moment, and our lips met.

"Ah, that first kiss!

"Conceive, sir, the perfect communion of two such souls: I, a man in whom the subtler sensibilities had been given full sway from the moment I began to reason; she, an angelic being designed, apparently, for me alone. The glory of that moment is beyond the power of language to describe."

"Tell me," I interrupted again, determined to bring the weird, fantastic tale out to its fullest extent, "was there any marked dissimilarity, other than what you have already mentioned, between her and the ordinary mortal?"

"Aside, of course, from her perfection, she seemed to be intensely human except for her delitescence—that and her inability to speak our human language. The latter was a constant source of disappointment to me during those early days. I tried repeatedly to converse with her, but no sound ever issued from her lips save the faint sigh I have told you of, until that evening when our lips clung together in that first long kiss. Then, for the first time, came from her throat a soft, cooing, tremulous love note, inarticulate, but to me then and forever afterward the sweetest, dearest sound in all the world."

"Was she clothed, as mortals are?" I asked.

"Her garment seemed to be of some soft, clinging, filmy material, pleasing to the touch. Cobwebby in texture, it was; and I recall that my first thought was of the fairy looms I used to believe in when I was a mere urchin. But perhaps I am tiring you?"

"Far from it," I protested. "I am deeply interested in every detail, though I confess I am eager to hear the climax of your wonderful experience."

"The climax! Ah, that came with the autumn. Through the long summer evenings we met there in my garden, loving, embracing. For me it was indescribable bliss, and for a time I felt that my happiness was complete. But a desire for a still closer relationship gradually took hold upon me, increasing in intensity as the days passed until I was in a sort of ecstatic misery.

"I perceive, sir, that you are astounded at the idea of a nuptial tie in such a case. Another held the same view—my old family pastor, a man of deep sympathy, whose outlook upon the world embraced with cre-

dence many things at which most men scoff. I had already confided my secret to him—the one man who, among all my acquaintances, I felt sure would hear me kindly, understandingly. To him I went in my distress and uncovered my heart's desire. For long he opposed me in my purpose; but by persistency, and through my claim upon his affection, I finally overcame him. One evening in October he came to us in the arbor. I took my love's hand in mine, and together we stood before him. Did she hear his questions and my responses? Did she understand? I will not say. As I have told you, she could not speak our human language. But this I do know, and I leave you to judge for yourself: She laid her cheek in fullest confidence against my arm while my old friend spoke the words which wedded me to her.

"Yes, the climax came in the autumn," he resumed after a pause. "It has not ended yet. She is with me daily. My life is complete. This evening, when I return to my home, I shall find her waiting. I shall feel her sweet lips press mine; I shall hear the one love note she can utter. That, sir, is my story. Have you ever heard a stranger one?"

"Mistuh Paul," broke in a voice close at hand, "had yo' done fo'got, honey, whut time it wuz? I been lookin' fo' yo' ev'rywheres. Bettuh come along home wid me, now. Yo' dinnuh's done been ready this half an hour."

I looked up to see a powerfully built, middle-aged negro, in uniform, who took my blue-eyed friend gently, but firmly, by the arm as he arose. Bidding me a courteous good evening, the story-teller took his way leisurely out of the park, tapping idly at the graveled walk with his cane as he went.

As I also arose to go, I noticed, to my surprise, that my friend of the hour had had another auditor besides myself, in the person of the guardian of the park.

"Did you hear it? All of it?" I inquired.

"Yes," he nodded, smiling. "And I never heard him tell it better. He was in fine fettle to-day."

"You know him, then?"

"I've known him for years."

"His is a remarkable case," I ventured.

"Unique, I should say," he returned.

"At first I was in doubt," I said, "as to whether he was simply lying or the victim of an hallucination, but the appearance of the attendant cleared the matter up. Besides, those eyes gave me a hint of his condition. He is harmless, I suppose."

"Harmless? The man is as sane as you or I. I know him well, I tell you. He lives in that fine house just behind you. The negro is his footman."

Before I could frame another question in my mind I heard the crunch of footsteps on the opposite side of the hedge. I listened. Suddenly, through the dense growth came a soft, cooing sound, tremulous and sweet, in which a note of love was clearly distinguishable.

"In the name of Heaven, man," I demanded, "tell me the meaning of this riddle!"

The guardian of the park chuckled.

"He has been totally blind from birth," he said. "And he is married to a deaf mute."

THEATRICAL

BY HAROLD SETON

OH, I was stage-struck, so I went
And joined a Broadway troupe:
They told me I must be content
To get my start as "supe."
Then war broke out. I didn't lag,
But got my chance at last:
For in the playhouse service-flag
I'm in an all-star cast!

The Seventh Game

by George C. Jenks

IN the constant shift and change of rules for the National Pastime it is possible that they have been modified to such an extent since this story was written as to cause dyed-in-the-wool fans to question its technicalities. Think, therefore, of the story, which is a good one, and which is what really matters!—THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

AT THE HOME PLATE.

IT was the ninth inning. The score was 2 to 1 in favor of the Daytons. But—their opponents, the Joliets, were at bat, with one man out and two on bases, the first and third.

Bullyer, their star batter, had just stepped up and was in great form. He was a mighty hitter, and he had come nearer to solving the delivery of the Daytons' pitcher, William Warrick, than any other man in his club.

The Joliets were not only hopeful but confident. Let Bullyer bang out just a single, and the man on third would almost certainly get home, tying the score. Moreover—such are the chances of the diamond—the alert "Flitters" Moore, on first, whose baseball craftiness equaled his speed, might dodge the Dayton fielders and also sprint victoriously to the plate. He had done such a trick, at least, once in the season, and might accomplish it again.

Let this double catastrophe take place and the Daytons would be beaten. It would be sad indeed for them, for not only would they lose this game but the Middle State League championship as well. The Dayton and Joliet clubs were tied for first place, and the present contest—the last of the league series — was to decide who would carry off the pennant for the wide territory between the Ohio and Missouri rivers, where baseball interest is as vital as anywhere in the world.

The Daytons were determined that no more runs should be scored by the Joliets. They depended on Warrick. For twelve years he had been pitching winning ball for them, and now, at thirty-four years of age, his speed and control were, many believed, as good as ever.

His deadly "pinch-curve" was famous, and few were the batters who could negotiate it when he got it over cleanly. But it was as difficult a ball to pitch as it was to hit, and of late Warrick had used it sparingly. In this day's game he had not employed it at all.

Gene Murtagh, manager of the Joliets, had told his men privately that the reason Warrick did not work his pinch-curve was because he could not be sure of the result when he tried it. There was one man on Warrick's own team, Louis Marquis, also a pitcher and the next in popularity to him-

self—who said the same thing to his cronies. He had been heard to declare that Warrick was too old for his work, and that he had no business in the box against a strong nine. Warrick may have known that Marquis had so expressed himself. But, if so, he never commented on it in public.

Murtagh was coaching at third base, and as Bullyer took his place at the bat, Gene remarked to Joe Jessup, the base-runner on third:

"Warrick isn't as steady as he used to be. I look to Bullyer to knock him out of the box this time. He can't field as he did a few seasons ago, either."

Murtagh may have believed what he said, but he paid the pitcher the compliment of watching him carefully, as, after squarely facing the big batter for a moment, as the rules require, he drew back his arm and sent over a ball that shot straight toward the plate for three-fourths of the distance, and then turned out and down.

Bullyer hit at it savagely and—missed! A wan smile flitted across the pale, drawn face of the pitcher. He had, unexpectedly to the batsman, delivered a pinch-curve, and though the ball had not traveled exactly as intended, it had cut the corner of the plate and fooled the overconfident Bullyer.

"One strike!" sang out the umpire, holding up a finger.

"That's all right, Bullyer!" yelled an excited Joliet fan from the bleachers. "Don't let him git yer goat! You'll hit him next time. Swat it over the fence!"

The second ball was a slow incurve, altogether different from the other delivery. But Bullyer was an old-time player, with a cool head, and he was not to be taken unaware twice in succession. He caught that slow incurve just when it seemed as if it would get away from him, and drove it straight down the infield—*into the hands of the pitcher!*

Bullyer was out! But there was another chance for the Joliets.

"Run, Jessup, run!"

The crowd in grand stand and bleachers roared and shrieked as the man who had been dancing away from third base, with his eye on the pitcher until the ball left his hand, now dashed headlong toward the home plate. He *must* make that tie for his side! The whole field seemed to be upheaving with excitement. Would Jessup get home?

Well, it depended on one man — the pitcher whom Gene Murtagh had pronounced unsteady and losing his skill in fielding. Almost before the spectators realized that the fate of the game was in his hands he had acted. For a splinter of an instant he stood—the ball in his fist, left foot advanced and the right touching the ground only with the toe—strung up for action like a greyhound leaping from his leash. Smack!

The ball had been hurled straight into the leather mitt of the catcher, who had been waiting for it with one foot on the home plate.

Jessup was still six or eight feet away. A gasping groan escaped him as he saw that he was beaten.

"You're out!" bawled the umpire. "Game!"

It was all over. The Dayton Club had won by a score of 2 to 1, and they were champions of the Middle State League.

William Warrick walked slowly to the bench. He was a tall man, who looked not far from forty years of age, and his slightly bent shoulders gave him the air of one who had found the burden of life rather heavy to carry. This suggestion was increased by the strands of gray that could be seen in his dark hair and by the lines that zigzagged across his forehead and cut crescents in his cheeks.

He lifted his cap to cool his forehead as he went along. The late afternoon sunlight made the zigzag lines look as if they were alive and squirming.

Many of the people who were slowly leaving the grand stand shouted approval of his work, but he took little heed. He had been a ball-player for a dozen years, and he was used to this sort of thing when a game had come out the way certain fans wanted it. Let them cheer him, if they liked. The next time his team lost a game they would execrate him, as if he were the vilest reptile on earth! Didn't they always blame the pitcher?

This was the trend of thought that prevented his looking up with a smile of acknowledgment, as he might have done had his mood been more pleasant. Yet he could not forbear a gratified smile when a perfect roar of applause broke out. The crowd had mistaken his reason for lifting his cap; they believed it was meant for a recognition of their kindly disposition toward him.

Hundreds of them would like to have jumped over into the field and shaken his hand, if they could have done it. Some of the bleacher folk *were* coming toward him, dodging the ground-keeper and his myrmidons.

They wanted to show their appreciation of the fact that he had won the game, not only by skilful pitching but by his neat double-play at the end, when he had caught out Bullyer and then beaten Jessup to the home-plate with a swift, straight throw.

"Good old Warrick!" bellowed one enthusiast as he leaned over the front of the grand stand, waving his straw hat above his head.

"What's the matter with Warrick?" screamed a bleacherite, and the answering yell came promptly: "He's all right—all right!"

"Bully for Warrick!"

"Good old scout!"

"You showed class to-day, 'Pincher,' and that goes!"

Pincher was a nickname often applied to William Warrick in recognition of his famous pinch-curve, of which he had given one example that afternoon. He was smiling grimly at the use of this appellation—for it had not availed him much this day, even though no hit had been made from it—and was just going to speak to the Daytons' manager, O'Neil, when he stopped and frowned.

Two middle-aged men who had been sitting in the bleacher seats, and who looked like iron-workers, were discussing the game, and one of them had remarked:

"Warrick put up a fine game for an old one, didn't he?"

"Yes, it's a pity he hasn't got youth as well as ability. If a *young* fellow knew as much about the game as he does, he'd be a wonder!"

"He sure would," assented the other. "But we can't have everything. A man can be young just once. I suppose Warrick will go into the discard soon."

"I guess so. He may last another season, but I don't know. He's giving out already. Three or four years ago he'd have shut the Joliets out with such support as he had this afternoon. But he let Bullyer hit him for a triple, and that meant a run."

"Still, it *was* a good game for an old one, as I said before. You've got to hand it to him, anyhow, considering his age. He must be forty-five, I should think."

The two bleacherites walked on and disappeared through one of the exit gates, and William Warrick clenched his teeth as he muttered:

"So I look forty-five, do I? And I was thirty-four six weeks ago. They don't know whether I shall last another season. Infernal fools! I'll show them!"

"Hello, Warrick! Come into the dressing-room. I want to see you."

It was Pugh O'Neil, the manager, speaking. He was a rather short, stocky man of twenty-eight, with a square jaw, steel-blue eyes, and black brows that met over his short, stubborn-looking nose. He was popularly spoken of as "Pug" O'Neil—the Pug being a corruption of Pugh. It also was held to describe his disposition in a general way.

Withal he was a good-natured fellow; but that, be it remembered, is not the same thing as good-humored. In fact, Pug was a man of rather short temper. His team all knew it, and so did most of the umpires in the league. Some of O'Neil's orations, when a decision did not please him, were Homeric in their denunciatory strength.

Warrick followed the manager to the room where the Dayton players had been removing their uniforms, going one by one to get under the shower, preparatory to the rub-down and dressing in street clothes.

"Look here, Warrick," began O'Neil, when he had got the pitcher into a corner, away from the others. "You didn't pitch your right game to-day."

"Didn't I? Why not? The Joliets got only one run off me, and Bullyer can hit any kind of a ball."

Warrick was disposed to be surly. He had been stung by the remarks of the bleacherites on the field and was on the defensive.

"They had no right to score at all," retorted Pug. "If you'd worked your pinch-curve the way I've seen you do it, they wouldn't have had even that one run."

"The pinch-curve wouldn't come to me," growled Warrick. "A man isn't always at his best."

"I know that," snapped O'Neil. "But I've noticed you haven't been at your best for the last half-dozen games we've played. You want to brace up. There's the world's championship series to come yet. I hope you're not getting too old. The championship games will tell the tale. If the Intercolonials beat us, it will be your fault. That's all."

The manager marched away, and Warrick slowly took off his uniform, muttering to himself as his gray eyes blazed with resentment:

"Too old; eh? I'll show them when we meet the Intercolonials."

CHAPTER II.

AT BAY.

WILLIAM WARRICK walked thoughtfully from the players' exit twenty minutes after his brief interview with Pug O'Neil. Two blocks from the ball-ground he could take a car for his home at the other end of town. The grand stand, bleachers, and press-box had emptied themselves long since, and the main gates were closed. Even if Warrick had come out with the crowd, only a few persons would have recognized him.

In his dark, well-made street clothes, with a black, soft hat pulled over his eyes, he was anything but the popular conception of a star ball-player. His lean, athletic form showed no bulging muscles at any time. When out of uniform he might have been taken for a high-school professor, a successful lawyer or a minister of the Gospel—never for the quivering bunch of steel-spring nerves and lightning movement which constitutes the average effective "twirler."

"So I'm getting old; eh?"

His eyes were fixed upon the ground as he went along. He was pondering over what the manager had said, and comparing his criticism with the free-spoken remarks of the two bleacherites who evidently had had no thought of his being within hearing.

One of those men had called him "an old one," and supposed that he would soon "go into the discard," while his companion, with frank brutality, had given him one more season on the diamond. Then had come Pug O'Neil, who had told him in so many words that, if the Intercolonial League beat the Middle State League in the world's championship series, it would be his (Warrick's) fault.

"That's a nice way to keep the nerve in 'an old man,'" he muttered bitterly. "But I'll make good. *I will!* Old? I'll show them when I get into the box again."

"Hello, Warrick! What was O'Neil kicking about?"

Warrick felt the breath of the questioner on the back of his neck, and he swung around impatiently. A large freckled countenance, set off by sandy eyebrows and a fringe of hair of the same hue showing on the forehead under a back-tilted straw hat, was within a few inches of his own face. There was nothing cordial in Warrick's tone as he responded:

"Oh, is that you, Marquis? O'Neil wasn't saying anything particular. Thought I didn't play as good ball to-day as I do sometimes, and told me to brace up!"

"I noticed you weren't quite tuned up in every inning. You let Bullyer hammer you for a three-bagger in the second. It's a long time since any one did that off your pitching. I guess you're tired. You've been in the box a lot this season—two games to my one, at least."

Warrick turned on him sharply.

"Well, the choice of pitchers is O'Neil's business. I play when he tells me. Your arm wasn't in good shape for a while."

"Only when I wrenched it a little in Indianapolis that time. It got all right in a day or two. There never was much the matter with it. I could have pitched with it after one day's rest if Pug had let me. And I'd have made good, too."

"I don't say you wouldn't," returned Warrick, somewhat wearily. "But here comes a Third Street car. That's mine. Good night! I'll see you at the club-rooms to-morrow, I suppose?"

"Sure!" replied Marquis in his flippant way. "At three. That's Pug's orders. Going to chew the rag over the world's series. It will be the Delawares, of course. They only needed that game to-day with the Richmonds to cinch the Intercolonial pennant, and the Richmonds must have been easy for them. Well, we ought to put it all over the Delawares. If you were in the shape you were five or six years ago, we might shut them out every game."

"I don't exactly understand what you mean," said Warrick stiffly.

"Well, it isn't your fault, of course. A man can't help getting on in years. I don't expect to be playing ball at all when I'm as old as you—or anywhere near it. Here's your car. So-long!"

Louis Marquis grinned, tipped his hat forward so that it covered the sandy fringe, and sauntered away as William Warrick swung himself aboard the Third Street car.

The drawn, angry expression was still on Warrick's face as he entered the well-furnished dining-room of his comfortable home in one of the villa suburbs of Dayton. He had let himself in with his latch-key and gone directly to the place where he knew he would find his wife.

Sure enough she was there, in her own rocker, with an evening paper in her hand. She had just finished reading an account of the game that had ended not more than an hour before. It doesn't take baseball news long to get into print in Dayton, any more than it does in any other American city, and the Warricks had a special arrangement with their newsdealer by which the "baseball extra" was rushed up to their house as soon as it was off the press.

Mrs. Warrick was a pretty, daintily dressed young woman of twenty-seven, who took a deep interest in baseball because it was her husband's business. She jumped up and kissed him as soon as he was within reach.

"Isn't it splendid, Will?" she twittered, bubbling over with nervous delight. "You let them get only one run, and it was your double-play at the end that beat them at last. Now for the world's championship! You'll win that, too, I know. Why, what's the matter, dear?"

"Nothing. Is supper ready?"

"Yes. You see the cloth is laid. Margaret will put on the supper now that she's heard you come in. But there's something wrong with you, and I want to know what it is. Any trouble with Mr. O'Neil?"

Her smile had given way to a look of wifely anxiety, and her imperative tone was not to be denied. So Warrick replied with a shrug:

"Well, Gertie, it's the same thing again. They think I'm getting too old. O'Neil complained that I had not played as good a game to-day as I should, and I heard some of the people, as they passed out, intimate that I was going back."

"They don't know what they are talking about," was her indignant exclamation. "You're the best pitcher in the league. My father says so, and I'm sure *he* knows."

"Ye-es," admitted Warrick slowly. "The judge is an authority on baseball. He played professional ball himself when he was a young man, and I never knew him to miss a game of the Middle State League on the home grounds since I have been in the Dayton Club. Still, we mustn't forget that Judge Carrington is your father, and that I read law in his office. Why, I should never have passed my examinations and been admitted to the bar if he hadn't helped me as he did. He's prejudiced in my favor, I'm afraid."

"Not a bit of it, Will! He says what he thinks, always. Whenever he isn't pleased you know it. Have you forgotten how he stormed last winter when you lost that real-estate case he let you try for him in the Common Pleas Court — Shaw *v.* Rood? Why, I was afraid you'd never speak to him again."

"Your father was right about that. I ought to have won that suit. Our client had both law and fact on his side. It was my own stupidity in the way I presented the case to the jury that lost it for us. I confessed it to Judge Carrington as soon as I had cooled down. But baseball is dif-

ferent. It isn't a cold, calculating thing like law. Why, I saw the judge this afternoon, up there in the grand stand, waving his hat and yelling like an Indian at every good play the Daytons made. He isn't a lawyer when he's watching a ball game."

"But he knows good and bad playing when he sees it."

"Our team won to-day, and so long as I did not make any glaring errors he'd think I played as well as usual. No, my dear, I can't trust your father's judgment this time. O'Neil was giving my work particular attention."

"I'm sure you are worrying yourself unnecessarily about what Mr. O'Neil said to you," she insisted gently. "He's always ready to find fault. I've heard you say so many times."

"Yes, but he's not the only one. There were those two men from the bleachers, and Louis Marquis—"

"What? Has that wretched man been annoying you again? What did he say?"

"Oh, the same as the others—that I was too old to be a pitcher. Not that I care what *he* says."

"I should think not. He's a deceitful, treacherous scoundrel!" she broke in hotly. "He wants to be the star pitcher of the Daytons, and he knows he never can be that while *you're* in the club. Why, I don't believe he can pitch at all."

William Warrick smiled, in spite of himself, at his loyal little wife's illogical feminine partizanship.

"Oh, yes, Gertie, he can, or O'Neil wouldn't let him do it. He's a dangerous man in the box, and they are all afraid of him. But I don't think he has been as good since he hurt his arm in Indianapolis two months ago. That is O'Neil's opinion, too. So I've pitched many games that Marquis would have had if he'd been sound. It was a mere matter of policy for the general good of the team. But Marquis can't see it that way, and if he could get me out of the club, he would; I'm sure of that."

"But he can't do it. The public wouldn't permit such an outrage. Why, it's you they go to see whenever you play."

"Well, I don't intend to be dropped without a fight—you may be certain of that. I'll win this world's series, and then maybe I sha'n't hear so much about being too old. I feel I am as good as ever I was."

"Of course you are, dear. But—"

She stopped as the maid came in with a covered dish, and she remained silent while the whole supper was placed on the table. When the girl had gone out and closed the door, Gertrude Warrick stepped close to her tall husband, and, looking earnestly into his face, said:

"I've been thinking of late, dear, that—that—if you were to give up baseball, shouldn't we be as well off? You know father will take you into his office as a full partner whenever you are willing to go. Don't you think it might be better than this continual excitement and frequent absences from home, and—"

"But, Gertie—"

"Father says you are a good lawyer, and if you were in with him you would earn as much money as you do now—and easier. At all events, you would not have that O'Neil saying nasty things to you, or be compelled to associate with men like Marquis."

"All ball-players are not like Marquis, Gertie."

"I know that. But he's the man you have to meet every day. I'm proud of you when you win games, as you did to-day, Will. But I should be just as proud when you won important lawsuits, as I know you would."

"Like the Shaw-Rood case; eh?"

"That was an accident," she decided promptly, adding, with an air of clinching her argument: "Even if you really *are* old for a pitcher, you are young for any other profession. Why not give up baseball?"

For a few moments Warrick was silent. He walked up and down the room twice, head bent and eye fixed, while the zigzag lines on his forehead deepened. Suddenly he stopped, and in measured tones which soon became faster replied:

"Give up baseball? Why, who can give it up, having once been in it? Whoever *does* let go until he is forced off the field? And then doesn't he fight every inch of the way? Fight? Why, fighting is the essence of the sport! Think what it is to be a

pitcher in a big game! There you stand—alone—the ball in your hand—thinking! A dozen men on the field are ready to dash into action at your signal, while twenty—thirty—forty thousand people hem them in, breathlessly waiting for you to send the ball twisting over the plate. Suddenly over it goes! Good ball! The batter swings with all his power and—*misses!*"

"Good! Splendid!" cried Gertrude, carried away by her husband's enthusiasm. "But—suppose he hits it?"

"Well, if he does, what then? Where in the whole wide world can you enjoy such excitement for twenty seconds? With the ball passing from hand to hand, everybody on the jump, and the basemen tearing their hearts out? Why, Gertie, it's glorious! Then think of the thunders of applause for a good play, or the awful hooting for a bad error! What does it matter which it is? Every man in the field has a thrill that he wouldn't exchange for any other emotion under the blue heavens! Money? What player ever thinks of that when he hears the call to 'Play ball'? No, I'll *not* give up baseball. There are a hundred battles left in me yet, and every one will be fought out, hand to hand and toe to toe, before they shall drive me off the diamond."

"But, Will—"

"I may be old, but they'll have to prove it to me by knocking me out of the box again and again before I'll accept the verdict. Until that time comes I'm a ball-player first—a lawyer afterward. Now let them come on!"

Gertrude Warrick shook her head with a hopeless smile. Perhaps she was disappointed because her husband was so determined to fight out his battle to the end. Certainly she was proud of him.

"Sit down to supper, dear," was all she said. "Everything is getting cold."

CHAPTER III.

STILL HITTING THE PITCHER.

IT is a recognized fact, old as creation, that the surest way to compose the nerves of a normal man is to feed him. No doubt Mother Eve—before she let the serpent lead her into her grave mistake—selected the fruits that Adam liked, and saw that he had plenty of them whenever he was a little fatigued from walking in the Garden of Eden. She knew it was the way to keep peace in the family.

Gertrude Warrick, being a sensible young woman, said nothing more about baseball until her husband had disposed of a hearty meal. Any player will tell you that pitching a game in fast company is the best possible exercise to put an edge on the appetite. So for half an hour the conversation across the table—what little there was—concerned only the various dishes, or took the form of brief conjugalisms, such as "Coffee, dear?" "Hand me your cup." "Thanks!" "You're not eating your tomatoes, Will." "That's so; I forgot them," and so forth.

Manager O'Neil permitted his men one cigar a day and no more. Also, he stipulated that it must be smoked only after the game, when there would be nearly twenty-four hours for the nicotin poison to exhale from the system before the next battle. The hard-headed monitor of the Dayton team, with his ten years' baseball experience, needed no physician to tell him that tobacco weakened the heart and relaxed the nerves.

So Warrick lighted his *perfecto* after supper, and, with the evening paper in his hand, went over in print the struggle in which he had participated in the afternoon. His own performances were related in detail, and his lip curled in a bitter smile as he saw how few hits had been made off his pitching, and how, with the exception of that unlucky three-base hit in the second, which resulted in a run, he had held the whole batting force of the Joliets safe for the nine innings.

"And they call me old!" he growled. "The yelping curs!"

"Don't, Will! Don't worry about it. What do you care? You know the Daytons couldn't get along without you."

His wife was leaning over him, smoothing with one finger a streak of white in his dark hair. He dropped the paper on the floor and stared moodily across the room. His eye fell on the well-kept sideboard, glittering with silver and cut-glass, in the midst of which stood the tall silver-gilt cup—the

bowl a baseball, supported by three crossed bats—which had been presented to him twelve months before, when his pitching had won for the Daytons the world's championship which they would have to defend this year.

"I *know* they can't get along without me," he said after a pause. "*I won't let them.*"

"What's that, Bill?" broke in a loud, deep voice. "You won't let them; eh? That's the kind of fighting-talk I like to hear. But who are you talking about?"

Warrick sprang to his feet, and for the first time since he had left the ball grounds a *real* smile spread over his face. With an exclamation of pleasure he took the outstretched hand of a big man, apparently in his fifties, whose round, jolly visage and bush of kinky gray hair were equally familiar in law courts and baseball grand stands all over the western part of Ohio.

There wasn't a better known lawyer from Cincinnati to Columbus than ex-Judge Cyrus Carrington. Everybody called him "Judge."

"You were at the game to-day, judge, I know. I saw you."

"Of course I was," replied Judge Carrington as he took the particular easy chair he always occupied when he visited his daughter. "And I was mighty glad to see you make that double-play in the ninth. By Cæsar, you needed it! But for that the Joliets would have got the pennant. It was the closest thing I ever saw. You oughtn't to have let them score in the second, Bill, when the teams were tied for first place in the last game of the season."

"It must have been exciting," observed Gertrude.

"Exciting? Why, I was so worked up that my seat in the grand stand felt like red-hot spikes! Not that it mattered much, for I was standing up all through that ninth like everybody else. Wow! It was a hummer while it lasted!"

The judge brought his broad hand down upon his knee with a tremendous smack and shook his Jovian head enjoyingly.

"You didn't see anything in my work that looked like falling off or going back, did you?" asked Warrick.

The pitcher had tried to speak with calmness, but there was a quiver of anxiety in his voice that he could not overcome, and he saw his wife glance at him in quick, loving sympathy.

"Why, no, Bill—of course not," replied the judge. "Haven't I just been saying that your double-play at the end saved the game?"

"Yes, but you also said that I shouldn't have let them score in the second. That was when Bullyer hit me for a triple, which gave them their one run."

Judge Carrington looked solemn and seemed to be turning over in his mind something that perplexed him. At last he answered slowly:

"It's the way Bullyer got that three-bagger which rather puzzles me, Bill. I don't think he should have had it. I was looking for you to put over one of your pinch-curves when you faced him, because you know what a wizard he is at the bat. It appeared to me as if you meant to give him that, or something else he couldn't hit, when you set yourself to pitch. Then, just before the ball left your hand, you seemed to fall to pieces for an instant. Just for a second—that's all it was. Before I could have counted 'one' you picked yourself up and away went the ball."

"Then he was all right, wasn't he?" put in Gertrude breathlessly.

"You sent the ball over," continued the judge. "But it was swift and straight instead of a curve, and Bullyer slammed it so hard that I thought at first it was a homer. It was almost as bad, for he got home on a steal and fumble when the next man came to bat. What *was* the matter with you, Bill?"

Judge Carrington turned in his chair as he asked the question, and fixed his keen gaze—a searching look that often served him with unwilling witnesses in court—upon the pale, disturbed face of his son-in-law.

"I don't know what was the matter," replied Warrick unsteadily. "I did intend to give him a pinch-curve that time; but I was afraid of myself at the last moment and changed it to a hard, straight one, hoping it would fool him."

"Why were you afraid of yourself? You never used to be."

Gertrude tried to catch her father's eye to beg him mutely not to pursue his questioning. But Judge Carrington did not notice her. Not only was he an enthusiast with regard to the national game, but he had a large pecuniary interest in the Dayton Middle State League Club. He was one of its three principal owners. So it was with some sternness that he waited for his son-in-law to answer.

"A man cannot *always* be at his best, judge," said Warrick. "That's what I told O'Neil this afternoon. There are moments in a game when any pitcher is liable to feel a doubt. His responsibility weighs heavily on him at such times, and he can't help it. But," he added with feverish confidence, "nothing like that will happen with me in the championship series. I'll practise my pitch-curve hard every day for the three weeks before it begins. The Daytons are going to be champions of the world. You can depend on that."

Judge Carrington looked at him thoughtfully. Then, with some hesitation and an anxious frown:

"You don't think you are getting too old to play ball, do you?"

William Warrick shrank down in his chair as if he had been struck a crushing, physical blow. There it was again! *Too old!* That cruel, hateful insinuation which had come to him so often of late, and from so many directions! Now it was in his own home that it attacked him! From a man who he knew would not willingly do him an injury—a man, indeed, who was his best friend on earth aside from his wife. He—Judge Carrington—believed him too old! Of course he believed it when he could even ask such a question.

Too old! By Heaven, he'd show them all the very next time he stepped into the box! The judge was mistaken like all the rest. William Warrick shook himself like a gladiator who has fallen in the arena before a sudden assault, and, slowly recovering, seeks assurance that he is still sound.

"No, judge!" he cried in ringing tones. "Whatever may have been the reason I couldn't send over that pitch-curve this afternoon, it wasn't because I'm not as good a man as I was five years ago. Too old! Ha, ha! That's a joke! No, indeed! I'm only thirty-four, and there are plenty of ball-players doing good work who are a great deal older than that."

He laughed loudly. The judge did not join in his mirth. He merely said in a matter-of-fact way:

"I'm glad to hear it isn't that, Bill. But, of course, a man can't pitch a strong game always. Youth will be served, you know, and when we find ourselves in the third decade we have to look the truth in the face, whether we like it or not."

"Well, I sha'n't be afraid to do that for five or six years, so far as baseball is concerned," declared Warrick doggedly.

"I hope not. I never should have thought of bringing up the question if Roderick Marquis, who was at the game to-day, hadn't said he believed you could not last much longer."

"Roderick Marquis? What does that old fossil know about baseball?"

"Well, he's one of the owners of the Dayton Club, you know, Bill."

"Yes, and he's Louis Marquis's father. Louis is working to get me out, and he put that idea into the old man's head."

"Very likely," assented the judge. "Anyhow, the directors of the club—Marquis, Shaw, and myself—are to meet Pugh O'Neil to-morrow morning in my office — before the players and O'Neil get together at the clubhouse in the afternoon—and the matter may come up. Silas Shaw, who has as much stock in the club as Marquis, has something to lay before the board. Shaw has it in for you, I am afraid, on account of your losing that case for him last winter—Shaw *v.* Rood. He may try to get even by putting you off the team."

"Would he do such a dirty trick as that?"

"Men who lose lawsuits are often inclined to do anything to revenge themselves," returned the judge gravely. "When you've been a lawyer as long as I have you'll know that."

"And they're going to try to get me out, are they?"

"If Marquis and Shaw can make O'Neil

and me believe you are too old to pitch—not otherwise."

"And can they do it?"

Judge Carrington placed his hand upon his son-in-law's shoulder and smiled reassuringly.

"Keep from worrying, Bill, if you can. You'll find your job safe when the players meet O'Neil to-morrow afternoon. I'll see to that. But you'll have to make good in the world's series. If you don't, why—"

That was all the judge said on that particular matter then, or at any time during the evening. After he had gone, and when Warrick was alone with his wife in the dining-room before they went up to bed, he said, with a grateful smile:

"Your dad's all right, Gertie, isn't he? Whether I'm waxing old or not, at least I'm sure of a square deal while he is one of the big owners of the club."

"Of course you are, Will," returned his wife cheerfully. "Now try to forget baseball for to-night and get a good sleep."

"My dear Gertie," he laughed, "the player who lets baseball get away from him, even in his sleep, isn't the man who wins games!"

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNDERHAND THROW.

At nine o'clock sharp the next morning Judge Carrington bustled into his law offices on an upper floor of a tall building in the vicinity of the courthouse. His clerical force, consisting of two embryo attorneys, a fluffy, pink-and-white stenographer, and a sharp-faced errand boy were already at their places in the spacious outer apartment.

The judge gave them a cheery "Good morning!" as he passed through to his own room. Busy man as he was, he always had time for the little amenities which lend grace to life's routine, and he was never seen in public without a flower in his buttonhole.

For nearly an hour the judge worked quietly at his flat-topped desk. His mail was heavy, as usual, but he ran through it quickly, turned some of it over to the two young men in the other room, and dictated several letters to the young lady. Then he pushed back his crinkly gray hair with a round-arm, sweeping gesture, characteristic of him, and settled down to study the papers in an important real-estate suit in which he was to appear in Common Pleas on the morrow. In its general tenor this case resembled the one of Shaw *v.* Rood, lost by his son-in-law the previous winter.

"I wish Bill had won that case," grumbled the judge when he had been reading for ten minutes or so. "If he had, old Silas Shaw would be on our side in this baseball squabble. As it is, I know the old man will use all his power in trying to get him out. Well, Shaw and the others have got me to fight. I can't believe Bill is quite done yet."

He got up and strode to the window to look vacantly across the roofs and parks of the city smiling in the morning sun.

"I wish Bill hadn't let Bullyer get that three-bagger yesterday," he muttered. "It couldn't have happened if Bill had been the pitcher he was two or three years— Oh, rot! What am I talking about?"

He returned to his chair, brushed back his hair again, and, elbows on the table, concentrated his attention on the brief before him.

"Let me see! Where was I? Oh, yes, I know! Here it is: 'Situate in the township of Harrison, in the county of Montgomery, and in the State of Ohio, and being part of the southeast quarter of section 27, town 3, range 6, west, *et cetera*, bounded and described as follows: Beginning at a stone at the—'"

"Mr. Shaw and Mr. Marquis!"

The shrill voice of his office boy, who had knocked at the door and entered almost simultaneously, stopped his reading with a jerk.

"Oh, all right, Theodore! Show them in." Then, to himself, as the boy retired: "Coming together; eh? Wonder whether it's accidental. Well, they're not going to get Bill Warrick out on a foul while I'm in the game. Not by a—"

"Mornin', judge!"

A stout, middle-aged man, who at first glance seemed to be all white waistcoat, yellow shoes, and jewelry, came briskly into

the room and waved a fat hand decorated with two diamond rings at Judge Carrington.

"Good morning, Mr. Shaw," said the judge quietly, without smiling.

"Just ten o'clock! That's the time we were to meet, isn't it?"

Mr. Shaw flung this out in an aggressive tone, as if somebody had denied it. He was a builder and contractor, accustomed to dealing with laborers, and it may have got him into the bullying way that presumably he found effective in his business.

Judge Carrington pushed back his hair and pointed to a chair without replying. Shaw plumped himself into it and went on talking:

"Met Roderick Marquis on Main Street, and we came up together. Come in, Rod! The judge is here."

Roderick Marquis entered, and in a piping voice said "Good morning." Judge Carrington returned the greeting and got up to place a chair. Mr. Marquis was one of those rather feeble, white-haired old gentlemen to whom such attentions are vouchsafed naturally.

In appearance, demeanor, and manner of speaking, he was the antithesis of Silas Shaw. He would no more have thought of addressing that loud-mouthed individual as "Si" than of dancing a hornpipe in church! No one but this same Shaw would have presumed to call him "Rod."

Mr. Marquis always maintained that he was comparatively poor. But he was believed to have made a great deal of money in the limestone quarries that abound along the Great Miami River, and he had speculated successfully in Dayton real estate. It was said that when a young man he had been a pretty good ball-player. Looking at him now, it was difficult to picture him doing anything of the kind. But he owned a good slice of the Dayton Middle State League Baseball Club, and was fond of saying what a great pitcher his son Louis had shown himself to be.

It was Silas Shaw who opened the proceedings. Leaning back in his chair, with legs crossed and his thumbs hooked into the armholes of his big white waistcoat, he barked:

"Now, judge, we can get down to business in a very few words. I—"

"Before we go on," interrupted the judge, "we must have Mr. O'Neil here."

"Well, why *ain't* he here? The time was set for ten o'clock. I can't wait for no one, and, by jings, I won't—"

"Pugh O'Neil is manager of the club," again broke in Judge Carrington with a calmness that made Silas Shaw wince a little. "He ought to be here to hear what you have to say."

"'Tain't necessary," insisted Shaw, recovering. "We can tell him afterward. We're runnin' this here club—not him."

The judge's eyes began to blaze, but just then there was a knock at the door and Pugh O'Neil came in.

He bobbed his head to the three club-owners collectively but said nothing. His heavy black brows were drawn down, and evidently he had come prepared for trouble.

"Sit down, Pug," said Silas Shaw. "I was just goin' to say that we ain't satisfied with the battery of our baseball team."

"What's the matter with it?" demanded O'Neil shortly.

"What's the matter with it?" echoed Silas Shaw in a loud voice. "Why, ain't it been steadily goin' down for the last two years?"

"I didn't know it," snapped the manager. "We have three good catchers and three of the best pitchers in the country that I can use at any time."

"If you have three first-class pitchers, why do you put Warrick in the box three games out of four?"

It was the piping voice of Roderick Marquis that asked this, and though the question was put mildly enough, there was a green light in his eyes like that of an angry cat. His thin lips were drawn together, too. Feeble and old he might be, but everybody in Dayton knew that in spirit old Roderick Marquis had a grip like a bulldog when he got into a fight.

"I didn't say I had three first-class pitchers, Mr. Marquis," returned O'Neil. "I have only one of that kind, and his name is William Warrick."

"It's a lie!" suddenly shrieked the old man, jumping from his chair. "There's

another pitcher in the club who can beat Warrick any time. You know that! My son Louis is the man. You've kept him out of the games just to let that old, worn-out Warrick ruin the club. Why—"

Roderick Marquis stopped, gasping, as he lay back in his chair with his two hands pressed to his chest. Judge Carrington hurriedly put a glass of water to his lips, but the old man pushed it away.

"Thank you, judge! I don't care for it," he said, sitting up with an effort, while the green light still showed under his white eyebrows. "But I am determined to have my son's rights respected."

Pug O'Neil had seated himself astride a chair, leaning on the back. He looked disgusted. The outbreak of the old man had made him weary. Now he looked at Silas Shaw in the direct way that his men on the team knew meant action and demanded:

"What are *you* asking me to do, Mr. Shaw?"

"To fire William Warrick out of the club," replied Silas Shaw promptly.

"What for?"

"Because he is not making good."

"I'm the man to say that, Mr. Shaw," was Pug O'Neil's quiet rejoinder. "Still, I'd like to hear from each one of the principal owners of the club, and I ask the same question of Judge Carrington: Why am I to fire William Warrick off the team?"

"I didn't say you were to do it, Pug."

Judge Carrington delicately rearranged the carnation in his buttonhole as he said this, and at the same time looked steadily at the still heaving Roderick Marquis.

"Don't you want Warrick dropped?" asked O'Neil.

"No, Pug, I don't want him dropped," was the firm, even-toned response. "And, what is more, he will not be dropped. I have allowed Mr. Shaw and Mr. Marquis to express themselves on this matter, and now I am speaking for myself—"

"And for me, judge!" threw in O'Neil emphatically. "Don't leave me out."

"I didn't mean to leave you out, Pug. I knew you believed in Warrick, just as I do, and as everybody who saw that game yesterday does. We have won the Middle State pennant three times in succession, and it is ours now. That was because Warrick pitched a large majority of the games."

"It was an outrage!" spluttered Roderick Marquis.

"I believe I have the floor, Mr. Marquis," said Judge Carrington, still evenly. "I say that William Warrick will not be dismissed until he has shown that he is no longer able to win games for the Daytons."

"He is too old. That's the whole secret of his falling down," interposed Shaw. "We don't want an old man pitching for us, making us the laughing-stock of the whole Middle State League, as well as the people who go to see the games. Young blood! That's what we want!"

"Like my son!" squeaked Roderick Marquis.

"Your son is all right in his place, but Warrick is the real dependence of the Daytons, and don't you forget it," growled O'Neil fiercely. "What do you say, judge?"

"I say again what I said just now: that William Warrick will stay with us until he shows that he cannot pitch winning ball."

"That won't be this season, nor next, either," added O'Neil.

Roderick Marquis got up from his chair and tottered over to the table, where he leaned both hands upon it. There were enemies of Roderick Marquis who said that he often pretended to be very much feebler than he really was to get sympathy, and that he was considerable of an old humbug in that, as in many other respects.

But every prominent and wealthy man has enemies. What they said may not have been true. Certainly he looked a very poor, old man as he stood facing Judge Carrington.

"I am going out now, Judge Carrington," he bleated. "You are defrauding my son out of his rights. I know that you have the largest amount of stock in the club, and that with O'Neil's stock added, you two have the balance of power. So it will be some trouble to get Warrick out. All the same, he is going. If it can't be done one way it can another. Good morning!"

He tottered to the door, his white spats—a distinguishing feature of his dress always—twinkling across the faded carpet, and he went out as quietly as he had come in.

Silas Shaw, who had been silent for five minutes because he could not get anybody to listen to him in that period, bounced out of his chair and strode heavily to the door after the old man. When he got there he turned and said out of the corner of his mouth:

"I'm with Roderick Marquis in this, Judge Carrington. I have no use for that fellow Warrick, and I'm going to see that he gets out somehow. And I don't care whose son-in-law he is, either!"

He bounced out of the room and slammed the door so hard that the two clerks, the stenographer, and the office boy all jumped and looked at him in astonishment. But he didn't care for them. He took Roderick Marquis's arm and walked him to the elevator, talking volubly in an undertone all the way.

Judge Carrington, in his chair behind the table, pushed back his hair and watched Silas Shaw go out and shut the door. Then, with a smile spreading all over his jolly countenance, he looked at O'Neil and said:

"Well, Pug, what do you think of them?"

"Judge," replied O'Neil slowly, "what I think of those two stiffs doesn't matter. They are trying to score with a foul ball, of course. But I do hope Warrick will show better form in the championship games than he has for the last few months."

"Do you think he's— "

The judge did not finish the query, but Pug O'Neil was a quick thinker, as a great ball-player must be, and he answered, with a sorrowful shake of his round, stubborn head:

"Yes, judge, I'm afraid he's past his prime. There have been old-time pitchers who could stay in the game many years after thirty — old Jimmy Galvin, for instance—but I'm awfully afraid Pincher Warrick is on the toboggan."

"But you'll give him a good chance in the championship series; eh, Pug?" asked Judge Carrington anxiously. "It would break his heart if you didn't."

"He'll get his chance, judge," returned O'Neil soberly. "After that it's up to him."

Then the two men fell silent. Both were thinking the same thing, and both shook their heads.

CHAPTER V.

WARMING UP.

IN the clubhouse of the Dayton team at the ball-grounds William Warrick was playing billiards with "Chief" Atkins, his battery mate.

Atkins was a full-blooded Sioux. He had been educated at Carlisle, where he learned to play ball, and was the Daytons' star catcher. The Indian and Pincher Warrick were regarded as the strongest battery in the Middle State League.

"That doesn't look as if your nerve was going, Pincher!" laughed Atkins, as Warrick, by the most delicate nursing, made four difficult caroms in succession and ran out the game.

"Billiards isn't baseball, chief," responded Warrick.

"But one requires as steady a nerve as the other. You couldn't have made those four shots if you weren't in fine pitching form."

William Warrick smiled.

"I guess you're right," he said. "I feel pretty fit to-day. We'll see when we get out for practise. There's O'Neil now, just come in. No more billiards this afternoon."

The large, airy lounging-room was full of ball-players in uniform, playing checkers or dominoes, reading newspapers and magazines, or chatting over yesterday's game and the possibilities of the championship series yet to come.

As the manager entered everybody straightened up. There was business in Pug O'Neil's steel-blue eyes. He gave a quick glance around the room, and each man had the feeling that he was singled out for an admonition of some sort. Certainly the manager had noted the presence of every member of his team. He had that kind of eye.

"Now, boys, listen!"

O'Neil had walked over to the billiard-table, and was leaning against it, so that he faced the room. His men gathered about him, and he continued:

"In three weeks from to-morrow, October 10, we play the Delawares, of Muncie, on our home grounds. It will be the first game of the series for the championship of the world. The date for the opening game was fixed last week. But I didn't know until last night what team we'd have to meet."

"You knew *we'd* be in it, though, didn't you?" grinned Larry Donahue, the Daytons' captain and a great second baseman.

"Of course I knew that," snorted O'Neil. "We *had* to beat the Joliets yesterday. How could we help it, with Warrick pitching and our whole team on edge?"

William Warrick, standing at the end of the billiard-table, partly behind the manager, stepped forward quickly. Had there been a subtle note of irony in the reference to himself? Pug O'Neil's hard face revealed nothing, as he went on:

"It would have been a disgrace if we'd let the Joliets win that game, because our team is better than theirs. Only bad playing for which there could have been no excuse would have made us lose. I didn't think we'd give them even one run. But accidents happen on a ball-field, as they do everywhere else, and their man, Bullyer, has a .350 batting average."

Warrick tried to catch his eye in gratitude, but Pug obstinately looked straight ahead. One might have supposed he did not know Warrick was there.

"Now, the Delawares are a red-hot bunch," he continued. "The way they slaughtered the Richmonds yesterday was only a repetition of what they'd been doing to every nine in the Intercolonial League all summer. The Richmonds had given them the hardest tussle they'd had, and were tied with them for the lead, just as we were with the Joliets."

"We licked the Joliets all the same," remarked Donahue, but Pug did not notice the interruption.

"When it came to the real test—the game that carried the pennant with it—the Delawares shut out the Richmonds, 4 to 0. And while they were doing that we were winning the Middle State flag in what was, take it on the whole, one of the best games we put up this year."

"In spite of that three-bagger of Bullyer's, eh?"

It was Louis Marquis who threw in this, with a sneering chuckle, as he glanced sidewise at Warrick. Pug O'Neil turned on the speaker like an angry bull.

"I've said everything about yesterday's game that needed to be said, Marquis. When I want you to criticise my players I'll tell you to take the floor. Meanwhile, remember that I am manager of this team, and I'm doing my own talking."

Louis Marquis did not venture to reply—O'Neil looked dangerous. He merely shrugged his shoulders and stopped chuckling. O'Neil turned to Warrick.

"Pincher, come into my room a minute. The rest of you get out on the field and warm up with the ball. I noticed some rotten fielding yesterday."

The manager, looking neither to right nor left, strode into his private office, where there was a window overlooking the whole field, and when Warrick followed him in he told the pitcher, gruffly, to shut the door. He waited till this was done before he said abruptly:

"Now, Warrick, I hope you see that you've got to make good in practise for the next three weeks if you want to pitch in the world's series."

The tone in which Pug O'Neil flung this over his shoulder was as hard as an ungreased wagon-wheel. He had seated himself in his revolving office chair and was opening his roll-top desk. The short black hair at the back of his obstinate head was as uncompromising as his face. Warrick frowned.

"I don't exactly understand what you mean?"

"Oh, you don't?" The manager twisted himself around in his chair to face the other. "Can't you see that this fellow, Louis Marquis, is going to down you if he can?"

"How can he?"

"When a man of his kind sets out to throw the hooks into another who isn't on to all his curves, he's liable to find a way to do it," snorted Pug. "Don't make any mistake about that."

"I know he doesn't like to see me pitch-

ing more games than himself. But I don't see how he can down me."

"He can't unless you give him an opening."

"How?"

"By pitching weak ball and forcing me to take you out of the box. That is how. I've got to have the best work I can command in that position. If you don't fill the bill, Marquis will have to take your place. He's the next best man to you. Then, if he makes good, why, it's good night for yours."

"You mean—"

"I mean that your game yesterday wasn't up to your own standard. I told you so as you came off the field after the ninth."

"You told the boys just now it was one of the best games we'd played this year."

"What if I did? Do you suppose I'm going to let *them* know I am afraid of my star pitcher giving out—that he is getting too old to stand the gaff?"

"*Too old?*" gasped Warrick. Then, inaudibly: "Always the same thing—and a foul lie at that!"

"What d'you say?"

"Nothing. I was listening to you."

"Well, I was going to ask you how long you think it would be before some of the boys would leak, and let it get to the public that my star pitcher has gone stale."

"Gone stale? You don't really think that, do you?"

In his pained eagerness Warrick raised his voice until it was almost a scream. The manager banged a fist down on his desk and looked quickly through the window at the field, where his players had already begun to hurl the ball from one to the other. The Daytons were noted for the energy of their practise.

"Keep quiet, will you?" warned Pug. "What are you whooping about? I brought you in here so that no one would hear us, and you're shouting as if you were talking to somebody over in left field. Can't you see the window is open?"

"I didn't mean to whoop," protested Warrick. "But you said I had gone stale. If that is true, I'm *done*, and—"

O'Neil gave him a quick glance of honest, manly sympathy, but Warrick didn't see it. He had covered his eyes with his two hands, as he tried to imagine what life would be to him without the excitement of the diamond that had been the breath of his soul for twelve years. Unconsciously he uttered a groan.

"Now, look here, Pincher," and there was a kindly ring in the manager's hard tones. "There's no use getting mad at me about this."

"*Mad?* Why, that would be ridiculous! How can *you* help it if I'm no good? I'm not *mad*. I'm just going *crazy*—that's all."

"You are? Well, can that, right away. I don't want any crazy pitcher on my staff. That's all foolishness. What I want you to do is to practise like—like—"

"I'll do that, of course," broke in Warrick, who disliked profanity.

"Mind, I don't say positively that there is anything wrong with you."

"You said there was."

"Well, there is, in a way. It may be only that you are tired out with your season's work. I hope it is. But it can't be denied that you haven't been putting them over of late the way you used to—when a batter never hit you except by accident. Your pitching would be good for an amateur, but for a star professional, as you are, it is punk. I'm not the only one who has noticed it, remember."

"Yes, Louis Marquis—"

"I didn't mean him. *He* doesn't count. But there are others kicking on you who *do* count."

"Who are they?"

"Old man Roderick Marquis for one, and Silas Shaw for another. Both of them own big blocks of stock in the Dayton club, and when they are against a player it is hard for me to protect him."

"Both of those men have personal reasons for being against me," said Warrick.

"I know all about that," grunted the manager. "Old Roderick wants to see his son Louis the star pitcher of the team, and Silas Shaw is sore because you didn't win a lawsuit for him last winter. My own opinion is that law and baseball don't mix well, and I should advise you to give up one or the other.

"I never try to make them mix," retorted Warrick, his color rapidly rising. "All summer, when I am pitching for the Daytons, I give all my time and attention to baseball. I'm under your orders then, and I'm always there whenever you want me.

"When the season is over in the fall, and there will be no more ball-playing for several months, I have as much right to practise law as others players have to loaf all winter or go on the vaudeville stage. You are my manager only while the ball season lasts.

"And when it is over it is none of your business how I spend my time, so long as I am in condition when you call me to practise in the spring."

"H-m! Is that all?" growled Pug O'Neil.

"Yes; that's all. Except that I won't allow anybody, manager or otherwise, to insinuate that I am not square in my dealings, not only as a ball-player, but as a man."

William Warrick, usually quiet in speech and manner, had flamed up now, and as he walked up and down the little room, with teeth and fists clenched, he looked as if nothing would please him more than for the manager to leap from his chair with some belligerent demonstration.

In plain words, Mr. Warrick was fighting mad!

But Pug O'Neil could exercise self-repression when it suited him. So, instead of giving his angry pitcher an excuse for engaging him in a physical combat, he smiled amiably. His steel-blue eyes twinkled with amusement as he looked at Warrick, and he folded his arms composedly.

For nearly a minute, while William Warrick fumed, the manager did not speak. At last he said, in low, even tones:

"Just keep as mad as that at Louis Marquis, Shaw, and the others who say you are getting too old to pitch good ball, and, by Jehoshaphat, you'll make the Delawares look like amateurs in the world's series. Be a lawyer in the winter if you like. As you say, it's none of my business. Now get out there on the field and put over half a dozen swift balls to me. I feel like handling a bat to-day, and I'm going to see whether I can hit you."

CHAPTER VI.

A MUFFED BALL.

"YOU can always hit straight, swift balls," said Warrick with a smile.

"Then don't send that kind in every time. Keep me guessing. Unbuckle a pinch curve when I'm not looking for it, or slide in a fadeaway—anything that you think may get by. That's what you'd do in a game, and it's in practise that you learn how to make your brains count."

O'Neil took off his coat, tightened his belt and reached for his old white uniform cap, with the faded red "D" in front, in which he had coached so many hard-fought games. Pug handled his cap so much in signaling his players that it had become limp, shapeless, and soiled. It was white now only in reminiscence.

But he would not get a new one. He was convinced that his old cap exercised a beneficent influence on his team. He believed that it helped to win games for the Daytons. Like most men—for superstition is not confined to ball-players—he regarded "luck" as much more than a mere word. Not that he depended on it altogether. Good, hard, intelligent work was the most important factor, but luck helped.

"I have some letters to write," he observed regretfully, as he closed his desk. "Important they are, too. But they'll have to wait. How is your arm to-day?"

"Feels in good shape," replied Warrick, stepping into the large room and swinging his right arm in a wide circle. "It generally does."

"Glad to hear it," grunted Pug, locking his door and putting the key in his pocket. "We'll give it a trial. Come on!"

Warrick had already gone out to the field when two persons entered from the street, and the manager's black brows came down over his keen eyes. He muttered something under his breath, and it was not an ejaculation of pleasure. The two persons were Roderick Marquis and Silas Shaw.

"Oh, there you are, Mr. O'Neil," piped

the old man. "Mr. Shaw and I thought we would come out this afternoon and look over the team."

"All right, Mr. Marquis. They're all here," returned O'Neil shortly, as he walked toward the door leading to the field.

"Wait a minute, O'Neil," called out Shaw, his white waistcoat and yellow shoes obstrusive, as usual. "I hope them men of yours are keepin' themselves in condition."

He picked up a heavy dumb-bell and tried to hold it at arm's length. But it was many years since the corpulent Shaw had done any physical labor, and after a moment or two of futile puffing and blowing, he put the weight down and wiped his red face on a silk handkerchief.

"My men know what is required of them, and they practise every day except when they are playing a regular game."

"They don't use those dumb-bells much. These are all over dust."

"Men who are playing ball or practising on the diamond four or five hours a day don't need a great deal of gymnasium exercise," retorted O'Neil. "They have no time to dust dumb-bells either."

"He-he!" tittered Roderick Marquis with rather extravagant mirth. "That's capital, Mr. O'Neil. Dust dumb-bells, eh? Ha, ha, ha! He-he!"

Silas Shaw opened his mouth as if about to make a rejoinder of some sort, but he didn't like the look of O'Neil's eyes under the peak of the white cap. No doubt he did wisely in keeping silence. Any person of ordinary perception could have seen that Pug was not in the humor to be bullied, even by one of the club's big owners.

"It's a long time since I've been in the clubhouse," squeaked old Roderick. "You keep things very nice here for your men."

"Try to!" snapped the manager.

"They have no excuse for not playing good ball, with such a fine gymnasium, a splendid ball-park, so many means of recreation in their clubhouse, and"—with a bow—"so able a manager."

"Durn his old skin!" thought O'Neil. "What's his game, I wonder?" But aloud he said, touching the front of his cap with a forefinger: "Thank you, Mr. Marquis."

"Well, are we goin' out to see these fellows work with the ball?" interposed Shaw, in his graceful way.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Shaw," assented Roderick Marquis. "Let's go into the press-box. We can see better there than anywhere else. You have no objection to that, Mr. O'Neil?"

"Certainly not. The box is empty."

"Come on then, Mr. Shaw."

The old gentleman, with Shaw behind him, trotted toward the door which led from the clubhouse directly to the caged-in space in the grand stand, immediately behind the home-plate, which was reserved for newspaper-writers and telegraphers. Suddenly he stopped.

"Oh, by the way, Mr. O'Neil. My son is out on the field, I suppose?"

"Yes, he's there," growled Pug.

"Is he going to pitch?"

"Sure! All my pitchers go on the mound in turn at practise. That's what they're here for."

"I want to see how Louis compares with the others. This will be a good opportunity." Then, with some hesitation: "By the way, Mr. O'Neil—"

"Yes?"

"I—er—lost my temper this morning, in Judge Carrington's office, and—"

"Oh, that didn't hurt anything," interrupted O'Neil scornfully. "I'm used to having folks fly off the handle when I do things that don't suit them."

"But I want to apologize."

"You don't have to."

The manager was a close student of men, and there was something decidedly unnatural in this humble behavior on the part of Roderick Marquis. Pug was sure that the old man hadn't really regretted his outbreak of the morning.

"Pardon me, my dear sir," insisted Mr. Marquis blandly. "I *do* have to. I was rude enough to say this morning that you lied when you said that the only first-class pitcher in the Dayton club was William Warrick."

"Yes, I know you did," returned Pug with sudden fierceness. "And it's lucky you're an old man or I should have thrown you out of the window. As it was, there

was nothing to be done but to let it go—which I did."

"Of course, Mr. O'Neil, I did not realize what I was saying."

"I know you didn't. And it was the same when you made the crack that Louis was a better pitcher than Bill Warrick. It ain't worth talking about. Let it all go."

The old gentleman had extended his hand, but O'Neil didn't—or wouldn't—see it. He pulled his cap down over his eyes and went out to the field. The smile on Roderick Marquis's wizened face changed to an ugly scowl, and he shook his bony fist at the door which the manager had slammed behind him.

"You uncouth brute!" he spluttered. "You'll keep my son out of his rights because that fellow Warrick is Carrington's son-in-law, will you? Not if I know it. And you'd have thrown me out of the window, would you? Why, I—"

A coarse laugh at his back made him turn angrily. Silas Shaw, his white waistcoat heaving and the vulgarly large diamond in his necktie sparkling obtrusively, was shaking with mirth. He was enjoying the old man's rage so much that he had temporarily forgotten his own resentment.

"Don't let it get away with you, Rod!" he jeered. "That won't help you with Pug O'Neil. He ain't afraid of nothin'. I don't believe he cares any more about you and me bein' owners in this club than he did about the fine the umpire put on him the other day for kickin' on a decision. Anyhow, Carrington and him together has a majority of stock, and if we're goin' to get Warrick out, we'll have to do it by him fallin' down in his pitchin'."

The warning to Roderick Marquis not to let his anger carry him away was not needed. Weak as he seemed to be, his well-balanced intellect had come to his aid already. In his ordinary tranquil tone he returned:

"That is all very well, Mr. Shaw. But suppose he does not 'fall down in his pitchin',' as you phrase it?"

Silas Shaw glanced around the big room to make sure they were alone. Then, stepping close to the old man, he whispered huskily:

"Then somethin' will have to be done to make him."

With a grin, to which the sanctimonious Roderick's response was a sly widening of his thin lips, Silas Shaw shuffled out of the room on his way to the press-box, closely followed by his companion.

They found a practise game already in progress, with O'Neil at bat, William Warrick pitching, and Atkins, the Sioux Indian, catching and giving signals to the pitcher, according to his custom when catching.

There were men in all their regular fielding positions—for, as O'Neil had said a short time before, he had noticed some "rotten fielding" in the last game of the season, and he meant to stiffen up this department.

Just as the two owners entered the press-box Warrick sent over his third pitched ball. O'Neil had let the two others go past, but this one suited him. It was swift and straight, which was the kind Atkins had signaled for, but it never reached his hands, for the manager caught it about the middle of his bat and sent it humming down center field. Warrick was on the alert, and the ball went into his glove with a crash that nearly knocked him over.

"You got it, eh, Pincher?" called out O'Neil. "Well, that's all right. I took a chance on it being that kind of ball. You gave yourself away a little when you raised your right foot like that. I've noticed you always do it when you are putting over a swift one. We'll have a little talk about that later."

William Warrick frowned. He didn't like to be rebuked before the other players, especially with Louis Marquis standing so near. In his disgust he let the ball he had fielded fall to the ground behind him as he walked toward the home-plate, intending to speak to Atkins. Louis picked up the ball unostentatiously.

"I should think you've said all that is called for on the subject," he remarked over his shoulder to O'Neil. "But I tell you, Pug, I'm tired of being the butt of everybody in this club. If my pitching and playing in general doesn't suit, there's a remedy, you know."

The nerves of the pitcher had been strung

to such a point that he did not care just then whether he stayed in the club or not. Why shouldn't he give it all up, and go into partnership with Judge Carrington, as his wife advised? By the Lord, he'd talk to her about it that very night, and if—

Pug O'Neil placed a heavy hand on his shoulder, but, heavy as it was, William Warrick knew that the action was a friendly one. He looked around and saw that the manager's face—it was so hard that some people said it was made of teakwood—wrinkled into a smile.

"Hold on, Pincher. Don't let a little thing get your goat. I didn't mean to call you down before the boys. It was only a friendly tip. Where's the ball? You caught it, I know. I suppose you held it, didn't you?"

"No, he didn't. Here it is!"

Louis Marquis held up the ball so that all could see it, and two or three of the team laughed as O'Neil looked reproachfully at Warrick.

"I'm sorry for that, Pincher," he said. "It was an easy one when once you had it in your glove."

"Well, he muffed it all the same," remarked Louis Marquis with a grin that made Warrick furious.

"Oh, I muffed it, did I?" he shouted. "Well, here's another muffed ball!"

With a lightning movement, he sprang forward and shot his left fist straight at the grinning countenance of his rival. As he did so Pug O'Neil no less swiftly stooped in front of him and, jumping up at the instant Warrick struck at Marquis, caught the blow on his elbow.

"And talking about muffed balls, here's another," said O'Neil sternly. "That little performance will cost you five dollars, Warrick. I won't stand for fighting on the field."

CHAPTER VII.

TICKERY.

THERE was a brief silence. Then William Warrick asked quietly:

"Do you want me to keep on pitching, O'Neil?"

It was difficult for him not to protest violently against the fine, as most of the players usually did. But he swallowed his inclination to do so, and closed down his teeth hard.

In truth, Warrick was a little ashamed of his ebullition of rage. If his quarrel had been with anybody else than Louis Marquis he might have held out his hand in apology. As it was, he could not do it, for he was convinced that Marquis had seen him throw the ball to the ground after holding it for at least a minute, and had deliberately misrepresented him. There could be no shaking hands with such a cur.

Pug O'Neil allowed the ghost of a smile to soften his face as Warrick tacitly admitted the justice of the penalty. The manager loved true manliness, and he placed his favorite pitcher's self-restraint in that category. Therefore it was in an ordinary tone that he answered:

"If you think you are steady enough you can put a few more over. Throw him the ball, Marquis, and then go to bat. Let's see what *you* can do with Warrick's delivery."

Marquis tossed the ball as directed, and slouched to the home-plate, a triumphant grin on his freckled face which lost itself in the fringe of sandy hair over his forehead. He wore his cap, as he usually did his street hat, tilted backward, but he pulled it forward as he took his place in the batter's box ready for business.

He picked up the bat O'Neil had thrown down, and there was an air of jaunty confidence in his attitude which made Atkins, the Indian catcher, grind his teeth. He did not like Marquis.

"That's a good thing, Mr. O'Neil!" exclaimed a piping voice behind the manager.

Roderick Marquis had come down from the press-box when he saw the altercation between his son and Warrick, and had hobbled over to the diamond.

"Why, what—" began O'Neil in surprised indignation.

"It's a good test for a pitcher to face another with a bat in his hand. I used to play ball when I was a young man, you know. Crack him over the fence, Louis!" he called out to his son.

For a moment O'Neil was moved to tell Roderick that only players were permitted to be on the field during practise. But he didn't. Besides, he thought, with a thrill of hope, Mr. Marquis might be hit by the ball, and that wouldn't be so bad either.

"Batting is all right," went on the old gentleman. "But I should like to see my son pitch."

"I'll put him on the mound later," replied Pug. "But I'll let you see him do some stick work first. He's rather uneven in his batting, and needs practise. Warrick's the man to give it to him."

After looking around to see that all his men were in position and the battery ready for business, O'Neil moved down to the coaching-line at first base. Roderick Marquis went with him.

"Play ball!"

Atkins, knees bent and eyes on pitcher, raised his right hand slightly with a peculiar crook of his fingers. It was a signal to Warrick for a pinch curve. Over came the ball desired, and Marquis, with a swing that almost dislocated his ribs—fanned!

Atkins smiled. William Warrick, the zigzag lines on his forehead well defined, took the ball from the catcher with a serious face.

"What's the matter, Louis?" screamed his father. "Why didn't you hit that?"

Pug O'Neil turned and frowned at the excited old man.

"Keep quiet, Mr. Marquis, please. I'll do the coaching when any is required."

"But—"

"If you interfere you'll have to go off the field. It's against the rules for you to be here. I've told you that already."

"But I'm an owner, and—"

"That makes no difference. Play ball!"

Another signal from Atkins to the pitcher, and this time a low, straight liner came in, which Marquis bunted down the infield. Warrick jumped forward and corralled the ball promptly with a neat scoop. Then, without hurry, he walked back to the box.

Old Roderick was raging. His freckled-faced, sandy-haired son looked bewildered.

"Look here, Mr. O'Neil!" cried the old man. "That wasn't a fair ball to give a batter. You know that as well as I do."

"Any ball is fair that goes over the plate," was the short reply. "Anyhow, you'll have to keep quiet while you are out here. If you are going to talk about the play you'll go to the grand stand. This is the last time I'll tell you."

The old man's pinched face flushed with indignation and his blue lips quivered as he labored to be calm. O'Neil glanced at him and hoped the convulsion would not end in apoplexy. He knew that, with a feeble old man like Roderick Marquis, it was even more dangerous to hold back wrath than to let it come forth, no matter how tempestuously.

"Mr. O'Neil!" he gasped.

"Sir?" responded the manager in an uncompromising tone.

"As the manager, and on the ball-grounds, you may regard it as your right to speak to me in this way."

"I do," interjected O'Neil.

"I may say, however, that I am not used to taking orders, especially of such a peremptory nature, from anybody."

"I'd give peremptory orders to the president of the Middle State League himself if he interfered with my business," was the emphatic rejoinder. "Now, Mr. Marquis, if you are through, we'll play ball."

"Just one moment! You say I have no right on the field. Why do you let Judge Carrington come here?"

He nodded in the direction of the players' bench, under the press-box. There sat Judge Carrington, his broad-brimmed, soft hat in one hand, while he pushed back his great mass of crinkly, iron-gray hair with the other. With eager gaze he was watching every movement of his son-in-law.

"I didn't notice the judge before," replied O'Neil. "But *he's* on the bench. That isn't the playing-field. You may go and sit there if you like, and I will never disturb you."

"I'd rather stay here, if you don't mind."

Roderick Marquis's tones were smooth, almost humble, and the bland smile, which, according to his enemies, always meant mischief, had taken the place of the evil scowl that had been there a few moments before.

"All right!"

O'Neil said this with a careless shrug.

Then he waved his hand to Warrick and again gave the order: "Play ball!"

Judge Carrington had reached the grounds only a few minutes before he was espied by Roderick Marquis on the players' bench. He ought not to have left his law-office when he was up to his eyes in work. All the way along in the car he had told himself that. But, busy as he was, with a big day in court before him on the morrow, he determined to come out to the ball-park and see how his son-in-law was getting on.

Strong pressure had been exercised on the judge to make him neglect his clients for this one afternoon. Gertie had ordered him to do it. Her husband was nervous and distressed, and she felt that she must take him in hand. The first thing to be done was to be sure of the conditions that prevailed. That her father must find out.

She had illimitable faith in his judgment, and if he should say it was time for William Warrick to give up baseball, why —he would have to accept the verdict. Therefore, Judge Carrington was on the players' bench to note how "Bill" shaped up in practise.

That was one of the reasons he was there, but not the most important one. The judge had made up his mind as to his son-in-law's status in baseball during the games he had seen this week. What decision he had reached he would tell his daughter and Bill in due time.

Aside from this question was that of Roderick Marquis and Silas Shaw's intentions with regard to the pitcher they had threatened to banish. Judge Carrington knew the two men well enough to be sure that if they had put their heads together to find a way of ousting Warrick, they would lose no time in putting their scheme into operation. So he was quite prepared to find Silas Shaw sitting in state in the press-box, his yellow shoes on a chair in front of him, and his white waistcoat and diamonds glistening in vulgar resplendence.

The judge would have taken a seat in the press-box himself had not Shaw been there. As it was, he preferred the more wholesome atmosphere of the bench. Then he saw Roderick Marquis doddering about near first base and arguing something with Pug O'Neil.

Warrick delivered a pinch curve in response to Atkins's signal. To the astonishment of Judge Carrington, and probably to that of nearly everybody who saw it, Louis Marquis met it fairly and sent the ball far away in a long drive to outfield. Before it had been recovered and whirled back to the pitcher, Louis had reached around to third base. Warrick fired the ball into the baseman on the instant, but the runner was safe.

"Well, what do you think of that, judge?" howled Silas Shaw. "A three-base hit off the star pitcher! Wow! I tell you, Warrick is done! I always said he wouldn't last, and now he's blowed up like a busted balloon! Whoo-oop!"

Shaw had jumped from his chair and rushed to the front of the box, where he could look down at Judge Carrington, who had also left his seat and moved forward on the field in his irrepressible excitement. Old Roderick Marquis was grinning cadaverously, while Pug O'Neil, his countenance distorted by bewildered anger, motioned Louis back to the plate.

"Say, judge!" yelled Shaw. "If this was a game, instead of just practise, Louis would have made a run with the next man up. He couldn't have helped it against such pitchin' as that. Now see him swat Warrick again! I believe he can do it every time. He's got the Pincher's measure now. And the Delawares will have it, too, if O'Neil lets that old has-been over there in the box do the pitchin' for the Daytons in the championship series."

It seemed as if Silas Shaw was trying hard to provoke Judge Carrington to a quarrel. But if that was his endeavor he failed utterly. The judge did not condescend to notice him. His gaze was fixed on Roderick Marquis, who in turn was staring fixedly at the Indian, Atkins, as the latter stooped, ready to catch, with his right hand raised and the fingers moving rapidly.

The twiddling fingers were giving a signal to the pitcher, of course, telling him the kind of ball to send over, in the hope of fooling the batsman. If Louis Marquis could see that signal he would most likely

make a hit, perhaps for another three-bagger, or even a home run. Good league batters would seldom miss a ball if they knew just how it was coming.

Pug O'Neil had already raised his hand for attention, and his mouth was open to give the command, "Play ball!" when Judge Carrington, his hat off and his long gray hair streaming behind, ran toward him headlong, shouting with the full power of his deep voice:

"Stop! Stop! Wait a minute!"

"What's the matter?" demanded Pug, turning angrily.

"The matter?" repeated the judge. "Why, just this, Pug! I'm not going to sit here and see a foul trick like that worked on my son-in-law."

"A foul trick?"

"That's what I said," replied Judge Carrington. Then, pointing at old Roderick Marquis with a finger that in court had made many a quibbling witness tremble, he thundered: *"Before Bill Warrick pitches again I want you to drive that man off the field!"*

CHAPTER VIII.

TUNING UP FOR BIG WORK.

NO one could doubt that Judge Carrington was in earnest. Certainly Roderick Marquis was convinced of the fact. As the judge bore down on him he shrank behind Pug O'Neil, and his shaking right hand—which an instant before had been raised, with the fingers twitching curiously, as he managed to catch the eye of his son at the bat—dropped to his side as if it had been struck down by an iron bar.

"You shall pay for this, Judge Carrington!" he gasped almost inarticulately. "I'll—I'll sue you for defamation of character. I will, as sure as my name is Roderick Marquis. Mr. O'Neil, I appeal to you for protection."

Pug brushed the whimpering old man aside as he said to the judge with his brows drawn low over his eyes:

"Tell me what the trick is, Judge Carrington."

"Just this," was the quick reply. "Your catcher is giving signals to the pitcher for certain balls, as is regularly done and as the rules permit. Of course, Louis Marquis, as a member of the team, knows the signals, and, in a league game, when he is in the pitcher's box, responds to them."

"Go on."

"Well, it is simple enough. You are trying out Bill Warrick in practise to see what he can do against a good batsman. Louis Marquis can't hit him unless he knows the kind of ball that is coming over. Roderick Marquis is watching the signals and repeating them to his son. That is how Louis managed to make that three-base hit just now, and if I hadn't stopped the play he'd probably have made another off the ball Warrick was going to put over. That's all."

"It's not true! The judge is mistaken!" howled Roderick. "Why, I don't know the meaning of the signals."

"That may be. I don't know them either," rejoined the judge. "But you were watching the catcher's fingers and making exactly the same motions with your own. *I saw you do it.*"

"I tell you—" blurted out Roderick.

"That will do, Mr. Marquis," interrupted Pug decisively. "You will either sit in the grand stand or go outside altogether. You can't stay on the field."

"But—"

"Go off the field!" roared O'Neil.

Roderick Marquis turned on his heel, trotted over to the door of the clubhouse, and disappeared. Pug watched him till he was out of sight, and smiled in his hard fashion as he saw that Silas Shaw—white waistcoat, yellow shoes, diamonds and all—went down from the press-box at the same instant.

Judge Carrington strode back to the players' bench without another word. He had vindicated the right of his son-in-law to fair play, and was content to let Pug conduct the practise in his own way.

For more than an hour the Dayton team worked on the diamond. William Warrick did not give anybody a hit—after that three-base performance by Louis Marquis in which his father had slyly assisted him. The pitcher seemed to be invincible when

once old Roderick was away. When at last O'Neil gave the word to quit, he and Judge Carrington both had decided that Warrick was as good as ever in the box—at least, in that day's practise.

Louis Marquis did nearly as well in pitching as Warrick, but not quite. Larry Donahue got a single off him, and Chief Atkins another, while Warrick drove a long one to right field, but outside the foul-line. On the other hand, no one was able to rap him for a triple, as had been done to Warrick.

"Pincher Warrick will do for the first game with the Delawares anyhow," remarked Pug, as he and Judge Carrington went into the clubhouse together. "I'll use him in about five games out of the seven, probably—if we have to play that many."

"I don't think you will if Bill pitches," was the judge's emphatic opinion. "He isn't so slow at bat, either, you'll notice. I'll bet he'd have clouted Marquis's delivery all over the meadow if he'd had some one to steal signals for him, as that scoundrelly old Roderick did for his big lummox of a son. Why, Bill would have been good for a home run every time he went to bat, the way he handled the timber this afternoon."

"Maybe," assented O'Neil. "But the main thing is that he is still a terror in the pitcher's box. If he *is* getting old, he didn't show it to-day. Let him be in as good form in the championship series as he is now, and he'll have them all swinging at the wind. There isn't one of them can hit him."

"I like to hear you say that, Pug. That's my feeling."

"Yes. I have confidence in him—if he is in form," murmured O'Neil slowly, half to himself.

"Let's see, Pug! The championship series begins in Muncie on the 10th in three weeks from now, doesn't it?"

Judge Carrington either did not hear the few qualifying words of the manager, or he chose to ignore them. He had spoken in his usual cheery, breezy way.

"Yes," replied the manager. "It was practically certain that the Delawares would get the pennant of the Intercolonial League, and arrangements were made for the first game to be in Muncie, their home, nearly a month ago."

"Subject to possible change, of course?"

"Sure! Nothing is certain in this world—especially in baseball. A game is never lost till the end of the ninth inning, and no team has the pennant until it has won its last game against the next club in the list."

"They knew the Delawares would win out, but they weren't so positive about the Daytons, were they?"

"No; how could they? Weren't the Joliets running us so hard for first place that it was nip and tuck for two months?"

"Well, I felt sure we would win," declared the judge with a smile.

"That's all right, judge. So did I. I felt it down back of my breastbone that we just *couldn't* lose. But there were some good judges of ball—President Taylor, of our league, among them—who were—well, nervous."

Judge Carrington took him up rather sharply.

"Nervous? About what?"

The two men were in the clubhouse now, and Pug elbowed his way through the crowd of excited, noisy players to his own room. The judge followed him in, and the manager closed the door before he replied to the last question. Then he said seriously:

"Well, I'll tell you. They were afraid about Warrick. We've got to face the fact that a lot of people insist he's weakening. I hope he isn't. But he's thirty-four years old, and most of the fans think he's ten years older than that because he always seems so thoughtful. He doesn't show himself much around town, and folks get an idea it is because he is all in after a game. As for his age, why, thirty-four is a critical time for a ball-player. He *may* feel his years then—and he may not. Some do and some don't, you know. As for Warrick—"

"As for Warrick?" broke out the judge irritably. "Yes, look at this afternoon, how he—"

Pug raised his hand in deprecation and shook his head dubiously.

"I know, judge. He pitched like a

champion, and his batting was almost as good. But you and I know that it may have been only a spurt."

"Why should it have been a spurt?"

"He was boiling mad because he knew the Marquises were trying to hang it on him. That's why. It made him put every ounce of ball-playing in his body and soul into his work, and magnificent work it was. But—"

"Well?" demanded Judge Carrington, as Pug paused.

"After a hard strain there's liable to come a—a—what's that word again?—a—"

"A reaction, do you mean?"

"Yes, judge—that's it. Come over here. Look out of the window."

Judge Carrington went to the side of O'Neil, who had been looking out across the field as he talked. William Warrick was walking slowly toward the clubhouse with Chief Atkins. They were the last men to leave the diamond.

The Indian, straight and sinewy, moved with the easy stride that had carried his ancestors over many a weary trail when Wyoming was a wilderness and the red man played a more bloody game than baseball. He was apparently as fresh as before he began to play. Warrick trudged by his side as if walking were a labor. He stumbled now and then.

Judge Carrington regarded the two men for an instant without speaking. He could not but remark the contrast in their gait and carriage. But he did not mean to admit any weakness in his son-in-law, even to himself. So he snorted obstinately:

"There's nothing wrong with Warrick. He's a little tired, of course. You've kept him in the box nearly all the afternoon. Pitching is hard work—as hard in practise as in a game. Naturally it has taken something out of him. When he wasn't pitching he was at bat. And he put his whole heart and energy into what he was doing."

"Yes, he always works conscientiously," admitted Pug.

"I know he does. He'll be all right when he gets into his street clothes. Why, he could pitch a game to-morrow that would win against any team either in the Middle State League or the Intercolonials. I don't believe anything could break *his* nerve. He'll make a show of the Delawares."

"I hope you're right," said Pug heartily. "He has plenty of nerve and he'll fight to the last ditch, I know. But nerve isn't *stamina*, judge. If it were, the history of baseball would have taken a different twist many a time."

"Bill Warrick isn't lacking either in stamina or nerve, Pug. He'll show you that when he pitches the first game against the Delawares at Muncie. I know him."

O'Neil only shrugged his shoulders. But Judge Carrington, as he rode back to the city with his son-in-law, said, in an offhand way that he hoped concealed his anxiety:

"How do you feel after your practise, Bill?"

"Splendid!" replied Warrick. "Never better."

Later, in the privacy of his home, Gertie put the same query to her husband, and he sank into his own chair and bowed his head.

CHAPTER IX.

1 TO 0 IN THE NINTH.

THREE weeks soon sped away. The Daytons practised every day, and when the morning of October 10 dawned, Pug O'Neil was satisfied that his team was on edge—trained to the minute.

It was a great day for Muncie. The first of the series of baseball games for the championship of the Middle States was to be played there, and if the whole population of the city—fifteen thousand or so—was not on the ball-ground when the two nines began their preliminary warming up, enough people were there to pack the grand stand and bleachers, and to form a fringe two or three deep in the outfield.

Of course many of those who crowded into the seats had come from Dayton. Among them Judge Carrington, with his daughter, Gertrude Warrick, were prominent. Silas Shaw and Broderick Marquis sat not far from them, and close by were several hundred rooters for the Dayton team who had journeyed from that city to

see their men uphold the honor of their home by winning the first game for the championship.

For of course the Daytons *must* win! No Dayton man, woman, or boy would be disloyal enough to allow the slightest possibility of any other ending of the contest.

"They are a husky-looking lot," remarked Judge Carrington to his daughter when the Delawares took their places in the field for the first inning, with the Daytons at bat.

They were indeed husky-looking, as Pug O'Neil admitted to himself with a snap of his eyes. His men would have to play as well as they knew how, if they meant to beat these nine giants on their own soil. Well, all the better. It would be eminently worth while to defeat such an almost invincible foe.

Pug glanced over at William Warrick, who sat on the bench, ready for his turn at bat, when it should come. The manager's granite visage lighted up. He never had seen his star pitcher look better. Warrick's skin was a healthy brown and red, his eyes shone with eagerness to do battle, and his movements, as he got up from the bench to bend over the row of bats on the ground, were resilient and suggestive of a latent energy which he found it hard to restrain.

The pitchers were announced—Dave Callahan for the Delawares and William Warrick for the Daytons. Manager Price, of the Delawares, and Pug O'Neil shook hands, according to custom. Then Pug went to the coaching line at third base, while Price, who was not in uniform, seated himself on the bench. The umpires took their places—one behind the batter and the other near the pitcher, who was already in the box.

Chief Atkins, the first man on the Daytons' batting list, stepped to the plate and cast his eye upon the pitcher, Callahan. The two men were strikingly alike in physical make-up. Both were tall and wiry, with the unmistakable suggestion of strength, suppleness, and speed which marks the effective ball-player everywhere. Incidentally, both were of the type of William Warrick, who was an ideal baseball warrior in every line of his lean frame and determined, grave visage.

For a few seconds there was that feeling of tense expectancy that is always noted before a big game begins. Then things began to move. The mayor of Muncie was in a flag-draped box near the press enclosure, surrounded by other members of the municipal administration. The umpire, behind the bat, walked toward the mayor and smiled. His honor arose and threw a new ball to him, which was immediately hurled across to Callahan.

"Play ball!"

The first game of the championship series was on.

Every eye was on the pitcher as he twisted the ball about in his fingers to get a grip on it that would satisfy him. Then, with left foot forward, the mighty Callahan put both hands behind his head and smiled grimly at the batsman. Chief Atkins accepted the challenge and flung it back from his dark eyes.

Suddenly, with a convulsive twist of his body and a bewildering whirl of both arms, Callahan brought down his right hand, and the ball shot across like a cannon-ball.

Unfortunately for the pitcher's intentions, he had put so much speed into his delivery that he lost control of direction, and the ball went wide. The Indian did not try to reach it.

"One ball!" sang out the umpire.

"If he keeps on like that we'll have an easy time," remarked Judge Carrington to Gertie Warrick.

She did not reply. Her whole attention was on the game.

Callahan gritted his teeth and pulled himself together. The next ball cut the inner corner of the plate, and Atkins jumped back and swung at it.

"One strike!"

There was a howl of joy from the Delaware rooters. But it did not last long. Again Callahan put over a good one, and the batsman, meeting it fairly, sent it whirring down the infield, past pitcher and short-stop, and on to the man guarding center-field.

Atkins was already flying down the baseline. He touched first base and dashed

to second! *The center-fielder fumbled!* A shriek of "Come on!" from Pug O'Neil, and on went the runner to third.

The thousands of Delaware sympathizers were bellowing to the panting fielder to send in the ball. But he hadn't got it yet, and Pug roared to the Indian to keep going. He did "keep going," and, as the ball came hurtling across to the catcher, the Chief bounded to the home-plate and threw himself upon it at full length!

The Daytons had scored a home-run with the first man at bat!

Instantly there was the deafening uproar which usually accompanies a sensational play, and even the self-contained Pug O'Neil permitted himself a decorous buck-and-wing dance on the coaching line while Atkins walked to the bench and Louis Marquis went to bat.

But Marquis could not hit Callahan effectively. He missed two altogether and then rolled a little one down toward the pitcher, which was corralled by Callahan and tossed to first base while Marquis was two yards away.

No more runs were made by the Daytons in this inning. Callahan steadied himself, and the next two men went out on strikes in a few minutes.

It was going to be a stiff game. Everybody saw that. Callahan seemed to have the Daytons' measure, and no one doubted that Warrick would cut out the Delawares' work for them.

"Oh, Will!" murmured Gertie, apostrophizing her husband as he walked calmly to the pitcher's box. "Don't let them get any runs—not one! Don't, dear, don't!" Then, turning to her father: "Doesn't he look splendid?"

"Fine!" assented the judge briefly. "I look to see him pitch a good game."

"He will, I know. He told me so this morning as soon as he was awake. Whenever he says that before he is out of bed I know he'll do it. Still, I am anxious."

"Yes, and there are others," was Judge Carrington's grim response.

Munden, the center-fielder whose fumble had given the Daytons their run, was first man up for the Delawares. He proved to be a strong batter. He was cautious, too, and though two strikes were called on him, he contrived to land on a swift ball that came sizzling over the center of the plate and sent it over to left field. But it was caught by the third baseman and Munden was out.

Warrick got better as he went on. Munden's was the only hit made in that inning. The next two men went out quickly—one on strikes and the other on a little pop-fly that fell into Warrick's hands without his having to more than half try.

Again the Daytons went to bat. But they made no more runs. Warrick got a chance to face the Delawares' pitcher this time, and knocked a two-base hit. That was the last his side got up to the end of the eighth inning, and their opponents did no better. Both Callahan and Warrick were masters of the situation throughout.

When the Daytons went to bat for the ninth inning the score still stood 1 to 0 in their favor.

Pug O'Neil had talked seriously to his men as they came in from the field in the eighth. He reminded them that their advantage of one run did not mean that they would certainly win the game, and he implored them to bat cautiously first and then with all the ginger that was in them.

"We are one to nothing," he told them. "That isn't enough. We want two or three more runs to cinch the game. If the Delawares get only one run in this eighth inning, that will make us even for the ninth. Then they'll strain their very heart-strings to get another run and beat us."

"We don't mean to let them do it," interjected Warrick, the zigzag lines on his forehead knotting themselves.

"I believe you, Pincher," returned Pug. "I depend on your shutting them out in this inning. But if they do hit you, it will be up to the fielders. Now all of you go in and take care they don't get even one run."

Well, they didn't get the run. Warrick sent over a puzzling procession of pinch curves, slows, fadeways, cannon-shots, and in and out shoots that the Delawares could not do anything with. The side was out with only one man on a base—the first.

So the ninth inning began 1 to 0.

"Now, Atkins, knock him out of the box," was the manager's injunction to the Indian. "Callahan isn't such a wonder. You got a home-run off him at the beginning of the game. See what you can do this time. Don't be afraid of him."

The Chief did not reply. When his grandfather was a young man, and was instructed by his elders to bring in the scalp of an enemy, he did not say anything; he simply brought in the scalp. That was Atkins's attitude in this baseball game. As he faced the pitcher he clutched his bat and resolved to hit out at least a three-bagger if it could be done.

On the other hand, Price, manager of the Delawares, had said a few terse words to his own men, encouraging them to put forth the best that was in them. Both he and Pug O'Neil were too experienced to say too much, and neither would have spoken an unkind or petulant thing to his men on any account. A rattled team is a losing one. So Callahan was resolved that no one should make a hit off him in the inning, and no one did. The Delawares went to bat for the last time hopeful that they would get the two runs necessary to victory—or at least the one that would tie the game and give them another inning or more in which to win.

William Warrick realized that now more than ever the game was in his hands, but he was of that well-balanced temperament which knows nothing of nervousness in a great crisis. He was as calm—to all outward appearance—as he stepped lightly to the box, as if he had been going to sit down to dinner, instead of pitting himself against the most dangerous line of batters in the Intercolonial League.

Munden, the first man up, struck out. He could not make anything of the elusive delivery of the Daytons' star pitcher this time, although he had contrived to hit it several times before during the game—without profit, however.

The Delawares' second batter was Martens, a gigantic individual of Swedish birth, whose blue eyes and yellow hair glistened so in the afternoon sun that some of the players said it made their eyes ache. Martens only laughed. He did not mind a little good-natured fun at his expense. Besides, he was busy. He was a left-handed batter, and it was said of him that he was more likely to hit a difficult ball than an easy one.

But he had not done any brilliant work this afternoon, and Warrick was not afraid of him. It chanced, however, that the pinch curve which, in response to Atkins's signal, the pitcher sent over, was just what he was looking for. He caught it squarely on the nose—as he expressed it afterward—and banged out a two-bagger.

"What makes Will rock himself in that funny way?" said Gertie to Judge Carrington.

Warrick had turned to glance behind him at Martens on second base, to make sure he was not trying to steal third, and Gertie's quick eye had noted that her husband swayed as if he were going to topple over. But he caught himself with a jerk, and the next moment pitched a ball so swift that it knocked Atkins backward as it slammed into his glove.

"I guess that swaying was only one of the didoes pitchers cut up before they let the ball go," replied the judge carelessly. "Bill Warrick doesn't give us many frills and scallops of that sort; but I suppose he couldn't be a *real* pitcher without some of them."

The next pitched ball was an elusive slow one, and Warrick sent it in while Judge Carrington was speaking. The batsman managed to hit it for a fly to the infield. Warrick rushed forward and caught it. Then, like lightning, he hurled it to third base, toward which Martens was sprinting with all the speed he could get out of his long legs. But he was only half-way to the base when the ball reached the baseman and was touched to the bag.

"Whoof!" spluttered the big Swede in disgust.

"You're out!" shouted the umpire. "*Game!*"

William Warrick's double play had settled the matter. The first game of the championship series between the Delawares, of the Intercolonials, and the Daytons, of the Middle State League, had been won by the Dayton Club, 1 to 0.

"Bully for you, Pincher!" exclaimed Atkins heartily, as he and the pitcher walked across the field together.

William Warrick did not reply—nor did he notice the yells of admiration from the spectators who were tumultuously leaving the grand stand and bleachers. He had nearly reached the bench, and he began to stagger even before he sank upon it wearily.

"Come on, old man!" urged Atkins. "Let's get inside. You're tired, and I don't wonder at it. You sure did pitch a great game."

He put his arm around Warrick and helped him into the room set apart for the visiting club under the grand stand. No sooner were they inside than Dayton's star pitcher fell to the floor in a dead faint!

CHAPTER X.

THE SEVENTH GAME.

IT did not take long to revive the exhausted pitcher. The judicious use of a palm-leaf fan, cold water, and a few sips of brandy from a flask that Pug O'Neil kept in his pocket for exactly such cases, brought him around in a few minutes.

"Don't let anything of this get out," O'Neil warned his men. "Warrick is all right, and we don't want the fans to get any other idea. Understand?"

The men understood, and not even Gertie knew that her husband had fainted under the grand stand when later on he stepped into a motor-car with her and Judge Carrington to ride to their hotel.

As Muncie and Dayton are only about a hundred miles apart, it had been agreed that two games should be played in each city alternately, with the seventh—if a seventh should be necessary to determine victory—in Dayton. The team winning four games out of a possible seven would be the champions.

"You look rather pale, Will," remarked Gertie solicitously, as they rode along. "Do you feel well?"

"Excellent," he replied lightly. "A little tired, that's all. I don't have to play to-morrow. Louis Marquis will pitch the game."

"I hope he'll lose."

"I don't," laughed Warrick. "We want the Daytons to be champions of the world, you know."

But Louis Marquis *did* lose. The Daytons were beaten 3 to 1 next day. Then they went to Dayton and lost the third game, too. This time it was not the fault of Marquis's pitching; at least, not directly. O'Neil had put in one of his second division twirlers, Gordon, because he would not trust Marquis, after his weak exhibition in Muncie. So Gordon went into the box, and was promptly walloped 7 to 2 for the Delawares.

"Two straight against us," grumbled Pug. "I want Warrick to have a good rest, and I can't use him for another day. I'll have to try Marquis again for this fourth game. Now he is on his own ground he ought to be able to shut out the Delawares easily."

Louis Marquis, full of confidence, agreed with the manager. So did old Roderick, his father, while Silas Shaw loudly insisted that Louis *couldn't* lose, adding that it was a lucky thing the Daytons were not depending on "that old-timer Warrick" to break the hoodoo. He did not say this in the hearing of the Daytons' manager, however. Pug O'Neil had a way of resenting criticism of his men that had made Mr. Shaw feel uncomfortable more than once.

But ill-luck remained with the Dayton Club, and the Delawares banged Louis Marquis's delivery all over the lot—singles, doubles, and triples—until at the end of the ninth inning there was a 5 to 1 victory for them, giving the Delawares three games out of the four required for the championship.

"Pincher, you'll have to pitch to-morrow in Muncie," said Pug, as he joined Warrick on the bench at the end of the slaughter. "It's up to you now. We've *got* to win the three remaining games."

"Very well," was Warrick's quiet reply. "I'll try to get them."

"Oh, I'm not going to ask you to pitch all three," said the manager quickly. "But if you can nail that one to-morrow it will put heart into Marquis for the next, and then you can wind up the series. You

have more nerve than Marquis when everything rests on your shoulders."

"Thanks!" smiled Warrick. "Let's see; that last game will be in Dayton. Well, that's an advantage. But if we lose either of them in Muncie it will be all over. The Delawares only want the one."

"They mustn't get it," growled Pug. "When you've won your game to-morrow you can come right home and rest for a day before tackling the last one on the Dayton grounds. Marquis will be in the box for the sixth, and he'll have to *pull* through. I'll have a little talk with the boys, and you can bet they'll give him all the support he could ask."

That was the end of the conversation, and as Warrick went out to ride home to supper with his wife in Judge Carrington's car, he resolved to win that fifth game in Muncie if he fainted between every inning. He had never told either Gertie or the judge about his collapse after the first game.

Things began to come right for the Daytons. At the end of the sixth game the teams were tied, and next day William Warrick walked over to the slab to pitch the seventh and deciding game of the series. He had shut out the Delawares in the fifth in Muncie by 1 to 0, and Marquis the next day had beaten them 4 to 3. It had been a close thing for Marquis, but a lucky catch and a put out at second base by Larry Donahue had prevented the Delawares getting two runs that looked almost certain for them. Besides the man on first who died at second, there had been one on third, but the game was ended long before the latter could get to the home plate.

Now here was the test battle to be fought with all the pomp and circumstance befitting such a great occasion. Never had there been a larger attendance at a baseball game in Dayton. And no wonder!

Had not the home club saved itself from defeat by unheard-of prowess? After losing three games consecutively to the Intercolonial representatives, had it not swept down the opposing ranks and brought itself up to even terms, and was it not now, in every respect, fit to play the game of the century for the championship?

Why, it was tremendous! And how thoroughly the people realized it was shown by the fact that every seat in the grand stand, every inch of space on the bleachers, and every bit of ground where spectators were permitted to stand, was occupied.

Not only Daytonians were there. Trainloads of visitors had come from Muncie and other places in Indiana to see what the Delawares would do to Pug O'Neil's celebrated team. With the mighty Callahan in the box, what chance would the Daytons have? In the opinion of the Delawares' supporters, it ought to be nothing less than a massacre. On the other hand, Dayton was positive their star pitcher, William Warrick, would turn the Delawares inside out.

It would be a pitchers' battle beyond question. But the pitchers would not lack worthy support. Every player in both teams was keyed up to the breaking point. Desperate fighting was in the very air. Would the Delawares carry away the championship for the Intercolonials, or would the Middle State League wear the diadem of victory by grace of these dashing warriors of Dayton? The answer would soon be given.

The home team, having the choice of innings, had sent the visitors to bat. As in everything he did in baseball, the astute O'Neil had his reason for letting them face the pitcher first. He felt that Warrick was in perfect form, and he hoped the Delawares would be so trimmed by him at the opening of the game that they would be demoralized at once.

Whether they were actually stricken with terror or not, there is no doubt that Warrick pitched a magnificent game. He retired the first three batters in one, two, three order so quickly that the Daytons were going to bat before most of the spectators understood that the first half was over.

But if Warrick was at his best, so seemed to be Callahan. He also struck out his first, second, and third man, and Atkins, who had been first at bat for the Daytons, declared when he reached the bench that he did not think anybody could hit the Delawares' pitcher that day.

So it went, inning after inning, and the ninth opened without a run having been made on either side.

The championship score stood three games to three. Now both the Delawares and the Daytons were resolved to settle the question of supremacy in the seventh. Whether the one game would be enough remained to be seen. At all events, that seventh game had been a "hummer" so far; that was certain.

As Warrick left the bench to walk to the pitcher's mound for the ninth inning he chanced to glance up at the grand stand. In a box at the very front were Roderick Marquis and Silas Shaw. For a second the old man caught Warrick's eye. In that brief glance were such malignity, defiance, and ridicule that only the indomitable nerve and self-control of the Daytons' star pitcher prevented his replying in words to this obvious endeavor to "rattle" him.

But the rules forbid a player to speak to a spectator, and Warrick seldom broke rules. So he coolly turned his eyes away from old Roderick Marquis's wizened face and walked on.

Through the confusion of tongues such as always breaks out in the pauses of a big game Warrick believed he heard Silas Shaw's harsh voice shouting: "Go in and get yours, you old fossil! They'll slug you out of the box!" But he was not sure. Anyhow, who cared what a fellow like Shaw might say?

Munden was the first Delaware at bat, and he knocked out a two-bagger on Warrick's second pinch curve, after missing the first. The Delaware rooters howled with joy. But Munden could not expect to win the game all by himself. He looked anxiously to see what the next man at bat would do.

Well, the next man didn't do anything to help him, for he struck out. So did the next. Then came Martens, the big left-handed Swede. He looked very serious as he faced Warrick. *Two men out and one on second!* A great deal depended on Martens. The noise from the spectators had become deafening.

"Now, Martens! You good old southpaw! It's up to you!"

There never was such a noise in a baseball field that some fellow with harveyized lungs could not make himself heard. So it was that a voice like the fog-siren of an ocean liner came from the bleachers and uttered the above exhortation effectively, while its owner seemed about to hurl himself bodily into the field in his excitement.

But there was a Dayton man with quite as loud a voice, and he bellowed above the awful din:

"Don't mind him, Warrick! Keep steady, Pincher! You've got 'em going!"

William Warrick stood squarely in the box his eyes fixed on the batsman, as he considered what kind of ball to give him. A left-handed batter is always an uncertain quantity for a pitcher. But Atkins decided the matter for Warrick. He signaled for a low swift one. Warrick smiled and nodded. He also had noticed that Martens had had greater difficulty in meeting this sort of ball than any other.

Warrick poised himself to send over a hot one—the hottest in his repertoire—when suddenly a dizziness swept over him and his arm dropped to his side. The next moment he fell headlong to the ground, the ball still clutched convulsively in his hand.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE FIRING LINE.

INSTANTLY the whole field was in confusion, while in the grand stand and bleachers the uproar became greater than ever. Dozens of men, led by the fog-horn Delaware man, jumped over the barriers and swarmed across the diamond, in spite of the vigorous opposition of the ground-keepers and players. Following them came another phalanx from the grand stand. The game would be a riot in another minute.

Atkins, the big Sioux catcher, was the first to reach the prostrate pitcher. He dropped on one knee and rested Warrick's head and shoulders on the other, snatching off the cap of the half-unconscious man as he did so.

"Time!" called out the umpire, thus

legally suspending the game until he should start it again.

"What hit you, Pincher? Don't give out!" pleaded Atkins. "What—"

"Doped!" growled Pug O'Neil sententiously, as he also knelt by the side of Warrick. "That's what it looks like."

"No, Pug. It isn't that. I'm just weak," murmured Warrick. "But I'm coming around. I can pitch the game all right. Where's my cap?"

He took his cap from Atkins—who had been fanning him with it—and, supporting himself on the catcher's shoulder, staggered to his feet.

"You can't finish the game; that's sure," observed O'Neil.

"Of course he can't! It would be an outrage on everybody, especially the owners!" piped an angry, squeaking voice. "Put in another pitcher."

Pug O'Neil swung around. He faced old Roderick Marquis.

"What the blazes does this mean?" demanded the manager, almost beside himself with rage, as he made a dive at the old man.

It was perhaps lucky that Louis Marquis had accompanied his father over the field, for he stepped between the infuriated manager and Roderick just in time.

"The Lord forgive me for threatening an old man!" exclaimed Pug piously. Then, seeing Louis, he thundered: "What are *you* doing here? Get back to the bench till I tell you to move! Gitt! Or I'll—"

A significant swing of his knotty fist—a fist that every player in his team held in wholesome respect—accentuated the command. Louis Marquis wisely backed away. He did not go far, however. He meant to pitch the remainder of the inning, and he wanted to be at hand.

William Warrick was standing up alone by this time. The swimming in his brain had ceased, and his indomitable will-power enabled him to appear almost his normal self. As he stood there, turning the ball about in his hand, a roar of encouragement arose from the people who had thronged upon the field, but who were being gradually sent back to their places.

The star pitcher smiled and swung his right arm as if to show that he was still in condition to pitch the game. Roderick Marquis mumbled something and shook his head at Pug to signify that it wouldn't do. The manager crushed the old man with a contemptuous frown and walked forward to speak to Warrick.

"Look here, Pug," said Warrick. "I want to show you something."

He swung his right arm in a complete circle twice, to test his power. Then, with a yell to Captain Larry Donahue, who was waving the crowd away at first base, he sent the ball over to him with all the steam he could command. Donahue caught it and immediately fired it back.

Smack! Warrick received it in his bare hands with a precision that brought forth a shout of appreciation from Chief Atkins. The catch was as workmanlike as any he had ever done. But O'Neil, who was watching keenly, noted that the pitcher fell back and wavered weakly, as if the shock, slight as it was, were a little too much for him.

"Larry!" called out the manager. "Put Marquis in to pitch."

"But, Pug," protested Warrick, "I—"

"Go over to the clubhouse. I'll see you there," interrupted O'Neil. "Louis Marquis will pitch the remainder of the inning."

"He ought to have pitched the whole game," squeaked old Roderick, who had persistently remained on the infield. "My boy is the best pitcher in the Middle State League, and you know it, Mr. O'Neil."

"Of course he is," broke in a harsh voice behind the manager. "Any manager who knew his business would have put him in the box at first and saved this game."

It was Silas Shaw speaking, and as O'Neil turned and got the full force of the yellow shoes and white waistcoat, he went white with anger. Mr. Shaw was shaking his head obstinately. The manager walked over to him with a gliding step that his men knew always meant mischief. So near did he go to the defiant Shaw that that individual took a backward step.

"Your name is Shaw, isn't it?" asked Pug quietly.

"You know my name well enough," blustered Shaw. "I'm one of the owners of this club, and I want to say right here—"

But whatever it was he wanted to say, he didn't say it. The umpire called out impatiently that he was going to start the game, for Louis Marquis was already walking over to the pitcher's box, and the spectators were loudly shouting for the game to go on.

William Warrick tossed the ball to Louis Marquis, and the umpire told him he could warm up with a few balls before he began to pitch. Atkins, in his place behind Martens, the big Swedish batsman, took the ball from Marquis and hurled it back, just as Silas Shaw and old Roderick walked toward the grand stand together.

"I guess Louis fixed him," whispered Shaw. "He won't interfere with your son any more, and I don't think the crowd will ever want to see him pitch again, eh, Rod?"

"I don't know what you mean," declared the old man, with a slimy smile.

"All right, Rod! You're a wonder! You never will admit anything, even to a man who knows all about it, even when you know he knows. But that drink of water he took in the clubhouse, right after Louis had used the cup, was enough, you see."

"Hush!" whispered Roderick.

"Sure I'll hush," chuckled Silas Shaw. "But I'm even with him for losing that lawsuit for me, and you've got your boy in as star pitcher of the Daytons. So we're both satisfied. *As for the dope*—"

"Hush, I tell you."

"Play ball!" shouted the umpire, and the game went on, while the two men who had been talking so mysteriously took their places again in the grand stand.

Gertie Warrick and Judge Carrington were in the clubhouse when Captain Larry Donahue led William Warrick in, the latter protesting there was nothing the matter with him.

"I felt a little faint, Gertie," he explained. "But Mr. O'Neil was afraid to trust me to go on. Thought I was too old, I suppose. That is the thing people have been saying about me lately," he added, with a bitter laugh.

"Anyhow, I'm thinking you couldn't have done worse than Marquis!" shouted Judge Carrington, who had been standing at the half-open door watching the game.

"The slob! There goes Martens for third base! Look! Munden is in, and—and—jumping Jerusalem! Throw up that ball! *Throw it!* Too late! Martens has made a home run!"

"What? Is that true, judge?" cried Warrick, wild with excitement, and every vestige of his weakness gone. "Oh, let me get out there! I must!"

Gertie clung to his arm as he rushed to the door.

"No, Will! You must not! You can't! You're not strong enough! Stay here with me! Do! My dear! Oh, Will, won't—"

But he tore himself away and dashed out to the field. As he got there he plumped into Pug O'Neil.

"Pug!" he cried piteously. "I must go in again. Marquis has lost his nerve! He must have, or he wouldn't have let them get those two runs! Why, that's three! We shall have to get four to win, and if Marquis stays there it will be worse. I tell you I can pitch. I'm as sound as ever now. There was something made me dizzy a while ago, but it's all over! Pug, *won't* you let me? I *must* get on the firing line just this once more!"

Pug O'Neil was a man of quick decision. Also his judgment of men was as nearly infallible as anything human can be. He looked across the field to the pitcher's box, where Marquis was standing, his arms by his sides, the picture of helplessness. Then he turned his eyes upon the eager man by his side, and he knew he could trust his star pitcher for this once, however it might be afterward.

He signaled to Captain Donahue, and a minute later Marquis was walking to the bench, while William Warrick, standing like a statue on the pitcher's plate, every muscle taut, nerves at concert pitch, and the fire of battle in his eye, looked at the batsman who had just stepped up, and then glanced at Atkins for a hint as to the kind of ball to be sent in.

"Pinch curve!" signaled the Chief.

The Delaware at bat was the team's right fielder, and his particular skill consisted in taking any kind of ball that might come in. He was not a very strong batter, but generally hit what came to him.

But he didn't do it this time. The pinch curve was too much for him. He hit at it with the best intentions, and—missed.

"One strike!"

Again he got a pinch curve, and again missed it. But the third time he hit the high swift one for which the Chief signaled and rolled it down to first base. Before he could get there himself *he was out.*

But the Delawares had made three runs in their inning, and their confident looks as they went to the field was echoed in the shouts of encouragement from the Muncie rooters, and reflected in the blank faces of the thousands of Daytonians.

William Warrick walked to the bench with a firmer step than he had shown at any time in the game.

"He's quite well again, father, isn't he?" said Gertie smilingly to the judge, as they stood at the clubhouse door looking out to welcome him.

"It looks so," returned the judge quietly.

CHAPTER XII.

A PINCH HIT.

"DO you feel all right now, Warrick?" asked O'Neil, before he left the bench to go over to the coaching line at third base.

"As well as ever, Pug."

"What do you think made you give out? I should say you had been doped. Have you eaten or drunk anything since you left home?"

"Not a thing," was the prompt reply. "It wasn't anything like that, I tell you. You know I've pitched a great many games this summer, and—"

"I know all about that," interrupted the manager a little impatiently. "Are you sure you didn't take a drink of water in the clubhouse just before the game? I saw you at the cooler with the cup in your hand."

"I had the cup half full of water and was going to drink. But I changed my mind. I was rather hot, and I was afraid cold water might cramp me. So I emptied the cup into the pail, instead of down my throat."

"H-m! And you didn't drink water or anything?"

"Not a drop, Pug."

"Well, don't until the game is over. I want you to knock out a home-run when you go to bat. Probably we shall need it."

"All right, Pug," laughed Warrick.

Atkins, the first man up for the Daytons, had been selecting a bat from the row in front of the bench. He and Pug walked over to the diamond together, each taking his proper place.

Evidently Callahan, the Delawares' pitcher, was not in good form, for the Indian soon took his place on balls, and Marquis followed him to bat.

"You want to do your prettiest, Louis," said Captain Donahue. "We have to get four runs to win the game. Don't forget that."

Marquis was a sound batsman, as well as a fairly good pitcher, and after missing two balls, he caught the third one and swiped a long liner down to center-field.

There were a few moments of excitement, with tremendous shouts from everywhere, and when the smoke had cleared off it was found that Atkins had scored, while Marquis was on second.

One run for the Daytons!

Larry Donahue was the next man, and there was blood in his eye as he took his place and watched the pitcher. But the best he could do was a single, which advanced Marquis to third.

The Daytons were full of hope now, and when the third batter—a smaller man than any others in the club, but a safe hitter under ordinary circumstances—took his place and prepared for trouble, the Dayton fans held their breath and waited to see what would happen.

The batsman's name was Smith—just Smith. He determined to be worthy of the great things that had already been done by members of his numerous family in all parts of the world.

Callahan and the catcher exchanged glances, and the pitcher sent in a low, slow one. That was all right for Smith. He was what his fellow-players called "a foxy guy," and he bunted the ball gently down the infield.

Before Callahan had recovered it and sent it to the home plate, anticipating an attempt by Marquis to get there and score, Smith had reached first base and Donahue was on second. Pug had seen Callahan's intention to put Marquis out at the home plate, and had told him to remain where he was, at third.

Three men on bases and one run, with nobody out, was the situation for the Daytons as Warrick, whose turn it was, went to bat. He looked at Callahan and smiled. The big pitcher felt that he had a foeman who knew every trick of the game, and whose nerve was not affected by the fact that so much depended on him.

Three men on bases! All right, Mr. Callahan! Play ball!

Almost before Warrick had time to set himself, a cannon-shot delivery made him jump back to avoid being struck. But the ball was outside the plate, and the umpire called out phlegmatically: "One ball!"

Another hot one came over, this time a fair ball. Warrick swung at it and missed.

"One strike!"

"Now, Bill! Let him have it the next time! Over the fence, my boy!"

It was the deep, reverberant voice of Judge Carrington thus shouting encouragement. Warrick heard it, and he knew Gertie was sitting by the side of her father in the grand stand, anxiously watching her husband. But he had no time to think about his wife just then. There was an other ball coming.

It was an insidious, serpentinelike delivery, but Warrick was ready for it. He always could hit balls of that kind, and he took it somewhere about the middle of his bat, putting all his weight into a swinging stroke.

Crack! Away went the ball far down in left field, and O'Neil, jumping up and down on the coaching line, yelled like one of Chief Atkins's Sioux ancestors, and bellowed to the men on bases:

"Go ahead, Marquis! Come on, Donahue! Yes, yes! Keep on! Now, Smith! Run! Run! Keep moving! Come on! Yes, go ahead! Go! Holy smoke! Go on! Come on, Warrick! Come on! Make it a home run!"

Plop! The ball was in the third baseman's glove, with William Warrick stretched at full length under him across the bag—unconscious!

Yes, Warrick had collapsed again, *but the game was won for the Daytons, 4 to 3. The Daytons were the champions.*

Warrick's tremendous clout had sent the three men home, and he himself was safe at third. He had made a pinch hit, and it had won the day for his team. He came partly to himself and tried to get to his feet as he heard the roars that greeted the sensational three runs which had brought victory to the Dayton club and the Middle State League. But he could only kneel.

O'Neil and Atkins got to him at the same moment, for the manager had been waylaid by his players who were all eager to shake hands in congratulation.

"Don't worry, Pincher," said the Indian, helping the other to his feet. "We've won the game, and you don't have to play any more to-day. What is it, old man?"

"I'm all in, Chief," was the almost sobbing reply. "Old Roderick Marquis is right. I'm too old. I've played my last game."

"Rot! Punk! There's nothing serious the matter. Just a little let-down after a hard siege. Anybody's liable to that. You'll be as sound as a nut after a winter's layoff. Isn't that so, Pug?"

"Take him over to the clubhouse," was all the manager said, as he turned away with a serious expression on his granite visage.

"All right, Pug."

The big, sympathetic catcher took Warrick's arm, and in the excitement that raged everywhere about the field, as well as in the spectators' quarters, few persons noticed how heavily the famous pitcher leaned on his companion. There was nothing unusual in two players embracing each other after a successful game, or in their walking across the field with the arm of one thrown around the other.

As Atkins and Warrick disappeared through the doorway of the clubhouse Louis Marquis went to the front of the grand stand, where his father and Silas Shaw were beckoning to him.

"What was the matter with Warrick just now, Louis?" squeaked old Roderick.

"He's worn out; that's all," replied Louis. "Some pitchers give out before they are as old as he is, and he's done. I knew it as soon as he began to pitch to-day. That big three-bagger he made just now took every ounce that was in him. He shot his bolt then for good and all. Now we'll see what Pug will do for me."

"Do for you?" shrieked Roderick. "Why, he'll make you the leading pitcher, of course. What else could he do?"

"I understand that is his intention, father—if Warrick doesn't stay on the team."

"Haw, haw, haw!" guffawed Silas Shaw. "He's out of it." Then, in a whisper: "That little powder I gave you this afternoon would have fixed him even if he hadn't been done anyhow. Did you give it all to him, Louis?"

For a moment there was no answer, but over the freckled face of Louis Marquis there came an expression of mingled indignation and anger that rather puzzled Silas. Louis raised his big right fist and shook it in the air. As he did so Roderick noticed that he held something in his hand, something in white paper.

"Look here, Mr. Shaw," broke out Louis at last, "I don't make a bluff at being a saint, or anything like that. I'd do a man who I thought was trying to down me, and I wouldn't care much how I did it. But I'm not bad enough to do such dirt as that on a fellow ball-player."

"What do you mean?" spluttered Shaw, purple with wrath.

"Mean? Why just this: Baseball is a clean game. It always has been, and I honestly believe it always will be. Men who belong to a baseball team play hard to win, and they'll do anything allowed by the rules to get there. Maybe some of them will go outside of the rules, to the extent of licking an umpire, or trying to. But I never knew a ball-player—in a league, anyhow—who would do such a dirty thing as you asked me to do this afternoon. I couldn't give you back the stuff before, because I never got near enough. What is more, I had some thought of turning it over to Pug O'Neil and letting him deal with you—"

"You didn't say anything to him about it, did you?" interrupted Shaw, alarmed.

"Naw!" growled Louis. "Here it is, in the paper, just as you gave it to me. Take my advice and get it down a sewer or into a furnace as soon as you can. And another thing, Mr. Shaw, don't you ever ask me to do such a thing again. It won't be healthy for you."

And Louis Marquis walked away, grumbling to himself, and wondering whether he ought not to have "handed one" to Silas Shaw, anyhow.

The young man wanted to be the star pitcher of the Daytons, and he'd go to some lengths to get there. But—as he told himself, with an oath—he wasn't giving knockout powders to a fellow-player, and a square man at that, to clear the way to the head position. If he couldn't get it without doping his rival he would stay out.

But who was this white-faced man, in a Dayton uniform, lying on a sofa in the clubhouse, as the rest of the Dayton team, full of the glory of victory, came tumbling in, to talk it over, before taking off their playing-clothes and getting under the shower?

William Warrick, the Daytons' star pitcher for twelve years, was indeed all in so far as baseball was concerned. He confessed it now, and there was nobody to contradict. His fainting in the first game of the series had been a premonition. Then had come his dizziness which had compelled O'Neil to put Marquis in his place in the pitcher's box.

The last proof that he could no longer hold his own was his falling prostrate on the bag at third after making a three-base hit and sending three men home. Great as the exertion of such a hit, with its resultant running, might be, Warrick would have thought nothing of it at the end of any other season. He had begun to go to pieces toward the close of this season, as Pug O'Neil had seen, and now he had broken down completely. It was a sad truth, but Pug knew too well that it *was* the truth.

As the hard-faced but tender-hearted manager bent over Warrick on the sofa, the pitcher said, weakly:

"I'm mighty glad the Daytons are champions, Pug."

"You won the deciding game for us, Pincher," returned Pug, taking one of the now feeble hands.

"Did I, Pug? Then I reckon this is a good time to quit."

And, with a wan smile, the ex-star pitcher fell back on the sofa and closed his eyes restfully.

In less than a month William Warrick was junior partner in the prosperous law firm of Carrington & Warrick. He had given up professional baseball for good.

Louis Marquis became the star pitcher of the Daytons. He never equaled the brilliant performances of William Warrick, but he pitched well enough to bring his team into third place for the pennant the next year. His father, old Roderick, declared it was poor support by the other players only which prevented the club winning the Middle State flag again.

Silas Shaw, a turncoat by nature, sneered at this claim and insisted that William Warrick was a hundred per cent better pitcher than Louis Marquis ever would be. But he never said it in Louis Marquis's hearing. He was afraid something might be told about that powder. Nothing ever *was* told, however.

A year after Warrick stepped out of the club Shaw sold out his interest in it, saying he never wanted to see another game in his life. Pug O'Neil bought the interest and grinned. Perhaps he knew—partly, at least—why Shaw had let go. A manager can make it very interesting for any one he doesn't like in a clubhouse, even for an owner, you know.

Gertie Warrick was very proud of the eminence her husband began to attain as a lawyer, although he never said much about it.

"I should think, Will," she remarked to him one day, when he came home to tell her he had just won an important case in court, "that you must be glad you are a successful lawyer, instead of just a ball-player."

He did not answer, but ten minutes later, when she peeped into their bedroom to see what he was doing, she found him with his old Dayton Club uniform in his hands, looking it over regretfully.

Softly she closed the door and came away.

(The end.)

HIS BIT

BY ALBERT WILLIAM STONE

"IT costs to be patriotic."
The aged man swayed on his feet
As he pleaded for funds to battle the Huns
From the throngs as they passed on the street.
"It costs to be patriotic
When we're fighting on land and on sea;
Nor can the expense in dollars and cents
Be reckoned by you or me."

"How much are *you* giving?" a stranger
Sardonically voiced a demand.
"The city's drain'd dry from this ev'ry-day cry
For our coin—say, where do *you* stand?"
"Why, I've done my bit," said the ancient,
"Or *we've* done it—mother and I.
Don't you think that a man's doing all that he can
When he gives up his son—to die?"

Allatambour

by Joseph Pettee Copp

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

SERGEANT ALONZO ZURIBAR, of the First Company, Constabulary Police of the Island of Guam, Philippine Islands, was, so far as he knew, the half-breed son of Mother Zuribar and an unknown American. He had been brought up as a native—a Chimoro—but after the American occupation had gone to school, joined the police, and risen by ability to the rank as first sergeant.

Some seventy-five miles off the coast lay a small group of the Ladrone Islands, known, on account of three towering volcanic peaks as the Triplets, and, according to the chart, uninhabited; but it was generally known that a brutal and merciless tribe of cannibals and pirates, led by a gigantic and fiendish black, Allatambour by name, lived there and preyed on passing shipping or any one unfortunate enough to fall into their clutches. Only one man was known to have returned from the island, Urido, and he was hopelessly mad from torture and terror.

Consequently, when Alonzo told his mother that he had been ordered by his captain to "Get Allatambour," she was first terrified and then insisted upon going with him. They started in a prao on the long trip, but were soon overtaken by a swimmer, who proved to be Mad Urido, and who insisted on accompanying them. Near to the Triplets they came upon a sailing ship, the Patience Standish, being attacked by Allatambour and four huge war-canoes of savages. They arrived too late to render assistance in the fight, but managed to rescue the captain, Standish by name, and his daughter, Patience. Thanks to luck, seamanship, and the fact that Mad Urido, plunging overboard, attacked the chief's canoe and got away with his "magic" sword of state, they managed to escape, and were guided by Mother Zuribar—who unaccountably seemed to know the coast well—through the reef into shallow water where the heavy war-canoes could not follow, but there appeared to be no opening in the jungle-grown shore.

"Where away, now, mother?" Alonzo asked.

"Straight as you are," she replied. "You are right now."

"All right," he agreed; but even though she had truly directed through the reef, he had his doubts about the tangled mass ahead, in which no break was visible. However, he steered straight, and left the manner of their entry into the apparently impenetrable wall of entwined roots to the future.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SWAMP.

IT was a pleasure to travel leisurely along over the quiet bay inside the reef watching the flickering rays of sunlight filter through the marvelously clear water which lay like a pane of glass between us and the bottom thirty fathoms below.

And for the present we were free of pursuers. But they knew where we were. That caused me to look warily toward the land.

The particular colanderlike island that we approached showed absolutely no sign of human life.

But from the heavy growth on the lower slope of the middle and loftiest of the three volcanoes smoke ascended lazily in several thin lines which joined in the air into a flattened cloud and hung like a canopy over the woods. There was a settlement under that smoke. And it was only about a mile from us.

Directly in line with this place where the smoke rose and further up the mountainside I saw a pretty scene. From one of the notches in the crater rim a heavy stream of water poured. It fell for at least a hundred feet, then disappeared in a rent torn in the rocky pile. No river came into view again and I wondered where the water went. It was not to be long before I should find out.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for July 20.

Adding to the beauty of this fall was the amphitheater of the rent in which it disappeared. Like an alcove especially prepared as a setting the walls opened out at a sharp angle forming a small flat plateau with the tumbling water as a background. This particular strip of ground had been cleared of trees and brush, and the outer edge of it showed nude as if many trampling feet had kept the persistant jungle growth from regaining a root-hold. To one side of the fall tucked in under the rocky cliff wall was a low rectangular building of stone, which being the same as that surrounding was almost invisible as it so closely hugged the precipice.

It seemed to me that I could hear a faint murmur as of wind blowing through taut fiddle strings, but so indistinctly that I could not be sure. It was from the direction of the waterfall. I noticed Urido raise his head and listen intently several times as the weird twang, like fairy music playing, came to my ears. He would shake his head, mutter, then settle back to his silent vigil again. He still clung to the crooked sword as a child would to a pet plaything.

Straight ahead of us the ironwood entanglement appeared no more hopeful than it did at greater distance, and we were within a hundred feet of it. But I decided to go up close, then follow it along eastward to try and find an opening.

Keeping the cleft in the mountain directly in line with the bow, I paddled easily, keeping a sharp lookout for any ambush. Not a sign of human life was apparent.

The bottom of the bay had been very white, and the water clear, but as we drew closer to the shore I noticed a muddy color to the upward sloping floor and a slight cloudiness to the water as if it carried silt from the swamp which lay between the nearest two of the Triplets.

Captain Standish was sitting idly in the canoe, the now unnecessary improvised paddle of split bamboo dragging in the water as he listlessly held it in his left hand. He was looking back at his ship which drifted out of the island's lee. I saw him grit his teeth and curse at his helplessness as he watched the cannibals from the war canoes again clamber over its sides.

Tears rolled down his cheeks as the schooner's sheets were hauled taut, the sails filled and she heeled over to a course westward—sailed away by the black pirates. They headed for the reef opposite the pretty blue bay between the western and main island. Very likely there was a natural channel down that way that they could take her through.

I felt sorry for the captain. He spoke.

"What is the date?" he asked.

"January fifteenth," I told him.

"The fifteenth!" He talked like a dazed man. "It was one year ago to-day that Patience's mother died. That's why I brought the girl on this cruise. Then the fifteenth again and I lose my ship." He did not complain. He was merely stating the facts of a coincidence.

There seemed nothing for me to say. I kept quiet.

Miss Standish came from under the cabin hood where she had been helping Mother Zuribar get breakfast. She had heard. Going to her father she seated herself beside him and put her hand into his.

"Everything is coming out all right, I am sure, daddy," she said. "Mr. Alonzo here is going to help us get to Guam."

"Gladly," I assured her. It made me feel good to have her look to me for help.

"I won't have to go to Guam in a canoe if—" Captain Standish exploded as an idea came to him, but he suddenly felt his daughter's presence, and looking up at her, stopped abruptly.

"I know, daddy—if we could get aboard our ship and get it out of these pirates' hands," Miss Standish finished for him.

But her father looked away a little guiltily, and I could see a deeper color in his cheeks. I felt that his "if" carried a different meaning—"if the girl weren't along," I sensed it.

"And maybe we will get it away from them—who knows?" she said optimistically.

Ignorance surely is bliss, and a woman's confidence in her man is a wonderful thing.

If Captain Standish felt the way I did then, and if feelings would help, we could have boarded the schooner, and in the face of the whole Triplets tribe taken the ship away from them.

"By the way," Captain Standish turned to me, "what brings you into these waters anyway?"

"I came to get Allatambour. I'm a sergeant of constabulary police from Guam," I told him.

"Who's this Alla—whatchacallim?" he asked.

"I don't just know," I had to admit. "But that big black with the white headgear might be him."

"What do you want with him?"

"I want him because he's done dirty work, like he did to you, before."

"Huh — the black devil — give him enough rope and he's gonna hang himself some day. But I wish you luck even if I don't envy you your job."

Miss Standish was gazing at me with what I thought was a look of added respect —and she asked:

"You were sent over here alone to get that big burly black?"

"Yes—or information about him," I told her.

"I wish you success, too," she said. And I knew she meant it. The captain looked away from the ship toward the shore we approached. He looked—rubbed his eyes and looked again. I wondered what he saw —all seemed serene on the beach.

"Have I got 'em or are those streaks of blood on that mud bank?" he asked, pointing to a thin strip of earth from which the ironwood grew.

Then I noticed little animated fiery dashes of color like blotches of blood scurrying about on the narrow strip of mud bank between the ironwood and the water. The hurrying little flashes would start like an arrow in one direction, then suddenly, and apparently without cause, or turning, shoot at right angles to the first course. Here and there and back again they raced aimlessly without taking the trouble to come about. They were gruesome, spider-like creatures, the size of a hen's egg, and with one big menacing claw always held overhead as if fearful of attack from above. Miss Standish looked and shuddered.

I laughed. "No—" I told him, "those are land crabs."

I knew that these villainous-looking, harmless little fellows liked to live on the bank of a stream, and I wondered what brought them here.

I gave a heavy dip of my paddle to bring my proa in close to the shore before turning the boat to follow it along. Then as we shot almost upon the mud, and as I was about to sweep the boat around, I knew what attracted the crabs.

It was the bank of a stream! The ironwood jungle on the seaward bank of the river blended so closely with that on the shoreward bank that the opening to a water-way, flowing for a short distance parallel to the seashore, was very effectually hidden.

I marveled again at Mother Zuribar's correct instruction.

Easily I entered my craft into the river mouth and found room to spare. The current was not swift but steady. I paddled cautiously around each bend, and curves were numerous, to avoid running into unknown dangers.

Miss Standish watched the ugly red crabs scamper for the holes in the mud as we drew near, and asked:

"Ugh! the nasty little things—will there be some where we stop?"

I laughed—but I had played with just as vicious-looking ones when I was a boy.

"They won't hurt you," I assured her. "See how scared they are?"

She looked at them, and I was very sure that she did not like their being there.

The business of piloting my boat up this waterway kept me well occupied, and I did not have much time for conversation, but I found time to steal an occasional glance at Miss Standish. She was certainly pretty—so pink and fresh looking, and it was a real treat for eyes that had been used to the dark girls of Guam.

However, I found time to call her attention to the long festoons of moss hanging from the limbs high overhead, and the grotesque arching roots of the trees that seemed all to be related. Really, from the

closely entwined mass of them it would seem that the whole growth in the swamp was but one monster plant. She soon forgot the crabs.

The jungle became so dense overhead that the sunlight was only let through in occasional dazzling rays. The swamp would be no healthy place to stay for long, I was sure, and I hoped to get in close enough to dry land to allow us to make a good camp.

But soon the stream we followed became so clogged with roots and growing giant-leafed plants that it was impossible to go farther with our boat as it was. The outrigger caught under one large stalk that stuck out of the water, and the canoe stranded astride another part of the same stem.

The restraining banks that held the water to a channel where it emptied into the bay had dwindled the farther up we went until nothing was visible of them, and the only way I knew we were yet in the river was by the current which slowly traveled past us seaward.

"I guess here's where we stop," volunteered Captain Standish.

"For the present, anyhow," I said. Then Mother Zuribar called "Breakfast," so I laid my paddle on the deck and joined the others.

Miss Standish had never before eaten rice from a coconut bowl, then drank tea from the same dish, and seemed to think it quite a lark. The captain was not particular, and after a bowl of the steaming drink had found its way down his throat, he became quite cheerful and anxious to finish breakfast that we might explore the swamp.

Urido, of course, ravenously ate what we gave him and made no comment.

And I was hungry enough to enjoy my meal and take my time doing it, for as soon as it was over I knew I was in for some disagreeable wading in mud and ooze until I found dry land.

Although we had turned and twisted on our way in, I know the cleft in the smaller peak should be yet ahead and the nearest inland border of the swamp close to our right.

Just as soon as I had eaten I asked Captain Standish to secure the boat by the painter in the bow while I scrambled out on the outrigger and with my paddle took soundings.

I found the water to be very shallow just beyond the root my boat had caught under, so I easily let myself down to test the bottom. It was of soft, sticky silt, but not too deep to walk in. I sank in to just below my knees.

Then asking Captain Standish to wait there with the ladies until I came back, although I knew him to be anxious to go with me, I felt that it was safer for the women this way. Taking my paddle as a stick to steady myself, and feeling to see that my small kris was secure in my loin cloth, I set out alone.

Hardly had I waded a hundred feet through the swamp on my reconnoiter when I heard a splashing behind me, and turning, was surprised at what I saw.

Miss Standish, boldly wading through the tangled water plants, was following me.

I stopped and waited for her. I was torn between two emotions. I thought that rightly I should scold her and send her back to the boat as I would Mother Zuribar if she should so wilfully go against my wishes and discretion. But it was Miss Standish, and I liked to see her there. She stepped along so gracefully even in what must have been to her a most unpleasant oozing mire.

"Rather gooey going, what?" she hailed cheerfully as she noticed me waiting for her.

I didn't remember of ever having heard the word "gooey" before, but it surely expressed it, and I had to smile despite the stern look I tried to assume.

"Yes," I said, "but why didn't you stay in the boat, Miss Standish?" I asked.

"Why, I was so cramped in there and wanted to stretch a bit," she said in a matter of fact tone as if wading was a common form of exercise for her.

"If you had waited I would have returned in a moment," I told her.

"Surely, but I wanted to go, too!" she exclaimed.

"But there may be danger!" I said.

"Well—you're with me—you see!" she said, looking full at me with her wide-awake blue eyes telling me better than words the confidence she had in me as a protector.

I knew it was foolish to let her go on, but what could I say? I didn't know, so I turned and led—she followed. And I felt glad she was there.

We clambered over large arching roots and under others, our feet sank into the soft slime, but never a word did she say about not liking it. I saw her wince and draw back a couple of times as her bare feet came down on some soft slipper plant tendril, that giving and curling, felt like a live thing, but I looked away each time, for she would color, prettily, to be sure, as if ashamed of showing any timidity if she thought I saw.

Then ahead I spied what made me glad. The trunks of a row of coconut palms stood spaced in dignified regularity a little way ahead. They seemed to me as old friends waiting to greet us. For where they grew I knew there was dry land.

Miss Standish wouldn't let me help her except over the most treacherous moss-covered tree-trunks, then only after pretending that she had helped me over. She was what Captain Jack would call a good sport. She surely was a good fellow, and no Chimoro girl had ever been such a pleasant companion for me even on any of the easy jaunts such as they would agree to take in Guam.

As we neared the palms I saw that the land which ended abruptly at the swamp sloped from the water's edge steadily and gently upward away from us.

It surely was a pleasure to step on dry land once more, and after helping Miss Standish up the bank, for numerous red land-crabs were in evidence, I took a look around.

The beauty of the scene entranced me. The cleft in the mountain was directly before me. The palms, like a cordon of sentries holding at respectful distance the encroaching luxuriance of tropical jungle, encircled a small grass-grown clearing that ran right into the sharp angle of the precipitous cleft for which I had steered. White, lilylike flowers grew plentifully in the soil. The hanging vines draped over the cliff from above clothed the otherwise naked walls.

Like an overhead light, the better to show the beauties of this natural shrine, the sun shone brilliantly into the clearing. Peeking from between the stately palms monster elephant ears hung their massive heads as if in abeyance to the grand mountain and a river that came from a cavernous opening in the angle of the cleft.

The waters of this stream ran along the west wall of rock and disappeared in the dense swamp greenery that drew its life from this source. "This must be the stream that empties into the bay," I thought. It was, and as I later discovered, was the only river on this end of the island. I learned much about that river later on.

And another fact was made plain to me. We were not on a separate island—as I had thought. The lesser peak of the Triplets before us was joined — back of the swamp—to the major peak by a backbone of rocky cliff. The new discovery startled me. The swamp did not intervene between us and Allatambour, but there was good solid ground that could easily be traveled by the black horde of savages. But one thing attracted my attention and somewhat allayed my fears. I saw that the coconut palms were not notched for climbing and the fruit lay in dry and rotting profusion on the ground. At least this place was not frequently visited by the natives.

Then I noticed that Miss Standish had edged real close to me. I liked it, but wondered why and looked to see what had caused her to draw so near.

She was standing, hands held tight together against her skirt in front of her, looking fixedly and with repugnance at something on one of the elephant leaves.

I turned the better to see what she looked at. At my movement she confusedly tried to recover her composure.

I saw on the broad back of the leaf, head raised, forelegs set ready for flight, a great green lizard. Further down the stalk of the plant was its mate. Both looked at us in seeming curiosity. They were giant iguanas and very common to these parts.

"Some of your harmless jungle friends?" Miss Standish asked.

"Yes," I said, laughing.

"O-o-oh! I don't like these crawly things!" Miss Standish exclaimed.

"Watch," I said, starting toward the treelike plant. At my first move toward them the green reptiles scampered away jumping from one broad leaf to another.

"See how scared they are?" I asked her.

"Yes," she admitted hesitatingly. "But they were a good twelve inches long."

"Surely, but their size doesn't make them any more dangerous."

"And do they know that?" she asked.

I laughed. "When you get to know these creatures of the tropics better, you'll not mind their being around," I told her.

"Well I don't seek any closer acquaintance," she said.

Then I suggested that she stay there and wait while I went back and got the others, rather than wade through the swamp again.

But she said she "didn't mind the wading one bit" and went back with me. And I was glad she did, I liked her company.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON LOOKOUT.

WHEN Miss Standish and I got back to the canoe we found Mother Zuribar and the captain seated in the boat talking earnestly; she was telling him something and the captain was listening intently, but with an attitude of disbelief.

"You're sure it was the Saucy Belle?" I heard him ask.

"Ah! could I forget, *señor?*" she exclaimed, then seeing us she placed a hand in caution on the captain's knee. He looked up, grunted and kept still.

It was after he and I had been working together most of the morning and we were at the camping ground that I heard him in an aside to Mother, "I believe you," and I wondered more.

When it came to pitching camp, Miss Standish was disappointed that I should choose a place away from the clearing.

"Why don't you camp out here in the open near the stream?" she questioned.

A Chimoro girl would never have asked such a question—it is sufficient for them that the men decide these matters. But I rather expected it of Miss Standish and must admit that I enjoyed the thought that she was interested enough to ask.

"Because the blacks might look right down on us from that mountain over there," I told her, pointing to the middle peak which was so clearly visible towering high above us. "And if they once saw us so near—I think they might seek closer acquaintance," I said.

"Well they'll do that anyway—won't they?" she asked.

"I think so," I said, smiling at her logic, "but in this game of hide and seek we are the hiders and it's up to us to make them search a bit and not let them just sit on the home base and yell—'I see you—you're it!'"

Then she smiled, too. And as her father agreed with me she pouted good-naturedly and went at her part of making camp with a will. I selected a spot about fifty feet back from the clearing against the mountainside where five giant elephant ears growing in an irregular circle had joined their leaves overhead into a green roof that should be very effective in turning the rain. Under them the ground was hidden by a rich growth of fern, which having flourished there for ages had laid a carpet of fallen leaves that was soft and deep.

When Miss Standish saw this natural room and, standing upright in the center, jiggled up and down on the springy fern bed trying vainly to reach the leafy roof above, she was delighted. And her smile showed that she had forgiven me for not camping in the open.

Mother Zuribar stood by and seemed to get as much pleasure out of the white girl's enthusiasm as I did. I noticed her furtively look our way whenever I stopped to speak to Miss Standish. An when I came into camp with an armful of coconut fiber, that I had stripped from the trees by the clearing, and built Miss Standish a mosquito proof retreat to sleep in, Mother turned her back and while busying herself

with the materials for dinner sang as if very happy. Miss Standish asked what I was doing. "Making a mosquito net," I explained.

"Who for?" she asked innocently.

"You," I said.

"O-oh, thank you!" she exclaimed and beamed at me in a manner that left me very much in her debt.

"And Mother Zuribar?" she asked.

"Oh, her—she's mosquito proof," I assured her.

After removing the outrigger from the canoe I was able to bring it right up to the inside of the cleft. We left everything in it except what was needed for immediate use for I did not know at what hour we might be called upon to depart in haste.

As for Urido—the big hulk—he disappeared up the side of the mountain as soon as I got him to dry land and left the work behind him. However he had indeed earned his passage and in such fine style that I surely wished he were a little more dependable and would stay where I could rely upon him if needed.

Like all sailors, Captain Standish was very handy about camp, working like a stevedore, and as a real seaman was indeed a big help in poling the canoe through the swamp to the final landing.

When all was shipshape about our stopping place and after warning the women to build no fires and stay close under cover until we returned, the captain and I started up the mountain to find a spot where we could spy upon our neighbors the cannibals.

We climbed a gentle slope from the clearing for about a hundred feet, then the way became more precipitous. Vines and small trees grew in wild profusion and although the going was not so difficult, they made it harder. Spanish bayonet and plants that looked like wild pineapples scratched our legs.

Of birds we raised none, as the only kind noticeable were sea birds, and they do not nest in the wood. I was duly thankful, for even this small favor, for nothing so betrays the presence of an intruder as excited fluttering flocks of birds.

We followed the eastward edge of the cleft until the upper angle was reached, then turned westward to get on the saddle that connected the mountain we climbed with the middle and inhabited one.

This backbone was of lava, and barren outcroppings of the burned rock stuck out all along its upper surface like warts on an ahuacate pear. The top of this ridge was not over a hundred feet wide at any point, both sides being a sheer drop to sea level. The swamp was below on the side from which we approached, while the clear emerald water of a reef locked bay washed the base of the other. And little cracks ran lengthwise of the ridge as if in sudden chilling the shrinkage of the molten mass had left them. Indistinct murmurs came from these openings, and placing my ear to one, I could hear the gurgle of running water. A cool draft fanned my cheek, coming upward from the stream.

In the center of this natural causeway and standing above all the surrounding rock and brush was a tumbled pile of lava. Three large masses had been upended and leaned against each other in this location. The countless rains of ages had worn the tops and inner surface to form a pocket between them that would allow of three or four men standing upright in the center and be effectually hidden up to the shoulders. The blocks of lava were separated enough at their base so a man could crawl through the openings.

We could not ask for better protection while spying upon our neighbors.

Crawling into this place Captain Standish and I stood up to take a look around.

In the place where I had seen the smoke rising in the early morning, which from our lookout was easily within a half mile, a large village of tipa huts was plainly in sight. It was unique in its very regular arrangement, radiating from a central plaza.

This was a hollow square around which six long huts of bamboo faced inward. About these was a white fence, and at each corner a round white ball of some kind ornamented a post. I remembered the stories I had heard of a fence of human shin bones with grinning skulls for corner posts. A street bordered all around and from it the other streets branched straight in eight directions. One started at the

center of each side of the square and one from each corner. The huts of the town outside the plaza were small, conical, palm-thatched dwellings raised from the ground on low posts. Leading up the mountain-side directly from the plaza was a broad, well trodden and seemingly paved roadway to the little plateau and the waterfall above.

The town was deserted except for several old women and men standing in a group at the far end as if waiting for some one. From where they stood a well-defined path ran westward around the base of the mountain and disappeared at a curve which was in line with the little bay I had noticed while out on the water, being chased by the blacks. And the tips of a vessel's mast showed above the lower part of the mountain slope.

"My ship!" the captain muttered.

"Very likely," I agreed.

Then looking over to the other side of the island I saw another and smaller town. It was joined to the first by a path that ran over the far end of the ridge upon which we stood. And it was just as regularly laid out, but had no large huts around the plaza, only the small conical huts set out in concentric circles. There must have been fifty little houses in this place. The round plaza in the center of this settlement was alive with girls—and only girls—except for a few gray-haired women who seemed to have them in charge.

"What's that place?" Captain Standish asked, and I could see that he was puzzled by the presence there of so many young girls. "It looks like a girls' seminary," he said.

"Well in a way I think it is," I told him. "I have heard that several tribes hereabouts separate the girls of marriageable age from the men's colony and isolate them until they are wedded by order of the king—they go into the secluded town at about ten years and marry at twelve."

"At twelve!" he exclaimed, appalled.

"Surely," I said, "and that is not half the story. For if my information is right there are wedding-houses in which one of those girls weds ten men until such time as she decides which one she wants for a permanent husband."

"Now you're joking?" he asked, gazing at me quizzically.

"We may have a chance to find out yet," I said.

"You're about right at that," he agreed and immediately became serious again.

"What are you really going to do now?" he finally asked as we settled down to rest on the ground with our backs to the lava slabs of our retreat.

Indeed I had been thinking hard on that very subject, but was really at a loss. However, I made a statement to see how he would take it.

"There's apparently only one thing to do," I said, "under the present developments, and that is to get you and Miss Standish out of this, then return to finish my commission."

"Well—" he began, and I could see he was swayed by a sense of duty to his daughter and a reluctance to desert his ship entirely to the hands of the pirates. "If Patience weren't along I'd say stay willingly and do what I could to help you—but with her here—there's not much else to do but get her safely out."

That settled it. I could return just as easily as I had come and with a much better idea of what to expect. But how little we know of our future and how little did I know of coming events that would block our escape.

"Let's go down and see if the women are all right," I suggested.

"Hold a minute!" he exclaimed. "What's that?" and he pointed toward the large village.

At the far end I could see the old men and women moving excitedly about, waving their arms and in every way showing an eagerness and a welcome to something.

Looking along the path I saw the advance guard of a procession coming around the curve from the bay.

The big black chief with the white headdress led. He carried a vivid green silk parasol in one hand and a brass cuspidor in the other, prized relics of conquest, and he proudly held them to the view of the old people waiting him. Behind him came men with burdens. The dead victims of the piratical assault were being brought in.

Slung like haunches of venison fresh from the hunt, they were carried over the black men's shoulders.

"Poor devils—they did their best and died fighting," the captain groaned.

Others followed, bringing loot from the schooner. One carried a large book with flashing metal clasps on its cover and I could see him gleefully flop the metal up and down in the sun to better show the glitter.

"My log-book," I heard Captain Standish mutter.

"Ugh!" A sudden grunt behind us sent us both about face, hands on our knives ready to defend ourselves.

And there, leaning against the rock behind us, watching the same scene as ourselves, was Urido. He yet held to the bright krislike sword.

"Damn!" the captain swore sailorlike.

"Ditto!" I said and we both relaxed. "Come on and let's go back to camp," I suggested.

"Huh!" Urido grunted again, "Allatambour!" and off he started—not toward camp but straight along the ridge, headed for the big town and trouble.

CHAPTER IX.

ASLEEP ON POST.

CAPTAIN STANDISH and I watched crazy Urido as he ran along the ridge dodging this way and that to avoid the lava outcroppings. And he was soon lost to view in the heavy underbrush covering the mountain before us. The captain and I both breathed a sigh of relief when we saw that he was not openly going to descend the path to the village. But we also kept an eye on the town and the savages who were pouring in from the far side on their return from the sacked schooner.

But they were too busy showing their trinkets and rejoicing over the victory to pay heed to anything else.

The chief, separated from the main body of his troop, who had stopped in the square, and followed by ten stalwart blacks armed with spears and machetes, mounted the road to the high plateau by the waterfall. He disappeared into the low building at the base of the cliff beside the stream. The body-guard of ten stood without.

We turned to go back to the women with an added worry, for Urido was yet at large and might return to camp at any time followed by the whole tribe of negroes.

As we cautiously picked our way down, trying to follow the same course that we had come up, we were suddenly halted by the sound of a shrill blast like that from a steam siren whistle. Quickly looking around we saw the natives in the village halt in the midst of their carnival. They started in a body for the plateau where we had last seen their chief as if the noise had been a signal and they were in duty bound to answer. Soon the road up the mountain was a mass of moving people.

The whistle stopped and we saw the white feather hat moving near the cliff. The chief was coming from the stone house. He went to a place directly in front of the fall and mounting a slight mound, evidently made for a platform, and as his guard formed in a semicircle about him, he stood at rigid attention until his people were all up on the flat land standing at a respectful distance from him. Then he moved and seemed to harangue them. I wondered just what was being said, but we could not hear. A wind sprang up, and it blew from us toward them so that the sound of the voices was but a mere murmur.

They had been called for a counsel. Frequent gestures by the speaker in our direction made us uneasy. But the natives all fell flat on their face the first time the chief pointed toward us and that seemed strange.

It was no use for us to stay longer and we went down to the camp.

Mother Zuribar had our supper ready and we were soon seated, each with a cocoanut bowl in hand, ready. I had noticed Miss Standish while she ate, and she did it differently from the way I had been used to seeing the girls at Guam do it.

In the first place she didn't stick her hand into the family kettle and grab what her fingers would hold, then transfer it by hand to her mouth. She would use a piece of broken coconut-shell as a small shovel

and, filling it, place the food in a bowl in her other hand. She left the broken shell in the big dish. It was nicer.

So I used the same shell instead of my fingers to dip out food. I looked at her as I did it to see how she would take it.

She noticed me and smiled approvingly. I now like that way of serving food much better than with the fingers.

I also saw that she kept her mouth closed when she chewed, and I also kept mine closed. And presto—I didn't make much noise.

Miss Standish knew a whole lot of nice little things like that and I have tried more with considerable satisfaction.

When we were through with the meal I asked the captain to help me get the canoe out into deeper water again so we could be started on our way to Guam in the morning before daylight.

We poled it out to where we had made our first stop, then left it secured to a tree, ready for a quick getaway.

The captain swore at the sticky mud on the marsh bottom for oozing so clammily between his toes, and in every way showed that he did not enjoy the wading as much as his daughter and I had in the morning. I didn't see much fun in it either—with him.

At the camp we found the womenfolk through cleaning up the coconut-bowl dishes and eager to take a look about. Miss Standish insisted that they wanted to see from the lookout of which we had spoken.

I saw that she really wanted to go up, so agreed to guide her. The captain frowned at the idea at first, but finally assented when I said: "They'll not be interested in us until the newness of their loot wears off and then it 'd be as easy to get us here as there," and all four of us started up the climb. The sun was well behind the big middle peak and a shadow cast by the mountain made a twilight around us. However the full moon showed on the eastern horizon, so I knew we were to have light enough for a few hours at least.

I led, helping Miss Standish and trying to pick the soft places where her bare feet would not be too cruelly hurt. The captain and Mother Zuribar followed. They soon dropped to the rear and I could hear their voices. They seemed to have remembered the interesting conversation of the morning and dropped back purposely, I felt, to be able to talk without our hearing.

"I think you're very brave, Mr. Zuribar, to come here all by yourself after that terrible man," Miss Standish said.

"Oh, that's only in line of duty," I told her, but I was glad she thought me brave. The "Mr. Zuribar" didn't sound as well as I had always imagined it would the first time I should hear it. Chimoros are not called "Mr." I wished she had said just "Alonzo."

"The others wouldn't come, so it fell to my lot," I told her.

"Why wouldn't they come?" she asked.

"They're a superstitious crowd, these Chimoros," I said, "and it seems foolish, too, when you see what husky chaps they are. But a lot of ghostly stories have been told about Allatambour, and Urido came back from his one visit crazy, so they all think there's a jinx on this place."

"Didn't you think so?" she asked.

"No. I was really curious to see for myself if the stories were true. I believe, in part, they were."

"Well, I think you are brave."

"How about yourself, Miss Standish? With me it is only a part of my every-day work—but here you are a victim of circumstances, and you have seen Allatambour's fiendishness, yet I see no trembling on your part."

"Oh—but you see I have had brave men to protect me!" she exclaimed.

I could think of no answer to that. And other things were occupying my thoughts anyway. It was growing quite dark. The softness of her arm as I held it, the warmth of her as she came next to me in the narrow passages between the brush and the sweet scent of her hair as she ducked her head close under my face while going under a branch I held up for her. All these things seemed to act strangely upon me. My brain was in a turmoil. I felt as I remember feeling when I drank a little too freely of Aquasiente, only a little more so.

A rocky ledge that was shoulder high for me and topped Miss Standish's head

stopped us. The moon, now well above the horizon, shone full upon us. Tall grasses and Spanish bayonet shut us in. We were alone—Patience Standish and I. As a stimulant the moonlight seemed to enter my blood and make it course through my arteries. Miss Standish—Patience—looked beautiful in the soft light. Dressed as a native she was the peer of all such—all pink and white.

"Oh, how am I going to get up that?" she asked, meaning the ledge, but looking into my eyes with a mischievous glint in her own that I took for a challenge.

"Easily," I said, and answering a sudden impulse stooped quickly and, encircling her in my arms, lifted her. I held her tight against me. I could feel her heart beating rapidly. My own was pounding. Her eyes met mine. They seemed so deep—so deep, and I saw no reflection of myself, but what I saw made me drunk. The thoughts surging through my brain—that I had before not allowed to stay as a possibility—suddenly became very real—very intense. I knew I loved. And I had never loved before. Holding her tighter I let my madness rule me for the blissful moment and kissed her full upon the mouth. Her lips were warm, soft, satisfying. She did not scream. She trembled.

I do not know how long I held her. Voices from behind brought me from my trance of love.

"I love you!" I whispered and set her feet on top of the ledge. "O-oh!—I hate you!" she gasped as she pushed my hands from her. Mother Zuribar and her father joined us. Vaulting beside her I again led her toward the lookout.

She was very quiet. She seemed to falter in her step. And I shook as with an ague, but I was not cold. She said she "hated" me.

"Are you cold, Miss Standish?" I asked.

"No, thank you," she said in a strained manner. I was afraid that my impertinent act had cost me dear. My aguelike shaking continued. Now I knew it was the violence of the new passion within me seeking outlet. I was miserable, for it seemed that I had gone too far. We walked together, but her father was close.

At the lookout all was quiet. The spot was lit by the moon and we four crawled into the safe retreat, formed by the three slabs of lava, to be out of sight from the village.

The town was indeed full of activity. A huge fire burned in the central plaza and all the people of the village seemed gathered around it. At one end the chief, his white hat yet in evidence, was enthroned on a grotesque chair that I imagined was formed of human bones. A group of attentive men stood at his back. His guard squatted on the ground before him.

I watched for a while, then shuddered, for as I looked I saw two burly blacks spit a white, human being on a long rod and start with the burden toward the fire. They were placing one of the poor sailors to cook. Miss Standish and Mother Zuribar had seen all they wished and with heads turned away were talking in hushed tones. The captain and I were horrified.

We were to see a cannibal feast. Suddenly, as the two cooks neared the fire, a long line of men and boys separated from the intent, black crowd. They were graded from a very tall man to a very short boy. Each carried a spear. The flickering firelight flashed from the metal blades of their weapons. But the black of their skins turned no light. Like pigs, dry after a wallow, their hides were dull.

They formed in a procession, and circling the roasting fire danced in a hopping manner. Every hop advanced them a step and they went three times around the blaze and body of the white sailor. The sound of tom-toms and chanting voices came to our ears. The audience joined in the song and clapped their hands in time to the dance.

At the third round the men stopped and, throwing their spears to the ground, placed each a hand on the shoulders of the nearest in front of him. In this manner they started a different action—a muscle dance more strenuous than any I had ever before seen. It was like the Hula-Hula, only more violent. It only stopped when the dancers dropped out from exhaustion. Then the feast seemed ready, for the crowd became restive and the cooks active.

I will not give the horrible details of that

frightful banquet. Suffice to say these people were eating human flesh and doing it as if enjoying a most delicate luxury of which they could not seem to get enough.

The captain and I had seen all we cared to, and I suggested that we start down.

This time Captain Standish and his daughter led and Mother Zuribar and I followed. Miss Standish so maneuvered that it should be this way. I was too miserable to talk much. But Mother Zuribar noticed my disconsolate bearing and asked: "What ails you, Alonzo?"

"She said she 'hated' me!" I blurted out.

And Mother Zuribar laughed. I could have struck her, she made me so angry. Then she said: "Don't let her 'hate' worry you."

"What do you mean?" I demanded, stopping her. I was like a drowning man ready to grasp any straw of hope.

But Mother Zuribar just laughed again and said: "You've got a lot to learn." That was all she would say. But she didn't know how much Patience's regard meant to me and she wasn't in love with Miss Standish—I was.

At the camp the women went to bed. The captain smoked a pipe he had saved from the schooner. The sun had dried his small plug of tobacco, which, with his pipe, had been soaked in his pants pocket. And he wouldn't smoke my home-grown tobacco—it was too strong, he said.

So, rolling a cigarette and wishing to be alone, I left to go to the lookout.

I had not been up there long when the captain joined me. He was strangely quiet. I was willing that he should be, for my own distracted thoughts were racing through my head in such a whirl that I was busy enough trying to adjust them again.

We sat with our backs to the rocks watching the natives and their orgy below us. The moon shone brightly down and the whole place was nearly as light as day. Only the very dense shadows stood out in blackness to declare for the night. Occasionally I would find the captain gazing intently at me as if pondering about something with which I must be associated.

I wondered. Then he nodded and soon slept. The fatigue of our strenuous day had conquered. Then I thought of my rash act in kissing Miss Standish to the exclusion of all else. I upbraided myself for a fool.

Finally the moon went down, and yet the cannibals celebrated. It became very dark. The dim embers of the fire in the village and the stars were the only lights. I must have fallen asleep, for of a sudden I started up to find the sun high over the eastern sea-line.

"Come, captain!" I said, shaking him. "The sun is up—we must get to camp and see if the women are all right."

He awoke quickly and was as eager as I to be gone from there.

Like a couple of guilty culprits we raced down the mountain to the camp.

All was quiet. No one stirred. We took a peek into the sheltered nook where we had left the women to sleep.

They were not there!

CHAPTER X.

A TRAMPLED LILY.

I HAVE said that I am a mild-mannered man, and generally I am, but when I found that Patience had disappeared, I must have gone daft for a while. I do not remember just what I did. I came to with Captain Standish holding me down on the ground and saying:

"Easy boy—easy. You may think you can lick Allatambour and his whole tribe single-handed, but you won't if you carry on that way—easy now and I'll let you up."

I had not thought the old man so strong. He had me pinned down in such a way that I could not move. I suppose thirty years at sea, working up from cabin-boy to captain, does harden a man's muscle; it must have his, for he had a grip like iron.

And he told me I had been kicking up a fuss for a half-hour, or it seemed that to him.

"But damn that pirate chief—if he has my daughter I'll kill him with my bare hands!" he swore.

And I believe he would have tried, too, for he looked as if he would. Seeing him

get riled up calmed me, and I began to think and reason more sanely.

First I got up and took a good look around. At first I saw nothing out of the ordinary. But when I went over by the cleft in the mountain and stood at the edge of the clearing looking from the cavernous opening from which the little river ran to the swamp, and out over the field of white flowering lilies, I saw something that held my gaze for a moment.

One lily stalk a short space from the bank of the stream and just before me was bent to the ground and the snowy flower had been crushed as by a heavy foot. Nothing else was different from usual.

We all had been careful to keep to the cliff side of the clearing in going to and from the boat. None of us had walked across the flower bed, at the special request of Patience, who said it would be a "sacrilege to harm one of the delicate beauties."

I wondered who had trod upon that flower. But I could come to no decision. For unless we had been passed by some of the cannibals while we slept on the ridge, I could think of no other way of their getting to our camp, for the ridge was the only connecting link between the two mountains.

I was at a loss. Captain Standish could think of no way for the savages to get in.

"But," he said, "they must have got in, and now it's up to us to go help the women."

"Yes," I agreed willingly.

As if by common impulse we turned together and started up the mountain, to again look over the village that lay beyond the swamp. We went to plan a campaign.

The captain carried my bolo. I relied upon my small kris.

All the way to the lookout I watched for signs of others having come that way, but saw none which would not be of our own making. I was indeed puzzled.

The sun shone down hotly. The sea birds flapped lazily over the blue water. And I could see flocks of them over by the women's town. Even the surf beating against the reef barrier seemed lazy this warm morning.

"If only we had not slept," I thought, "we would now be well beyond the end of the island and out of the reach of these savages on our way to Guam—with the ladies safe." And I knew I was at fault.

From the cannibal village came sounds of activity. The feasting ground in the plaza was being cleared of all signs of the awful banquet. Old women raked with sticks, brushed with swamp reed brooms and in every way cleaned the ground. I was surprised at this show of sanitation. In Guam we Chimoros knew of no such ways until the Americans taught us. I wondered where these savages learned to be so clean.

But in the actions of those blacks we saw there was no undue excitement apparent. No gathering as if to talk of a new capture, as I felt sure there should be if our ladies were held prisoners there. A drum sounded. A little, crippled, crooked, black boy beat it.

The young men of the village came from the long huts around the square and formed into six well-lined companies. They were truly military. Officers were before each command and seemed to call a roll. The chief appeared from the stone house on the high plateau and took a position before his body-guard at the mound in front of the fall. The men from the town marched up the road to the heights and went at drills before the chief. Two companies were chosen, about fifty men in each, and caused to take separate sides, then actually fight each other. The chief and officers intently watched and yelled orders. Blood was drawn. A man's arm was lopped off at the shoulder. The fight was stopped. The drill was over for the day. And the winning side yelled victoriously. The losers attended their wounded.

Then Captain Standish called my attention to the girls' side of the island. Plenty of excitement and action was visible there. And the cause was apparent.

Urido, with the crooked sword, was paying the girls a morning call. He marched up and down swinging the sword till it flashed in the sunlight for all the world like a child at play in the circle within the row of houses.

Strange to say, the girls were out of the

huts and down on their faces on the ground doing obeisance to him. Seemingly the whole population of the place had turned out to do him homage.

All but one. For from the near side of the encircling huts an old witchlike woman bobbed. I was surprised at the speed she made. She was excited and going good. The path across the ridge was her mark and speedily she plied her unsteady legs toward it.

"What 'll we do?" the captain asked.

"Stay here," I said. "It would be foolish to try and stop the old woman, for with the army of blacks so close they'd sure get us."

If we were to even leave our protecting lava pile we would surely be seen.

"Drunks and fools lead a charmed life," I added, referring to Urido, "so let him get himself out the best he can; we've got the two women to think of!"

"You're right," he answered, but I could see he was anxious to be doing something.

The old woman came up the path at a good speed and I feared Urido was soon to be a victim of his own crazy whim.

He pranced and danced before his audience in great glee and seemed to be enjoying himself indeed.

The hag reached the ridge and tried to haloo for the soldiers, but lacked the necessary breath. And she was weakening. She must go right up to them.

Then Urido's mood changed as suddenly as a wind and he became as a frightened deer. Leaping over the prostrate girls' forms nearest him he raced between the huts and came up the mountain path like a wild thing. Whether he had seen the old woman running for help I do not know. But he could not have gone faster if he had.

The soldiers saw the frantic woman wabbling toward them, beckoning and trying to call them. Sensing trouble they started toward her and covered the quarter of a mile while Urido was just getting well started up the grade.

It took a moment for the breathless witch to tell what she wanted, and I blessed the delay, for Urido covered a good hundred feet while she did it.

Then began a race for life. Urido couldn't have known what was in store for him at the ridge, for a mountain hid the blacks from him. But he couldn't have done better if he did. His crazy brain had started him running and seemingly had no intent to turn off the power.

And the cannibals were no slouches when it came to placing one foot before the other. They held up their end of the race as well as Urido and it was a toss-up which side would reach the ridge first.

That fellow Urido must have a lung capacity like a steam boiler and a triple expansion heart action, for he did not slacken speed even on the up-hill path. The trail ran straight from the girls' village up the steep slope, topped the ridge before us, then went down a lesser grade to a hollow where it branched. One stem led to the main village, the other to the plateau, and it was down this that the negroes rushed.

Into the little dip they sped.

Urido came on like a wild man. He swung the snakelike sword over his head. He surely was feeling fine. I believe he ran because he did feel so good and it was one way of letting off steam. He could not have known of the pursuit started by the old hag.

Captain Standish and I were in an ideal place to see the race. What we would do was left to circumstances. We were both in sympathy with Urido, but had a thought for the missing women and how best we might serve them.

Then Urido let a yell of exuberance out of him.

The savages ran as well-trained men run with long, easy strides, and without seeming exertion. Urido's cheerful "whoop" reached their ears, and I saw them loose their excess strength like hounds suddenly striking a fresh scent and hotly following the quarry.

The voice was something tangible and these fighting men sensed a battle. To them that was joy enough and stimulus to their speedy endeavor.

They plunged into the little ravine. Urido was within a hundred feet of the summit.

The cannibals were a hundred and fifty

feet away at the most. Then a treacherous creeper lying in the path caught Urido's foot and he fell.

I held my breath in anxiety.

The negroes gained—gained. And Urido—a fool—took the fall as a matter of course. He could not have been more fortunate if drunk, for, doubling up like a gymnast, he rolled quickly over, propelled by his onward impetus, and came up on his feet. Stepping out as if nothing had happened he ran as before.

But he had lost his fifty-foot advantage.

The race was even — too even to be pleasing for the captain and I. We were at one angle of a trident, the fast approaching runners were the other two angles. We stood up in our protecting enclosure forgetful of all but the scene before us.

The savages vied with one another for first place. One—a big, strapping six footer—took the lead and held it. His bushy hair rose and fell to the swing of his legs like wings aiding him in flight. A wooden hair ornament flapped ludicrously behind like a fantail on his head.

Urido looked toward us and laughed. He sprang to the summit. The big black leaped ahead at the same instant. The two came together with a resounding thud. But Urido had turned to look at us and took the blow of the collision on his shoulder. The cannibal got it full in the face and staggered back into the one next behind.

In the confusion the negroes lost valuable time. Urido was all action. With a full two-hand swing he brought the long crinkled steel blade crashing into the skull of the first black. And what remained of the man was not nice to look at.

The others, startled by the unexpected attack, stepped back. Waving his sword threateningly, Urido advanced on them.

They gave him a look—saw the sword and then they did a peculiar thing. They all dropped to the ground before him flat on their faces.

Then I knew the sword to be some kind of fetish that they had all been trained to honor. I understood now why Urido got so much respect in the girls' village—the sword gained it for him.

Urido looked over the prostrate men on the path below him and laughed again.

"Allatambour!" he yelled.

"Allatambour!" The muffled chorus of many voices came respectfully from the men on the ground.

Then in the bottom of the little, green-grown ravine I saw something white.

The chief was coming. The white I saw was his feathered head-dress. He came at a racing stride. And well he maintained it for one so large.

He yelled a guttural command. The black men seemed uncertain. Some half rose, then seeing the sword yet ahead sank to earth again. The question of which, chief or worshipful symbol, was too much for their simple understanding.

Urido saw the chieftain coming along the path. And again, yelling "Allatambour!" to be echoed by the blacks, some crazy kink in his brain caused him to deliberately turn away and, for the second time when revenge seemed his, leave the black chief in the rear.

Urido ran straight along the ridge toward us.

Once more the chief growled out a command. And whipping a bolo from his girdle he jumped in among the men on the ground and laid about him with his cruel knife in no easy manner. Blood spurted out at every descent of his arm.

Then, seeing that the sword was no longer in front of them, the soldiers rose to their feet and again took up the pursuit.

This move was not anticipated, but not entirely unexpected by the captain and I.

"In here, Urido!" I called to the fleeing crazy man.

He looked, laughed and ran.

Right at his heels came the blacks.

"Here, Urido!" I called again impatiently, for he was passing. "We can stand them all off here!" I yelled.

I wondered why the savages kept their bolos in their loin strings and not in hand. They carried the heavy-bladed, short-handled throwing machete that could be a very wicked weapon if used by experts such as I felt them to be. And the lava barricade in which the captain and I stood was a valuable fortification in such fighting.

Urido passed us by.

Ten natives followed him to the edge of the ridge where it blended into the smallest of the three mountains. There they stopped and no urging of the chief would cause them to go a step farther. I wondered at that.

Then my thoughts were kept busy. The captain drew first blood with a well-swung blow of my bolo on a black pate as its owner tried to climb into our retreat.

I got my dirk into another's neck and twisted it. Then we both did our best.

The blacks came fast and persistently. But they did not draw their weapons.

We were to be taken alive. It was a bloody fight—a sickening fight, like killing helpless animals for the sake of killing. Of a sudden some one clutched my ankles and the next I knew I was being dragged like a rat from a hole out under the lava slabs through the crevice by which we had entered.

And the captain came next. He swore in true sailor fashion, but he came just the same.

We were captured and disarmed. And I felt that this was indeed a poor way to be helping our women.

CHAPTER XI.

OUR PRISON HUT.

KNOWING that such men as these black fellows who had captured us believed that to die fighting would insure a clear passport to heaven, I marveled at their not using weapons. They were all armed with the heavy throwing machetes. And I did see a hand occasionally seek the bone handle of a knife that could be so easily drawn and sent hurtling at us to effectively stop our resistance. But each time the hand would be reluctantly withdrawn without the weapon and the man would return to the fray intent on capturing us alive.

Such must have been the meaning of the guttural commands shouted at the men by their chief. He stood back a few paces directing the fight. When I saw that it was useless to struggle further and as the weight and smell of the black, sweaty bodies that held me down was becoming stifling I quit and yelled at Captain Standish:

"Might as well quit captain and save our strength for what's coming—they're not going to kill us here!"

"Damn these pirates!" I heard his muffled response from under a pile of squirming savages, "they'll have me suffocated if they don't get off soon." And from the way he said it, I knew he did not class me with them. I felt glad.

It was but a moment after we had ceased struggling when the cannibals cleared a way around us, two holding each of us while others soon gathered near-by creepers to tie our hands.

Then the chief came close to take a look. I was equally curious about him.

He was a monster of a man standing fully seven feet, topping even his biggest fighter, and he was well proportioned for his height. Blue tattoo markings in the design of coco-trees rose from stenciled roots on his feet and spread to tufted foliage and pictured fruit on his chest and back.

But the thing that caught my eye as I looked up his tall frame was a blazing red tattooed design of the sword Urido had taken which shone on the front of him. The handle was downward, on his stomach, just above his loin band, and the twisted blade extended to where the point bobbed on his Adam's apple. And I knew the sword was the tribal fetish and his royal emblem. I better appreciated what the loss of the steel must mean to him.

Then I saw his face. I am used to seeing brutal, harsh faces, but I shuddered. Circles of blue tattoo around his big-lipped mouth and cruel eyes added a horrible background for the human phalanx bone stuck through the center of his nose. In the distended lobe of each ear a radius bone from the forearm of some victim had been forced. They swung free and tapped their enlarged ends front and rear as he moved his head.

Topping all was the wonderous feathered head-dress. It was indeed a marvel of workmanship and a kingly hat. I wondered how it was held so firmly in place for

no strap showed under his chin. Later I found out that it was glued in place with a sticky mud which when dry would last for some time, then could be easily renewed. He wore the thing night and day. I did not envy him his sovereign duty.

Our hands were securely tied. Allatambour—for this chief was really he—came to where I lay on the ground. He seemed strangely perturbed and looked at me curiously. He did not give the captain more than a casual glance. It was upon me that he centered his frowning gaze. In it I thought I saw curiosity tempered by some inward trepidation as if he were looking at some deadly animal that he feared might spring at his throat. And a disdainful sneer overspread his face and I wondered at the man's thoughts that would cause such changeable expressions. Then he angered and seeming not to like my curious stare, kicked me roughly over on my face.

After that we were caused to get up and marched down to the village. As we drew near the swamp I noticed that its near border was overgrown by an immense bamboo cane brake.

A runner went on ahead and our coming was heralded. And those of the villagers who lived close to the side we entered had time to gather and exult over us. Particularly were old women crowded around the end of the path where it entered the cluster of huts. They were all as excited as children at a Chimoro fair. It was an event to make much of. They talked, gesticulated, screamed, and chanted; the uproar was deafening until the chief stalked ahead and shouting a command to the people brought about quiet.

Then he ordered his personal body-guard of ten men to clear the passage for us. This they did in no gentle manner. Grabbing any slow movers by the hair of the head, they dragged them from the paths. A little unclad piccaninny, a baby unable to walk, got loose from its mother and crawled directly in Allatambour's path. He roughly raised his foot and kicked it back into its mother's arms. But it was a girl.

"Damn the brute!" the captain exclaimed.

"I double that," I said.

One old hag with three black babies hanging to her grass skirt spat betel juice at me. Others jeered and showed their pointed, filed teeth. All the men were tattooed—mostly with blue circular designs—all over the body. Every woman we saw had black teeth, and I knew them to be married—the Chimoros follow this same custom of staining the bride's teeth dark. They all—men and women alike—carried little gourds suspended by a strip of fiber cord from the neck. These were the containers in which was slaked lime to sprinkle on the betel-nut they would roll in a leaf and chew. Plentiful splotches of the red juice showed on the ground about them.

Another woman made as if to spit at us, but Allatambour saw her and did a strange thing. He slapped her face, then raising his hand to demand quiet harangued the crowd. With many gesticulations he seemed to describe our capture, then he pointed to beyond the swamp apparently telling the people that we came from over there.

A murmur as of awe rose from his listeners. Their manner changed. They prostrated themselves on the ground before us. They did us homage as to those to whom reverence is due. The old hag that spat on me crawled on her knees and kissed my bare feet.

"Well I'll be damned!" Captain Standish ejaculated. He was astounded at the sudden change affairs had taken. So was I. "What do you make of it Alonzo?" he asked.

I noticed Allatambour intently listening to our talk.

"Not much," I said. "Unless as I have guessed, these people have some superstitious regard for that swamp and what lies beyond."

Then Allatambour turned and led the way for us to follow.

I felt elated, however, for if my surmise was true, our womenfolk *may* have been accorded as much honor as ourselves, and Patience would be safe.

Then I thought what a forlorn hope it was; Patience was so beautiful, this Allatambour was such a brute. I felt that he would defy even the tribe's pet traditional devil if it would gain for him a desire.

The sun shone hot. Oppressive vapors rose from the swamp and combined with the dust from under our scuffling feet it made the atmosphere stifling. Myriads of flies swarmed around us and uncomfortably waded in the sweat on our bodies. And our hands were tied.

A large, gray, fly-harboring mound at one side of the central square attracted my attention. It was a pile of oyster shells and refuse.

Everywhere else the village was neat and clean. Even the street we followed between the rows of round tipa huts and white fences of human bones seemed to have been swept. The bleached bone fence on our right joined and blended into a more pretentious stockade of whalebone, but the top was gruesomely decorated with grinning human skulls. Some had hair, some were bare.

"Pleasant outlook!" the captain grunted, shuddering as he looked. "And I'd hardly pick this damnable spot for my permanent resting place, if the choice were mine."

I didn't say anything. I had been looking ahead.

Behind the upright whalebone that made the fence I saw two low huts. They were each at least a hundred feet long and separated by an entrance way to the central square which they faced. Over this passage from the street arched a huge jawbone of a whale and decorating its upper surface were the fresh blood-stained heads of the Patience Standish crew. The captain had not as yet seen them.

But he finally did spy the horrible array. He wilted. Tears came from his eyes. He bowed his head.

"God be merciful, my men were brave!" he mumbled. A morbid attraction seemed to cause him to look again. He spoke to me.

"The one on the left with the grayish hair is Aaron, my first mate." Then he spoke to the death's-head: "Many a cruise we've had together, Aaron, and a better mate never sailed—I guess it's as well I'm here for I couldn't go back and face Anna an' the kids."

And I knew he referred to the man's family.

He made some remark to each silent horrifiedly staring face. He must have known all intimately and their families.

Allatambour stopped before this arch of death and proudly pointed up to his latest collection. He seemed pleased with himself. The captain and I bowed our heads and passed through the gates without comment.

Allatambour grunted angrily. We had not shown proper appreciation of his prowess and the decorative idea.

Inside we found an open, barren, smooth-trodden, reddish-colored, plot of ground, rectangular rather than square, confined within the line of long, low huts. Four of these were on each of two sides—while two stood at each shorter end. Back of these mess-halls the pointed thatch of the village showed like haycocks against the dense, cool, green of the tropical jungle and cane-brake.

In the center of the plaza, which was as neatly cleared as the street without, was a small pit and there the village fire burned. As we came in sight a woman was carrying some live embers in a green gourd, from it to her home fireplace. She had not known of our capture for our sudden appearance startled her and she dropped the ember on her bare foot, then danced with pain as it burned her.

The conch-shell blower whom we had seen calling the fighting men in the early morning, the crippled little hunchback, was squatted at the edge of the pit feeding new fuel that the fire might not die. He looked like an ebony infidel idol before whom an alter fire burned.

He apparently was firetender as well as village bugler. He jumped to his feet at sight of his chief—grabbed up his conch shell and placing it to his lips blew a blast.

An old woman before the door of one of the long mess-halls at our right had just chopped the head from a long-legged chicken, and was holding the bird up that the blood dripping from its neck stub might drain into the mouth of a young boy (preventive of consumption), whom she firmly held and made take the dose of medicine per force of arms. She had not expected the sudden blast from the shell.

She dropped the still flapping bird in the boy's upturned face. The little youngster, anxious to be free jerked from her grasp and ran wiping the red smears from his face as he went.

The boy made toward the far corner of the square and it was then that I noticed one lonely bone-fenced, round hut inside the grounds. The boy seemingly avoided this little hut going around it at a safe distance as if it might be haunted.

From the point of the palm-leaf thatch to the giant bamboo stakes that held it from the ground, this hut was in good repair. The fence of whitened bones shone in the bright sun with a hazy dazzle. But the place was apparently unoccupied.

It stood in its far-off corner across the barren expanse of trodden, reddish earth like a well-kept sanctuary where some important event had taken place which was the cause for its preservation.

It was held in awe I could surmise from the way the boy scouted around.

But Allatambour led us straight across the sunbaked, sweltering, open field to this lonely hut.

He pointed within, bowed to us, seemingly in respect, but I saw the fiendish sneer on his face as he turned and left us.

The captain and I were freed of our bonds and motioned by our guards to enter.

We went inside.

The round room of its interior was neat. Apparently the last occupant had gone hurriedly and everything had been maintained just as left by the owner. The fixtures were strange in a cannibal hut.

To the right of the door was a regular Occidental bed of bamboo. That in itself was unusual. On it was a pad, two aged yellow sheets and a blanket, very apparently taken from some ship. The whole was made up as I have seen hospital beds in Agana, Guam. At the foot of the bed was a lesser bed — a well-woven, reed, basket-crib as for a baby. In it were delicate linens and soft, feather-stuffed pillows —over it a mosquito net.

The net only of all these things showed the ravages of time. It was falling to pieces.

On the other side of the room was a mat on the floor with more ship's blankets as if made up as a bed for some man who had followed the sea.

Above this pallet fastened to the wall where it would be conspicuously visible to one in the bamboo bed was a picture of the "Madonna and Child."

As I looked at the haloed child, I crossed myself.

"Well what do you know about this?" the captain exclaimed, then suddenly he seemed to think of something. He looked at me curiously, grabbed my hand in a most friendly manner and smiled as if he had just won a wager of some kind.

"I don't know what to make of it, or you," I answered.

But he offered no explanation of his actions. And after that he was exceedingly cheerful for a man expecting a tortured ending to his career at any moment.

It was hot and close in the hut. I went outside and sat in the shade of the overhanging thatch.

I was thinking of Patience Standish. There had been no sign of her presence anywhere in the village, but I felt sure she must be somewhere near and wondered where it might be.

Out in the hot sun the crippled conch blower squatted by the fire-pit. A thin spire of smoke rose from the hole in front of him. His long arms frequently waved through the smoke as if thus casting weird spells into it. He looked like a medicine-man. The woman who had killed the chicken was standing near watching something in the fire. A crowd of villagers were coming in at the gate.

But every one kept at a distance from us. All were curious, but seemed afraid of too close acquaintance.

I could see that what the chief had told them of our capture, and from where we came, indeed had impressed them.

It was but a short time when the entire plaza was lined with villagers all gazing at us like timorous children gazing at a doctor—curious yet fearful.

"Say, captain, come out and look at the excitement we're causing," I called back to my companion in captivity.

He came and joined me. The hunchback blew a blast on his conch shell.

Then we saw the crowd before the gate by which we had entered part and five comely young girls, without even the meager grass skirts customarily worn, came toward us each carrying a woven reed basket on her head. The crowd chanted a singsong dirgelike air.

The girls came nearer and nearer, slower and slower, then faltered—turned as if to flee, but the jeering cries of the people forced them on.

The crippled bugler by the fire — the hunchback—looked at the girls and uttering a cry of dismay he dropped his shell instrument and hobbling as fast as his legs would allow, he ran to the leader of the five. They rubbed noses—he caressed her hair and cheek with his hands. Both were in tears. The crowd hooted angrily. Two soldiers went hurriedly to the pair and roughly tore the malformed boy away. He implored—she pleaded, the guards kicked and mauled the unfortunate fellow. The girls were forced to walk on.

I was sorry for them. The girls were all thoroughly scared. And they were no more than children. The oldest, who led could not have been fourteen and the last barely twelve.

I looked at the captain. The old man was blushing. "Why this embarrassment?" he asked.

"Some of Allatambour's entertainment," I remarked. The girls were to be pitied, but the contents of the basket interested us. The first held bananas, the next cocoanuts, and in order came mangoes, oranges, and ahuacates.

I was thirsty. It was too hot to be hungry and the flies were too numerous.

When they got inside of the yard of our hut the girls seemingly thought they had done their duty and placing the baskets on the ground toward us with trembling hands they each prostrated themselves behind the portions of food.

I went where they were and spoke to them. But they were sobbing as if their hearts would break.

Finally I got the oldest of the five to look up at me. The anguish in her eyes wrung my heart. Surely the simple task of bringing us food could not cause them so much dread I thought. The captain came and helped me.

After much persuasion we got the children up and the baskets of food in the shade. The girls would do nothing but kow tow to us and tremble with fear so we gave up trying to calm them for the present.

The oranges were like the kind in Guam —green in color and sour to taste—but we ate them. The coconuts gave us good drink for they were not ripe enough to be rancid. And I was just starting the untidy but enjoyable eating of a mango when an unusual noise from the crowd of eagerly watching blacks attracted my attention.

From the fire-pit came the old woman whom I had noticed with the slaughtered chicken. She carried a large smoking mud ball held between two flat sticks. And the cries of the blacks seemed to imply that they wanted her to come back.

She stopped—turned—and deliberately stuck her tongue out at the whole crowd of them.

"Good for you, old girl," Captain Standish called and it was amusing to see the old colored woman's face light up at the kind tone. She was all smiles when she deposited the hot ball she carried at our feet and bowed herself away.

And the mud ball held the chicken in close confinement within — cooked to a nicety. The fact that the bird had been roasted fully clothed, as it were, was no drawback except for the burned-feather taste. For all the feathers came off with the mud. The fowl had not been drawn, but we saw to that, then we really had a good meal.

I had not supposed that I was really hungry enough to eat. However, both the captain and I would have eaten whether or no after seeing the old woman's kindly act in the face of adverse criticism.

A commotion started among the people. The hunchback was brought in sight. Then came a sudden blast from his conch shell, a hurried parting of the crowd, and Allatambour strode across the field toward us. He was followed by his armed guard. Each was now equipped with a long, split-bamboo lance, the upper part sharp and black from the fire-hardening process.

The chief strode right up to me.

He looked at me with a quizzical sort of a grin on his face as if to express a satisfaction at having the upper hand of me. "Why me?" I wondered. He seemed possessed with some direct antipathy for me. But he acted as if for some reason he feared to openly do away with me.

"Well, you big stew bum," I said, although I thought to talk was of no use if he could not understand, but I was getting tired of his haughty sneering stares, "what's the big idea?" and I waved my hand to include the hut, girls, and food.

He particularly noticed the girls.

The next five or six yards of guttural talk he barked meant no more to me than any like-sounding dog fight. Yet I tried to seem intent on his speech. After a full ten minutes of this, much to the captain's amusement, he afterward told me it made him think of standing in front of a phonograph horn looking in to see where the sound came from, we were dumfounded when Allatambour said, pointing at the pathetic sight of the five prostrate girls:

"Him fine gal, huh!"

He spoke in English. Then a particularly fiendish gleam came into his eyes as he followed it up with: "Me! Big stew bum!" he grabbed on my disgusted epithet as a new complimentary title for himself, "Allatambour—the big noise! I have them die — sunup — yeah!" and turning he stalked away.

"Where'n hell 'd he learn English?" was my startled question of Captain Standish.

"Search me—but hold on!" he said, "I believe Mother Zuribar can tell us if we get to see her again in this world."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the conclusion of this story without waiting a month.

Little John

by Dixie Willson

IT was the first year of the twentieth century. The sweet, warm, late afternoon stillness of the last day of September flooded the room with a delicate trail of sun and shadows. Along the speckled rug it ran, and up and down the whitewashed walls and across the motionless covering of the bed. One shimmering little patch clung to the forehead lock of Meg's red-gold hair, touching her closed eyelids caressingly, and holding silver lights in the tears that lay along her white cheeks.

Her little room was breathlessly full of the greatest expression in the world—silence—the silence of her wordless unrealization—her groping to understand the glory of a thing come out of God's scheme of creation to *her*.

Presently came the slightest whisper of a door-knob turning—and the door moved

open with a smoothness speaking of reverent hands behind it—came hushed, creaky steps across the floor — came one sharp, heartful intake of breath—came two big hands over Meg's limp ones — and she opened her eyes to smile through her tears into the face of her husband.

"Did you see 'im?" she whispered—then repeated her question with sweet playfulness. "Did you see 'im—fayther?"

The man nodded—then dropped on his knees, and buried his face in the pillow beside her.

"Little John!" she went on—half whispering, half talking—"and all day I've been a lyin' 'ere with 'im—a prayin' for the man he'll be. Rob, do you know it's a *man* as is here—this little buntin'?" Rob lifted his head and looked at the wee one lying against her shoulder—then he slipped one big arm under her pillow—embracing them both with a wordless depth of wondering love.

"Little John!" she said softly. "Since daylight I been thinkin' for the years he'll come into. Our son, Rob! Can ye think o' that? Oh, but we must grow 'im brave and good! Seems to me as 'ow every breath o' my life 'ill be took in a prayer for 'im till he does 'imself brave and good!"

Her faint voice fell softer in her dream as she went on. The long sun streaks fell softer, too, till at last they grew away together and it was twilight. By and by, Rob slid his arm from under her—brought himself awkwardly to his feet, and left Meg as he had found her — her son sleeping warmly in the mother curve of her arm, and her eyes closed on the day present, that she might live in the day coming—when her Little John should prove himself the answer to her prayer.

Meg put all her slight weight against the rusty wheel, and moved it creakingly around. She felt the bucket coming—coming—and heard the little silver drip of its overflow. A minute more—and she caught it, swung it into the brake, and rushed its clear, cool stream along the trough. The rope wheel spun its length loose again, and she turned for her full pail—but it was gone!

Then, in a second, her puzzled eyes broke into twinkles of smiles, because the long shadow in front of her told her well enough what had come of it. Laughing, she faced about and held up her cheek for the son's kiss.

"You're such of a scamp, Little John," she laughed, "as I never knows when you comes at all. Where's fayther?"

The boy slipped his arm around his mother's shoulder and patted her gently without replying. She looked up in quick terror.

"Not so *soon?*" she questioned sharply. "They've not gone again so *soon?*"

John nodded, then drew her along the path toward the cottage which stood, with the drowsy hush of early summer noontime, in the shadow of a great, flowering linden tree. On its shady side two corner posts and a slant roof marked a bit of a porch with a low bench, upon which the lad placed the water-pail before he followed Meg in to the spotless little kitchen.

She hung up her bonnet, removed one of the three places set at the white-covered table by the window, turned a hand to the bubbling bean-pot, then came to the door and tucked herself under her big boy's arm.

"Well, laddie," she said quietly. "Now let's hear of the men's havin' had to go."

"That I can't tell you, mither," John answered. "I was to ha' met fayther at noon by the Folkestone road, and, when I'd been waitin' some time, a cart comes by from 'ich a lass tells me the Queen's Royal Surrey 'as been ordered up and gone in scarce an hour." Then after a pause he ventured a hesitant question. "Mither—shouldn't you say I'd soon best be goin' up Lon'on wye mysel'?"

Meg's eyes met his with a lightning glance. Her hand bore hard upon his shoulder for a minute, then she playfully pushed him into his place at table.

"Why, John!" she laughed. "You've scarce turned fifteen! 'Cause your mither is shorter than yoursel' you feels too aged by much! Tyke your beans and keep your mind 'ome a while!"

It was hard for John to obey. Presently he began counting exactly how long by

real weeks it would be till he should be sixteen and a man! When he found out, he looked up with an exclamation to ask her if she knew it was only twenty. But, though the words were right on his lips, he didn't say them, because something in her face brought to him his first realization of really turning his back on the white, sweet quietness of this little cottage-in-the-sun, and on the warm eyes and the warm heart and the warm mother that was in it—to go out on the highroad—and on—and on—and on!

Suddenly Meg laughed softly. She was looking along the rough floor to where the little panes of the window marked themselves in sharp sunlight squares.

"There's where you played hop-scotch while I maked your kilties, Little John! And, lookee—" she went on, crossing to the window-frame—"'ere's all the charcoal-marks faythers put up for your sizes!"

With two strides John brought himself against the whitewashed wall, slipping under her arms and standing erect. "'Ow tall do I come now, mither?" he cried.

She flashed a glance from his eager eyes to the distance of his thick, blond curls *above* the last mark—the one faythers had made a year ago. "I've not no charcoal to-day, boy," she said, almost whispering. "Come away from the clean wall."

For a minute her eyes, with a deep mixture of fear and love, caught his. He kissed her with rough tenderness — then stepped out through the open doorway.

She felt her heart struggling in an unreal sort of a something. The little cottage —*so* still and peaceful, and this blue-eyed boy in the dooryard—*so* fair and precious! With a sudden fluttering madness to get away from herself—a sudden wild little feeling that she *must* turn things backward —Meg ran to the patch of sun on the floor and, dropping on her knees beside it, stretched her arms before her, placed her hands together, crooked her fingers oddly and, against the sunshine, brought to life a black, long-eared bunny, with a mouth that opened, and an eye that winked!

"Little John," she called, laughing sharply. "'Ere it is! Just the wye you used to play with it all of an afternoon!"

John glanced in, saw, and laughed with glee. "You can't myke 'is ears wiggle, mither!" he challenged gaily.

He stepped around to watch her—standing half *in* the cottage, half out of it—and, suddenly, standing so, it struck him that—queerly—his heart was half in and half out, too! At once dreaming of battles and laughing with joy at the flapping ears of a shadow bunny!

"Mither!" he broke in shortly. "See 'ow I'm standin'! I'm 'alf with *you*, and 'alf in the world! I'm just—I'm just 'alf a boy and 'alf a man, mither!"

Then his ears caught the sound of horsemen on the highroad and he turned his head quickly to see. He looked out across the long, green, quiet meadow—out beyond to where the little group of uniformed men were riding briskly on to Folkestone. Eagerly he turned to point them out to Meg—but stopped short in surprise. Her white arms stretched and tense, still shaped a stiff, queer, little, long-eared rabbit, but she—the hands forgotten, knelt with her head thrown back—her eyes closed—and big, soft tears dropping all shiny in the sun.

With one stride across the floor he fairly snatched her to her feet, whirled her through the door, and held her eyes to see the proud bit of a regiment.

"Think o' *me* ridin' like that!" he cried. "And I could—and I *could!* If my mither was brave as *me*—I *would,* too," he finished laughing.

Meg looked up at him quickly. What he had said was startling—but she knew in a flash that he was right about the "mither" who had prayed since his birth for *his* bravery! She knew, suddenly, that the time was at hand when she must show him *in herself,* the strength she prayed for in him!

She reached in her pocket. "Why, 'ere's some charcoal after all!" she said. "Let's take your size. You're coming sixteen soon, and you're a tall lad and strong. Maybe it's right, there *is* good you could do!"

With a whoop of joy in her sudden understanding, he fairly swept her off the ground! "Oh, you is fine, mither!" he cried between kisses. "Some mithers is afeared of the dark, but not mine!"

She had to stand on tiptoe to make his headmark—and in the midst of the fun they were having about it—the young curate from the village chapel, who had walked in unobserved, forgot his dignity so far as to laugh—which brought Meg and her son around in a fine hurry. He carried vestments over his arm which he shook out and held up to John.

"'Tis of your boy I would speak, Mrs. Blondwin," he explained. "Our crucifer for St. Stephen's has"—he hesitated just a breath—"has gone away, and I'd like to see this lad in his place."

The gown fit perfectly, and Meg assented with pretty pride—promising that he might go to be put through the service that night. Arm in arm they stood in the doorway to watch the curate out of sight—then John discovered that the height of which he had so boasted, had played him poorly, for he found one of the thorny tendrils from the vine above the door had tangled itself in his thick, yellow curls. Meg, with shears, hurried to the rescue.

"Don't clip the *vine,* mither," he broke in. "Them little fingers is too live to cut—and it's too tight catched anahow." It *was* well twisted, so Meg, with care, just clipped the lock, and left it clinging there.

The day was well gone, and John hurried to his garden chores, while Meg set about the cottage work. She did not see him again till he came in late for the evening meal, which was scarcely over when the curate called to take him to the chapel and, at the same time, neighbor Hannah Barker came with cart and pony begging Meg for company up-town way to meet the late post.

Meg minded John to be attentive, and sent him on with a kiss—then rattled off by the west road with Hannah. As long as she could see, she looked back over her shoulder up the dusty lane after the boy and the curate, but she soon lost them in the violet-gray of summer evening, and the thin mist which came creeping up from the sea.

The late twilight grew gradually deeper, closer—then slipped suddenly into dead night and dead, thick fog. Hannah had not expected the fog. Scarcely able to see the way at hand they rattled on. The fog seemed more than common dense. Like a murky choking thing it seemed to cut off breath as well as sight and, as they went on, the oppression grew until their heads were fairly pounding with the weight of the heavy air.

But suddenly Meg began to realize that the low, thick, burring sound was not altogether *in* her head—more nearly did it begin to seem around—above her! With a quick hand over Hannah's she caught the straps, stopped the gig and listened.

As though wound in the thickness of the fog, a distant throb beat rhythmically. Close at hand cut the shrill neigh of a restless pony.

With a snorting answer Hannah's beast plunged forward, jerked them a few yards, and brought up shortly full out of the fog—which closed like a solid wall behind them—beneath a blue-black sky.

The street was narrow and cobble-stoned. On either side the trim cottages of the city's outskirts stretched dimly into distance. Nowhere—ahead or behind—was there the thinnest gleam or line of light, and sensed, rather than seen, in this dead darkness were men, were women, drawn together in little groups, silent under the tension of suspense.

Low in the sky to the southward, a dark, solid cloud moved slowly—coming on and on—sullen—muttering—with the menacing rumble of a tidal wave or tearing wind!

With her eyes fascinated by that dark mass above, Meg climbed from the gig. A second later the pony, frenzied now by the queer hush of it all, wheeled—and backed again into the fog.

As he turned, Hannah, jerked forward, toppled to the ground, and the wheels and sharp hoofs passed over her. Meg, crouching in the road, mechanically gathered the crushed head into her lap, and rocked it, crooning softly, her eyes never once moving from the south sky.

Down the middle of the street the vicar stopped, threw his arms awide, and began a prayer.

Through the fog came a ring of hoofs and a little band of cavalrymen rode into sight—dismounted, and with gray faces they, too, took a silent stand.

Closer, louder, as the great cloud grew nearer, came that grumbling—that beating of air against air!

All unconscious of themselves, the little groups of people drew closer together, clinging to each other—waiting—waiting—

The cloud came lower, its outline more clear. It cut the air more sharply! And then came a new sound! A stinging, long-tailed whir—the whistling cut of a heavy thing plunging downward through air!

Faintly at first it came—like a long echo of winter wind across an open field! Then plainer, sharper, more often—and now and then the streak of a black comet cutting from the moving cloud earthward.

Here and there, among the watchers, broke half-stifled cries, or meaningless words, trailing into silence again—silence, but for the low voice of the priest in constant prayer, and the lullaby Meg still crooned above the dead woman in her arms.

Then still another sound! A muffled boom of bursting shells! The earth trembled from the bruises on its near-bosom and, with the shuddering of it, came, in echo, a hideous clatter of toppling things!

The cloud hovered — hovered — then seemed to soar, and suddenly broke into many parts, with the noise of its whir fairly upon them.

So black it was between earth and sky! And the streets so black! The shadows! The comet tails! All great black hopelessness!

A low, growling boom! The earth quivered again!

But where!

But why!

Oh, the gropingness, the pitilessness, the treachery of the dark!

Suddenly it seemed that it must be *this*—this very dark—that kept them in the horror of uncertainty! Kept them helpless against this thing so surely—surely closing in upon them!

A brawny fellow broke across the street.

"Lor' lu' me!" he shrieked. "There *mus'* be a light! Shall we choke like bloody fools i' fear o' the dark! Lor' lu' me—no!"

Reaching a corner lamp-post he clutched himself up it like a squirming animal. In an instant he opened the great lamp, torched it into a glowing ball, then broke into cheers for himself and his heroism.

And in almost the same instant came one sharp crack from the cavalry group!

The light spat out.

The man dropped to the ground.

Then from directly overhead something came whizzing sharply—crashed on the cobblestones, rolled a pace, settled smoothly, and offered up a thin trail of smoke.

From somewhere one long wail broke and died.

The priest's prayer cut off.

Meg buried her crooning in the cold neck that bent stiffly over her arm.

Above—that rhythmic thing seemed to hold its thundering breath!

And, against this world of utter black—white, set faces, staring toward that straggling bit of gentle smoke, stood out like bloodless shells of things already dead—like faces on a sea.

In Meg's next conscious moment, she found herself stumbling through a bit of deep-grass meadow, in the steel-gray light of breaking midnight.

Her print skirt, wet with fog-dew, clung about her knees. Her hair fell loose and her sleeves were torn.

She caught herself up shortly—ran her fingers over her hair—and looked ahead—behind. Her hot hands, wandering up her smock, tore at the throat of it, closed convulsively over her ears as if to shut out some sickening memory of sound—then shot out in expressionless bewilderment.

The bare arms, flung before her, stiffened as her wide eyes, falling upon them, sensed that they were blotched with thick, half dry blood! The arms dropped limp. She swayed forward, caught herself, and stumbled on.

Presently she came out near a narrow lane and stopped, still feeling the weight of uncertainty!

Again her hand went to her head, but remembering the blood, she took it away with a shudder.

Suddenly she heard a scurrying, and saw a wild, long-eared rabbit dart out of the grass beside her, and hide away on the other side. For a long minute her eyes

held to the place where he had vanished. Then, with a sharp cry, she knew herself, and plunged out of the grass, running wildly on!

"Little John!" she cried brokenly. "*My* Little John! Wherever tha' is—tha' mither's comin'!"

The hard gray of night's morning had paled to the softer gray of morning's night when Meg, breathless and disheveled, found herself come to the quiet lane which led to the little chapel.

She hurried down it—opened the gate—and stepped in.

Calmly, slowly, she looked about her.

The markers on the graves stood out white and grim as had those faces in the night!

From a near pond a stray frog chirked—and the trill of a morning thrush in the hedge came softly. Here and there the sky folded into warm violet with a line of gold.

It was the hush of perfect peace.

To Meg, too weary, too numb, to sense even heartache, it seemed just that the world had mercifully moved away and left her all—all alone on the shell of it!

Before her, along the fresh green grass, lay the walls of the little chapel—a clean, smooth ruin. They had fallen so as to leave no mysterious, hideous debris—every line of destruction was spread flatly before her. The benches, splintered, lay along the floor, but — beyond them — the white chancel with its cross of gold stood untouched in simple majesty. The breath of a morning wind stirred the altar cloth, and traveled beyond it to ruffle the lace-edged surplice of the young curate.

On the chancel's floor were many mud prints of booted feet, and many irregular pools of blood.

Nothing more.

Nothing but one stout leather shoe caught by its thong in the curate's dead hand.

A boy's shoe!

Meg drew back against the gate with her hands doubled to a tense whiteness around the pickets.

Looking through the ragged edge of the wall above the chancel, she saw among the sooty chimney pots and solemn towers of the town—the morning star. It seemed to mock her with its pale, unfeeling eye. The whole peaceful, unfeeling silence mocked her, and suddenly she rebelled. She rebelled with a scream! A shrill, hot scream!

When it was done she felt two strong hands on her shoulders and observed that behind her was a uniformed Englishman—his horse cropping near by.

"Margaret Blondwin?" he asked with gentle seriousness.

Meg nodded.

"Mother of John Blondwin?" he asked again—and again she nodded.

"I've been sent from the colonel of the Forty-First Highland to inform you he is well and safe and on his way to France."

Meg caught blindly at the gate — her heart fairly stopping as he went on.

"We'd a small regiment of un-uniformed boys comin' down to Folkestone for the mornin's boat—and they had got just to this chapel when the bomb fell. It killed three—and a many were knocked out a bit—but them as were able took the others along, buried the three, and went aboard with the rest at midnight. So come that your son was took on for one of them. When he was fit and told of himself, the word come on for me to bring to his mother. He's such a lad you can order him brought back, Mrs. Blondwin, but they say he's well eager to go on and serve—that he's an uncommon brave lad, Mrs. Blondwin, and says his mither'd *want* him to go on."

Meg drew up proudly and smiled.

"He *is* uncommon brave," she said, "and would I be orderin' 'im away from livin' as brave as 'is 'eart bids 'im? Tell them this is just as 'is mither wishes!"

After a while, when she turned on down the lane toward the cottage, the messenger was gone.

All was just as she had left it—the door open—the water-pail fresh filled—the tea table with its new loaf and mulberries—

Meg slipped off her wet, heavy shoes—washed the blood from her arms and fingers—put herself into a clean smock and apron—combed her hair—and stepped to the doorway.

It was quite morning now. The milk-cart came rattling into sight, and presently its brown old woman was at the door with her daily crock full. Meg stepped out to meet her with a fresh "good morrow"—then told her she would need the milk no longer.

"My son has gone to Paris!" she smiled in answer to Martha's surprised eyes.

"Tha' little John!" the milk-woman exclaimed.

"Yes," Meg nodded, "my little John. How's tha' garden growin'?"

"My garden is fairly ripenin'," Martha answered, "and—and—God be wi' ye."

Meg watched her out of sight—then turned back to the cottage.

A step forward—and she stopped short—her eyes grew deep and dark, and her lips pressed together.

Above the doorway—the wild vine—and caught in one of its spiral tendrils—

She reached up and untangled the scrap of a yellow curl. It caressed her finger softly just as she had felt it a hundred times—a thousand times.

Smiling all to herself, she slipped down the wall, down on the grass by the cottage door.

One August day Meg looked up from the garden patch to see the post-girl standing by the gate.

With a cry she ran to get the square, white letter, and tore the flap away with trembling fingers. A penciled note—short—and the last word "John."

He was well, it told her, a good soldier, and very happy. He loved her, it said, more than he could ever tell, because she—the wife of a soldier and the mother of a soldier—was as brave as both of them together. He had heard nothing from fayther, which must mean that he, too, was well.

At last Meg put away the letter, a damp mixture of kisses and tears, and returned to the patch.

By the next day a cartful of truck was ready, and with it she jogged into Folkestone. She found the streets alive with flags and music for the winning of a splendid victory. With a prayer of thanks in her heart, and a warm pride for England and her two fighting men, she made way through the crowd to the market.

The stalls were surrounded with eager, excited people, and, as Meg waited, her face too caught the spirit of thanksgiving and hope. Her shoulders straightened, and, turning to the woman next her, she smiled.

"Did tha' see 'er picture?" the woman questioned, instantly glad to talk.

"Whose?" queered Meg.

"Why, the girl as won the day!" the other explained in surprise at the question. "The girl as carried the bomb o'er the top. I don' know 'ow she got in—but o'er the top she went, bless 'er—o'er the top 'ith the best o' them! She's a beautiful face. They're a showin' of her on the news board. Come—lookee."

Grasping her arm, Meg's friend pulled her around the corner to the great board flaring the print of a fair face at which Meg now looked. Below the face were the blazoned head-lines, and as each bit appeared, cheer after cheer broke from the throng that packed the street.

"Eight sent into enemies' trench with bomb," it read—"Exploding shell killed seven. Last man went on alone and bombed the way to victory!"

Meg's eager companion stopped cheering a minute and leaned closer to make her words heard above the crowd.

"I think it aren't a girl after all," she volunteered. "Now, from the face I thot—"

But her sentence cut off in astonishment at the flash of the glowing eyes that met hers.

"Aw woman!" Meg cried—"It is my—my Little John!"

And Meg's heart sang through the days that followed. Days when all England talked of its fair young fighting son—*her* boy! And when his name was still warm on their lips came a second report of a second winning deed!

A tumbling little river hurrying from France, through Germany to the sea, had been carrying the bottled messages of spies in its current. And when one such mes-

sage, plunging down the rapids in a driving storm, had bobbed for an instant into sight, young John Blondwin, who knew no fear, rode the rapids along — fought the storm-swollen stream for hours till he caught it — then faced untold dangers in the enemies' country to bring it back to his commander!

And this was Meg's boy! Her little, fair-haired son thus carrying glory for England! It was more than mother mind could sense, or than prayers of gratitude could be offered up for. She spent her hours living through his life from birth till now—and then one day Rob came home!

There was no word of his coming. His shadow just fell across the threshold, and he was there! His regiment had come in for rest and a change of service.

So then they lived their unspeakable joy together. They lived Little John — they breathed Little John—they dreamed Little John! And their heaven was the day when he should be coming home!

And then, as suddenly as Rob had come, came word that John *was* coming!

The letter was in his own hand—and smeared with tears were the words that told of "back to mither."

He'd been wounded. Just slightly—but his youth, and all he had done—had decided them to send him home a while.

In another day all England knew it, too! Young John Blondwin was coming home! The queen herself would give him his honors!

Meg's heart seemed fair to bursting—so full it was in trying to realize.

The cottage was as spotless as a thing untouched by hands. John's low room done and done again with a thousand touches of tenderness. Big Rob strode forth and back along the lane, feeling as though even the sky were too close a boundary for him, and at last Meg came to a place where she could occupy herself in no way—and gave up to stand in the doorway —singing and waiting—and watching the highroad down which in three days he should come!

And thus watching, waiting, on the second day she saw a stranger. Saw him turn down the lane, and held a steady hand for the message he was bringing. She thanked him. Then read what was written.

Rob was scything the tall grass by the roadside.

She caught his eye and held up the fluttering paper.

"Come here fayther," she called—"'tis about Little John."

Rob came and asked sharply: "Aren't he comin' 'ome?"

"Yes," Meg replied. "Yes, 'e's comin' 'ome. Rob—all 'is life I've prayed 'e'd be brave and good. 'E's answered 'ith the best o' glory."

The next few days Meg stood like steel through the services and the honors that worshipful England bestowed upon her son. The queen herself put the flag over him and pinned the gold cross of honor on his breast.

Quiet, calm, reverent — Meg watched and listened. Now and then she smiled.

Great folks marveled at her courage. Lesser folks whispered that she must nave lost her wits—that she couldn't know he was dead!

When finally they brought him back to the cottage—the bishop came with her.

"It's a strength to know you," he said in farewell. "That young hero was made of his mother's stuff!"

"'E wanted 'is mither to be brave as 'im," Meg answered quietly.

So once again Meg was alone with her son in this room where he was born.

It was the seventeenth year of the twentieth century. The sweet, warm, late-afternoon stillness of the last day of September flooded the room with a delicate trail of sun and shadows. Along the speckled rug it ran, and up and down the white-washed walls, one little patch clinging to the forehead lock of Meg's red-gold hair, touched her closed eyelids caressingly, and held silver lights in the tears that lay along her white cheeks.

Her little room was breathlessly full of the greatest expression in the world—silence—the silence of her wordless unrealization — her groping to understand the glory of a thing come out of God's scheme of creation to *her*.

Palos of the Dog Star Pack

by J. U. Giesy

Author of "Mimi," "The Blue Bomb," "House of the Hawk," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

JASON CROFT, scholar and mystic, master of the occult and the esoteric lore of the Hindu, had been recounting his astral experiences to Dr. George Murray, who had been summoned by Croft's housekeeper after he had lain "dead or asleep," as she put it, for more than a week.

On his return to consciousness he declared he had been in "Palos, one of the Dog Star pack, a star in the system of the sun, Sirius." In fact, he insisted he had an astral body in Palos, for he had long since come to roam the world at will, projecting his mind with his astral body into every corner of the cosmos.

In Palos he had found a flourishing civilization, a highly cultured people, a thoroughly organized political state. The country was composed of separate states, the principal of which were Tamaria, Zollaria, and Cathur. Here national jealousy and "Teutonic" diplomacy were bent on their old game of alliance and counter alliance.

In Aphur, the royal city of Tamarizia, where dwelt the king, Jadgor, Croft had found the secret of his terrestial unrest and the magnet that had been drawing him, *always*, to Sirius.

Until he looked upon Naia, daughter of Prince Lakkon and niece of the king, Croft had been untouched by love. Now his whole soul was caught up in the swirl of the bitter-sweet passion, for consciousness recognized at once that he had found his counterpart, his soul-mate, his twin. While the mere sight of the princess made him her slave forever, he was invisible and imperceptible to her.

King Jadgor and her father, for reasons of state, were anxious to give her in marriage to the Neronian voluptuary, Kyphallos, Crown Prince of Cathur, whose vices revolted the purity of her soul.

At the king's behest Lakkon had given a banquet and entertainment for the prince. Flushed with wine he had caught up one of the dancing girls, and had proposed a lewd toast to her, when Naia hurled her goblet of wine at his feet.

Stunned into sobriety by the daring of the outraged princess he then and there claimed her hand in marriage, and cemented the political union of Cathur and Aphur.

Then, amid the cries of assent and acclamation of nobles and guests, the princess exclaimed: "Aphur accepts!"

A month was to see the thing ratified and the marriage consummated. Blinded by his impotency and his despair, Croft turned, and then "one ray of blinding thought" struck him. Grasping at this he left Lakkon's palace, turned to the earth, and "opened the eyes of the form he had left on his library couch."

CHAPTER IX.

'TWIXT EARTH AND HEAVEN.

NOTHING had been disturbed. Everything was as he had last seen it, save that a layer of dust had collected, thanks to the absence of Mrs. Goss, and that due to the difference of the length of the Palosian day. Nine terrestrial days had passed since Croft had lain his body on the couch.

Rising slowly, he ignited the flame of a small alcohol-lamp and quickly brewed himself a cup of strong beef-extract, which he drank. The hot beverage and food put new physical life into his sluggish veins, as he knew it would. Seating himself in a chair, he gave himself over to a considera-

tion of the thought he had brought with him from Palos — a thought more weird than any of which he had ever dreamed.

Briefly, Croft had conceived of a way to acquire a physical life on Palos. That was his unheard-of plan, the possibility of which had wakened in his consciousness as Jadgor announced the formal betrothal of Naia to Kyphallos at the end of the month. It was that that had sent him back here to his study and his books.

And after a bit he rose and drew a volume from a case and brought it back to the desk. It was a work dealing with obsessions—that theory of the occultist that a stronger spirit might displace the weaker tenant of an earthly shell, and occupy and dominate the body it had possessed.

He read over the written page and sat pondering once more while the night dragged past. Even as he had gone a step farther in astral projection, carrying it into spirit projection as a further step, so now he was considering a step beyond mere obsession, and questioning whether or not it were possible for a spirit, potent beyond the average ego of earth, to enter and revivify the body laid down by another soul.

His thoughts were of Jasor as he sat there wrapped in thought. The young Nodhurian was dying, unless Croft's medical knowledge was all at fault. Yet he was dying not from disease in the physical sense. His body was organically healthy. It was his soul which was sick unto death. And—here was the wonderful question: Could Croft's strong spirit enter Jasor's body as Jasor laid it aside and, operating on the still inherent and reasonably sound cell-energy still contained within it, possess it for its own?

It was an amazing thought—a daring thought—yet not so far beyond the spirit which had dared the emptiness of the unknown in the adventure which had brought Croft to his present position, thereby inspiring the thought itself. Day broke, however, before Croft made up his mind.

He realized fully that he must remain on earth for a day or two to provide his present body against another period of trance. He realized also that in the experiment he meant to make he might lose that earthly body and fail in his other attempt at one and the same time. But he made up his mind none the less. Should he succeed, he would live as an inhabitant of Palos—would be able to physically stand between Naia—the one woman of his soul—and her fate—and, winning, be able perhaps to claim her for himself. Against the possibility of such a consummation to his great adventure no argument of a personal peril held weight.

Croft sent for Mrs. Goss, telegraphing her shortly after it was light. He spent the day waiting her arrival in feeding his body with concentrated foods. He met her when she came, and for a week life went on in the Croft house as it had gone on before. Then Croft summoned the little woman and bade her sit down in one of the library-chairs. He told her he was engaged on a wonderful investigation of the forces of life. He made her understand dimly he was doing something never attempted before, which, if it succeeded, would make him very happy. He explained that he was about to take a long sleep—that it would last for three, and possibly four, days. He forbade her to disturb his body during that time, or to touch it for a week. Then, if he was not returned and in his sane mind, she might know that he was dead.

With quivering lips and wide eyes and apron-plucking hands, she promised to obey. Croft sensed her anxiety for himself, and tried to be very gentle as he saw her from the room.

But with the door closed behind her, he moved quickly to the couch and stretched himself out. For a moment he lay staring about the familiar room. Then into his mind there came a thought of Naia—and of Jasor—of love for the one and pity for the other. He smiled and fastened his mind on the object of this present attempt. And suddenly his eyelids closed and his body relaxed. Once more time and space suffered annihilation, and he knew himself in Jasor's room.

It was full. The nurse was there, and the physician. And there was another—a young man with a strong, composed face, clad in a tunic of unembroidered brown, whom Croft recognized as a priest.

He stood by the couch on which Jasor

lay, pallid as wax, with closed lids, and a barely perceptible respiration. He held a silver basin in his hands, and as Croft watched he sprinkled the face of the dying youth with his fingers dipped in the water it contained. A quiver of emotion shook Croft's spirit. He had returned to Palos none too soon.

The priest drew back. The doctor approached the bed. He lifted the wrist of Jasor and set his fingers to the pulse. In a moment he laid it down, and bowed his head. And as he did so, Jasor sighed once deeply like one very tired.

"He passes," the physician said.

Priest, nurse, and physician all saw it. But Croft saw more than they. He saw the astral form, the soul-body of Jasor, rise from the discarded clay. And swiftly casting aside all other considerations, he willed his own consciousness into the vacant brain.

Thereafter followed an experience, the most terrible he had ever known. He was within Jasor's body, yet he was chained. For what seemed hours he fought to control the physical elements of the fleshy form he had seized. And always he failed. In some indefinable way it seemed to resist the new tenant who had taken the place of the old. Croft describes his own sensations as those of one who presses against and seeks to move an immovable weight. He suffered—suffered until the very suffering broke down the bounds in a demand for some outward expression. Then, and only then he knew that the chest of the body had once more moved, and that he had drawn air into the lungs. Encouraged, he exerted his staggering will afresh, and—he knew he was looking into the faces above him—through Jasor's physical eyes!

"He lives!"

With Jasor's ears he heard the physician exclaim:

"This passes understanding, man of Zitu. He was dead, yet now he lives again!"

"The ways of Zitu oft pass the understanding, man of healing," said the priest, advancing to the bed. "What is man to understand the things that Zitu plans?"

Croft thrilled. Coordination between his conscious spirit and the body of a man of Palos was established. He had won again—won a visible, material existence on the planet with the woman he loved. The thought brought a sense of absolute satisfaction; he closed the lids above Jasor's eyes, and slept.

For several hours he lay in restful slumber, then awoke refreshed. His deductions had been correct. Jasor's body was healthy, aside from the weakening influences of his spirit. Given a strong spirit to dominate it now, and it responded in full tide.

He glanced about. It was night. By the dim light of a single oil-lamp he saw two persons in the room. One was the nurse. The other was the priest. They appeared to converse in lowered tones.

"Man of Zitu," Croft spoke for the first time with his new-found tongue.

The priest rose and hurried to him. "My son."

"I am much improved," stated Croft. "In the morn I shall be almost wholly well."

"It is a miracle," the priest declared, holding his forearms horizontally before him until he made a perfect cross.

A miracle! Croft considered the words. They carried a sudden meaning to his mind. Truly the priest had spoken rightly. This was little short of a miracle indeed, did the other know the facts. Swiftly Croft formed a plan. "Father, what is your name?" he inquired.

"Abbu, my son."

Croft turned his eyes. "Send the nurse away. I would talk with you alone."

The priest spoke to the woman, who withdrew slowly, her face a mingled mask of emotions, chief among which Croft read a sort of awed wonder.

"Why does she look at me like that?" he asked.

The priest seated himself on a stool beside the couch. "I said your recovery was a miracle, my son," he replied. "I am minded that I told the truth. You have changed, even your face has changed while you slept. You are not the same."

Croft felt his muscles stiffen. He understood. The new spirit was molding the fleshy elements to itself—uniting itself to them, knitting soul and body together. The experiment was a success. He smiled. "That

is true, Father Abbu," he replied. "I am not the same as the Jasor who died."

"Died?" The priest drew back. His eyes widened.

"Died," repeated Croft. "Listen, father. These things must be in confidence."

"Aye," Abbu agreed.

Croft told what had occurred.

Abbu heard him out. At the end he was seized by a shaking which caused him to quiver through body and limbs.

"Listen, father," Croft said. "I am not Jasor, though I inhabit his form. Yet I know something of him, and of Tamarizia as well. Jasor had a father."

"And a mother." The priest inclined his head.

Croft had gained information, but he did not make comment upon it then. "To them I must appear still as Jasor," he returned.

"They are looked for in Scira," Abbu declared. "We hoped for their coming. Why have you done this thing? Are you good or evil?"

"Good, by grace of Zitu," said Croft. "I come to help Tamarizia. Think you I could have come had not Zitu willed?"

Suddenly the face of the young priest flamed. "Nay!" he cried, and rose to stand by the couch. "Now my eyes are open and I see. This thing is of Zitu, nor could be save by his will. It is as I said, a miracle indeed." Again he lifted his arms in the sign of the cross.

"Then," said Croft, striking quickly while the man was lost in the grip of religious fervor. "Will help me to do that for which I came—will help me to help Tamarizia should the need arise?"

"Aye." To his surprise Abbu sank before him on bended knees. "How am I to serve him who comes at the behest of Zitu in so miraculous a way?"

"Call me Jasor as in the past," decided Croft. The name was near enough to his own to fit easily into both his ears and mouth. "Yet think me not Jasor," he went on. "Jasor was a dullard, weak in his brain. Soon shall I show you things such as you have never dreamed. Think you I am Jasor or another indeed."

"You are not Jasor," said the priest.

"Nay—by Zitu himself, I swear it," said Croft. "Go now and send back the nurse. Say nothing of what I have told you. Swear silence by Zitu, and come to me every day."

"I swear," Abbu promised, rising, "and —I shall come, O Spirit sent by Zitu." He left the room backward and with bowed head.

Croft let every cell of his new body relax and stretched out. He closed his eyes as he heard his nurse return, and gave himself up to thought. It appeared to him that he had made a very good beginning and won an ally in Abbu, into whose astonishment he had woven a thread of the man's own religion to strengthen his belief. Now it remained to gain utter control of the body he possessed—to master it completely, and make it not only responsive to his physical use, but to so impregnate it with his own essence that he might leave it for short times at least in order to return to the earth.

And to accomplish that he had just four days. Lying there apparently asleep, he sought to exercise that control he possessed over the body now lying on his library couch. And he failed. Strive as he might, he could not compass success. In something like a panic he desisted after a time and sought to fight back to a balanced mental calm. Was he trapped? he asked himself. Was he a prisoner of the thing he had sought to make his own? Reason told him the question was folly—that already the body was responding in a physical sense. In the end he decided to take a longer time in his endeavors, and so at last fell into a genuine sleep.

From that he awakened to the sound of voices, and turned his eyes to behold a woman past middle age, with graying hair, and a man, strongly built, with a well-featured face, in the room.

Working swiftly, his mind recalled Abbu's words concerning Jasor's parents. The priest had said they were expected in Scira. This woman, then, must be the Nodhurian's mother. He opened his lips and called her by that word.

She ran to him and sank on her knees by the couch. "Jasor, my son!" she cried in a voice which quavered, and as the man

approached more slowly, turned her face upward to meet his eyes. "He knows me, Sinon—he knows me," she said.

"Aye, Mellia, praise be to Zitu. Jasor, my son, dost know me also?" the Nodhurian's father replied.

"Aye, sir," said Croft, marking his parents' names. "But — how come you in Scira?"

"Did we not write that we should arrive and take you with us on our return?" Sinon asked.

Croft saw it in a flash, and the slip he had made. This explained Abbu's assertion that they were expected. The tablets hurled to the floor by Jasor had been deciphered after his illness, it appeared. "Aye," he admitted somewhat faintly. "But—I have been ill."

"And are recovered now," he who was to be his father rejoined.

"Aye. Had I my clothing I could rise."

"We shall return then at once," Sinon declared.

But Mellia, the mother, broke into protests, and Croft became more cautious, spoke for delay. He did not wish to undertake a trip to Nodhur before he had returned to earth. That was necessary if he was to protect his earth body from Mrs. Goss at the end of the week, since now he knew he must have more time. He determined to make another attempt at escape from his new body, when he would appear merely to be asleep.

And he succeeded late that night, freeing himself and once more rousing on the library couch. He did several things at once. He examined his own body and found it sound. He wrote a note telling his housekeeper he had returned and gone away for at least a month. He knew many a body had been kept entranced for longer periods by the Indian adepts of the East, so did not fear the attempt. Next he crept up-stairs to his former bedroom and packed a suit-case, carrying it to one of several spare rooms seldom used and always kept closed. Locking himself into this, he opened the window slightly to assure a supply of air. He had told Mrs. Goss to remain at the house or go to her daughter's, as she preferred, until his return. He felt assured he would be undisturbed. Laying himself on the bed, he once more satisfied himself that all was as he wished it, and returned to Jasor's room.

CHAPTER X.

WHOM ZITU CHANGED.

DAWN was breaking on Palos as he opened his eyes. The nurse dozed not far from his couch. He waked her and demanded his clothing. She brought it in some doubt and assisted him to put it on. Ten minutes later he sat on the edge of his couch a Palosian in all physical seeming. Yet the woman regarded him still in a more or less uncertain fashion.

Croft smiled. "Thank you for your kindness, my nurse," he said. "I shall ask my father to remunerate you for it. Now I would eat."

She nodded and hurried from the room, to return with food. Hardly had Croft disposed of the meal with a zest evoked of his physical needs, than Sinon of Nodhur appeared.

Croft rose and stood as the man came in. "We return home to-day, my father," he declared.

Sinon seemed embarrassed before the words of his son. "Aye, if you wish," he made answer after a pause. "Sit you, my son. We must speak together. Your sickness has wrought changes within you. You are not the Jasor to whom I wrote it were useless to remain in Scira. The glance of your eye, the sound of your voice, even the lines of your face, have changed."

Croft smiled. "That is true," he agreed. "Yet even so is it of small value to remain in Scira, since now I know all and more than the learned men can teach me, were I to linger among them for many more cycles than I have."

"Zitu!" Sinon regarded him oddly. "My son, is this change to make you a braggart instead of a dullard?" he began slowly after a time.

"Not so," Croft returned. "My father, I am as one born anew. I shall prove my words, yet not until I have returned to our home. Let us begin the journey this day."

"It shall be as you wish," Sinon said, and left the room.

Later Abbu came and was admitted. To him Croft explained that he was going south to Nodhur with his father. He went further and questioned the priest concerning Sinon himself, learning that he was a wealthy merchant, residing in Ladhra, capital of the southern state.

The information was a considerable shock to Croft. The merchant caste, while exercising great influence and weight in Tamarizian affairs, were not of noble blood. Hence now, at the very beginning he found himself confronted by a gulf of caste separating him from Naia of Aphur hardly less completely than before he had made Jasor's body his own. For a moment the thought occurred to him that he had chosen that body rather badly. Then his natural determination came to his aid. and he set his lips as he resolved to find a way to win to Naia's side.

Abbu rather drew back before the gleam which crept into his eyes. "Jasor, since I know you by no other name," he cried, "wherein have I given offense?"

Croft laughed. He rose and flexed his arms and stared into Abbu's face. "In nothing; I was but thinking," he made answer. "Abbu, give me tablets to the priesthood at Himyra, stating those things you have seen."

Abbu nodded. "You stop at Himyra?" he said.

"Aye." The first step of winning to the woman of his soul had flashed into Croft's brain, even as his plan for winning a body had flashed there days before.

But he kept it to himself, locked safely in his breast, as he set forth for his new home, with his parents, Sinon and Mellia, that afternoon.

That Sinon of Nodhur was wealthy he was assured when he saw the galley in which the homeward journey was to be made. It was a swift craft, gilded and ornate as to hull and masts and spars. Ten rowers furnished power on its two banks of oars, seated on benches in the waist of the hull. Behind them were the cabin and a deck under an awning of the silklike fabric, a brilliant green in hue. Not only did all this show Croft his supposed father's financial condition, but he learned from Sinon that he was owner of a fleet of merchant craft which plied up and down the Na, and across the Central Sea. In addition, the largess Sinon bestowed on the nurse was evidence of a well-filled purse.

All these things Croft considered in the intervals of conversation with Sinon and Mellia while the galley ran south. In his boyhood Jason had been possessed of a natural aptitude for mechanics. In later manhood he had owned and operated his owned automobiles, making most of the repairs upon the cars himself. Learning now of his father's line of business, it occurred to him to revolutionize transportation on Palos as a first step toward making his name a word familiar to every tongue.

To this end he approached Sinon the first evening as he and Mellia reclined on the deck.

"My father," he said, "what if the trip to Ladhra could be shortened by half?"

"Shortened, in what fashion?" Sinon asked, turning a swift glance toward Croft.

"By increasing the speed."

Sinon smiled. "The galley is the best product of our builders," he replied.

"Granted," said Croft. "But were one to place a device upon it, to do the work of the rowers with ten times their strength?"

"Zitu!" Sinon lifted himself on his couch. "What, Jasor, is this? What mean you, my son? What is this device?"

"One I have in mind," Croft told him. "Come. You make your money with ships. Apply some of it to making them more swift of motion. Let me make this device, and they shall mount the Na more swiftly than now they run with the current and the wind."

Sinon turned his eyes to the woman at his side. "And this is our son, who was a dullard!" he exclaimed.

"In whom I have always had faith," Mellia replied with a smile of maternal joy on her face.

"You have faith in this thing he proposes?" Sinon went on.

"Aye. I think Zitu himself spoke to him in his deathlike sleep," the woman said.

"Then, by Zitu—he shall make the at-

tempt!" Sinon roared. "Should he succeed, the king himself would make him a knight for his service to the state."

Croft's heart leaped and ran racing for a minute at the words. Knighthood! That was the answer to the question in his brain —the bridge which should cross the gulf between Naia of Aphur and himself. He crushed back his emotions, however, and faced Sinon again. "Then I may carry out my plan?"

"Aye—to the half of my wealth," Sinon declared. "Jasor, I do not understand the change which has come upon you. But this thing you may do if you can."

"Then we stop at Himyra," Croft announced.

"At Himyra!" Sinon stared.

"Aye. I would see Jadgor of Aphur so quickly as I may."

"See Jadgor? You?" Sinon protested. "Think you Jadgor receives men of our caste without good cause?"

"He will see Jasor of Nodhur," Croft told him with a smile. "Wait, my father, and you shall witness that, and more."

And now all doubt, all foreboding left him, and he planned. That night as he lay in his bunk aboard the galley, he smiled. To him it seemed that any doubt must have been transferred to the minds of Sinon and Mellia. He heard them speaking above the lap of the waters and the squeak of the oars. He realized how much of an enigma he had become to these two who believed themselves his parents—how wonderful to them must be the change in their son. But his own mind was coolly collected and calm. He would see Jadgor. He would use his knowledge of that monarch's present wishes to interest him in his plans. He would become not a knight of Nodhur, but a knight of Aphur instead. And then—then—Croft smiled and fell asleep.

The next day he questioned Sinon concerning the nature of the oil used in the lamps, and found it a vegetable product, as he had feared. But—he had been given evidence that the wine supply of the country held no small alcoholic content, which could be recovered in pure form with comparative ease. And—he knew enough of motors to know that slight changes would enable them to burn alcohol in lieu of petroleum-gas. Straightway he asked for something on which to draft his plans.

Sinon, eager now in the development of his son's remarkable plan, furnished parchment and brushes with a square of color, something like India ink, and Croft set to work during the remainder of the trip. He had assembled more than one motor in his day, and after deciding upon his type of construction he immediately went to work. At the end of four days, while the galley was mounting the Na toward the gates of Himyra, he finished the first drafting of parts, and was ready for Jadgor the king. Yet he did not go to Jadgor first, when once he had stepped ashore.

"Wait here," he requested Sinon. "After a time I shall return."

"Hold, my son," Sinon objected at once. "What have you in mind?"

"To see the priest of Zitu without delay," Croft replied without evasion. "Shall Jadgor not give ear, if the priest of Zitu asks?"

"And the priest?" Sinon said.

"I carry a message to him from Abbu of Scira." Croft held up the tablets that Abbu had inscribed.

"My son!" Sinon gave him a glance of admiration. "Go, and Zitu go with you. We shall wait for you here."

Croft nodded and left. He had purposely had the galley moored as near the palace as he might. Now he rapidly made his way to the bridge across the Na, and along it to the middle span. And there he paused and gazed about him, at the palace, the pyramid, the vista of the terraced stream. This was Himyra—this was the home of Naia. To-day he stood here unheralded and unknown. Yet he stood there because of the dominant spirit which was his, which had dared all to stand there, and—it should not be long until all Himyra—all Tamarizia knew of Jasor of Nodhur, as perforce he must be known.

He went on across the bridge and approached the pyramid. It lifted its vast pile above him. He found an inclined way and began to mount. After a considerable time he reached the top and entered the temple itself. The huge statue of Zitu sat

there as he had seen it in his former state. Now almost without volition he bent his knees before it. After all, it stood for the One Eternal Source. He gave it reverence as such.

A voice spoke to him as he knelt. He rose and confronted a priest.

"Who art thou?" the latter asked, advancing toward him. "How come you here at no hour appointed for prayer?"

Croft smiled and held forth the tablets he had brought.

The priest took them, unbound them, and looked at the salutation. His interest quickened. "Ye come from Scira?" he said.

"Aye. Carrying these tablets from the good Abbu, as you see."

The priest considered. "Come," he said again at last, and led the way back of the statue to the head of a descending stair.

Together they went down, along the worn treads of stone steps, turning here and there, until at length they came into a lofty apartment where sat a man in robes of an azure blue.

Before him Croft's guide bowed. "Thy pardon, Magur, Priest of Zitu," he spoke, still in his stilted, formal way. "But one comes carrying tablets inscribed with thy name. Even now he knelt in the Holy Place, so that I questioned—asking what he sought."

Magur, high priest in Himyra, at least as Croft judged, took the tablets and scanned each leaf. As he read, his expression altered, grew at first well-night startled, and after that nothing short of amazed.

In the end he waved the lay brother from the room and faced Croft alone. "Thou art called how?" he began.

"Jasor of Nodhur—son of Sinon and Mellia of Nodhur," Croft replied.

"Whom. Abbu writes, Zitu hath changed?"

"Aye."

"Thou comest to Himyra, why?"

"To assist the State—to safeguard Tamarizia from the designs of Zollaria perhaps."

"Hold!" Magur cried. "What know ye of Zollaria's plans?"

"Zollaria desires Cathur and plots the downfall of Tamarizia, Priest of Zitu. Think that I bring no knowledge to my task?"

"Yet, were you Jasor indeed, thou mightest know somewhat of Zollaria's plans to some extent," said the priest.

"And Jasor was a dullard, as the schools of Scira will declare," Croft flashed back. "Let my works show whether I stand a fool or not."

"Thy works?" Magur inquired.

"Aye—those I shall do in Tamarizia's name. The first shall be one which shall span the desert twenty times as quickly as the sarpelca caravan—or drive a boat without sails or oars, or propel a carriage without any gnuppa, and so haul ten times the load."

"Thou canst do this?" Magur laid the tablets on the lap of his robe and sat staring at the man who spoke such words.

"Aye."

"And what do you desire of me?"

"An audience with Jadgor," Croft replied. "Since Aphur's king suspects the thing Zollaria plans."

Magur frowned. Croft's knowledge seemed to have swept him somewhat off his feet. For moments he sat without motion or sound. But after a time he raised his head. "To me Abbu seemeth right in this," he said. "In this is Zitu's hand. This thing shall be arranged."

He clapped his hands. A brown-robed priest appeared.

"Prepare my chariot for use," the high priest said.

The other bowed and withdrew.

Thereafter Magur sat through another period of silence ere he rose and, signing to Croft, led him through a passage to a small metal platform which, when Magur pulled on a slender cord, began to descend.

Croft smiled. It was a primitive sort of elevator as he saw while they sank down a narrow shaft. He fancied it not unlike the ancient lifts employed in Nero's palace in Rome. But he made no comment as they reached the bottom of the shaft and emerged past double lines of bowing priests to the waiting chariot.

Magur mounted and took the reins. Croft stepped into a place at his side. The gnuppas leaped forward at a word. They

rumbled down the street and out upon the bridge. Croft had crossed it alone and on foot an hour before. Now he rode back in the car of Zitu's priest.

CHAPTER XI.

WITH A MOTOR IN PALOS.

AND in that car he passed the palace-gates, where the winged dogs stood guard, and entered the palace-court.

Guards in burnished cuirass leaped to the gnuppas' heads when Magur drew rein.

Inclining his head, Magur stepped from his car and led the way within that wing of the palace, where Croft already knew that Jadgor led his private life. The high priest moved as of perfect right, saluted by a sentry here and there in corridor and hall. So at length he came to two guardsmen posted outside a door of molded copper, embossed with the symbol of a setting sun, which Croft sensed at once as Aphur's sign.

And here Magur asked for the king.

Quitting his fellow, one of the guardsmen disappeared through the door, was absent for some few moments, and returned. Leaving the door agape behind him, he signed Magur and Croft to enter the room beyond.

Thus for the third time Croft came upon Jadgor of Aphur. And now, as on the first occasion, he found him in the room where he had conversed with Lakkon concerning a way to counter Zollaria's plans. Yet now for the first time he met Aphur's ruler in the flesh, and faced him man to man.

Magur approached the seat where Jadgor waited his coming. "King of Aphur," he said, "I bring with me Jasor of Nodhur, in whom Zitu himself has worked a miracle, as it seems, so that he who was known a dull wit for cycles at Scira's school, having fallen ill unto death, returns to life with a changed mind, and comes bringing tablets to me from a brother at Scira to the end that I gain him audience with thee."

"With me?" Jadgor said, bending a glance on Croft.

"Aye."

Jadgor continued to study Croft. "To what end?" he inquired at length.

"To the end that Himyra and all Aphur may grow strong beyond any Tamarizian dream, and Cathur never mount the throne at Zitra," Croft replied.

Jadgor started. He narrowed his eyes. "What talk is this?" he cried, his strong hand gripping the edge of his seat.

"Jadgor the king knows best in his heart," said Croft, and waited. "I ask but his aid to bring this thing to pass."

"These things have been spoken to Magur?" Jadgor turned his eyes to the face of the priest.

"Aye," Croft said quickly.

Jadgor nodded. "Then speak of them to me."

An hour passed while Croft explained and the two Tamarizians listened or bent above the drawings he unrolled. "And this—how do you name it—" Jadgor began at last.

"Motur." Croft threw the word into the native speech.

"This motur will do these things?" Jadgor asked in a tone of amaze.

"All I have promised, and more."

"And what is required to bring this to pass?"

"Workers in metals—a supply of wine to be used as I shall direct—and a closed mouth that Cathur shall not be advised, nor permitted to view the work until done."

"Those things are granted. I shall see it arranged." Jadgor turned his eyes again in Magur's direction. "Priest of Zitu—Zitu's own hand appears in the plans of Jasor's mind. The designs of Zitu himself have surely entered his soul. I, Jadgor, shall sponsor the carrying out." And once more he addressed Croft. "When shall this work begin?"

"So soon as Aphur wills."

"Good." Jadgor clapped his hands. He was a man of action as Croft knew, quick to see an opportunity and seize it. Now as a guardsman answered the summons, he spoke quickly in direction. "Make search for my son, Prince Robur, and say I desire him here."

Saluting with upraised hand, palm forward, the soldier withdrew, and Jadgor plunged into further questions concerning Croft's plans. Croft on his part answered him fully, promising other wonders than

the motor in good time, until a faint tinge of color crept into Jadgor's cheeks and his eyes were aglint with a deep and subtle light. Croft could not doubt but that he saw Aphur dominating all the nation, that he dreamed a far-reaching dream.

And at that moment there entered the room a youth to whom Croft's heart went out. Clean-limbed, strong-featured, with a well-shaped jaw, and a mouth not lacking in humor, he advanced with a springing stride and stood before the king.

"Robur, my son," Jadgor began. "Jasor of Nodhur is our guest. In all things shall you aid him, speaking in all such matters as the mouthpiece of the king. See to it that he has metal-workers under his command to do his bidding, also that wine is given into his hands for such use as he sees fit."

Robur put forth a hand, which Croft took in his own. The Prince of Aphur smiled. "My father's word is the law in Aphur," he said. "Welcome, Nodhur. Ask and I obey."

"First, then," said Croft, "I would visit my father's galley at the quays and acquaint them with what has occurred ere they continue up the Na."

"Come, then." Robur responded to the natural request.

He led Croft from the room. Five minutes later the two men were driving down the terraced inclines to the quay where Sinon's galley lay. Not only that, but at his own request Croft held the reins above the four gnuppas and guided them down the sloping roads. He felt for the first time that at last he stood on the threshold of that success for which he had planned.

And thus he began that work on Palos which was to hold him for many months. He presented Sinon and Mellia to Robur, and after an hour spent in explanations, and ending with a promise to visit Ladhra after he had his work in Himyra started, he left them divided between amazement and pride in their son.

"Once what I intend is completed, we will mount these splendid roads without gnuppas, and at many times their speed," he said as Robur and he reentered the prince's car.

Robur opened his eyes. "Say you so? Is it for that I am to aid you as my father said?"

"Aye."

"Then let us begin at once. I would see the thing accomplished," Robur urged.

Croft nodded and briefly described what was required.

"There is a place where the doors of metal and the bodies of the chariots and carriages are molded," Robur said. "Metal is melted and worked into shape, according to designs."

Croft had felt assured that some such industry existed from the molded doors and the type of the other metalwork he had seen. "Take me there, O Robur of Aphur," he said.

Robur laughed. He was an exceedingly companionable man. "Call me not by so lengthy a title," he exclaimed. "I am drawn to you, Jasor. Let us forget questions of caste or rank between ourselves. Speak to me as Rob."

"Gladly will I call you so," said Croft, his heart warming to this proffered friendship of Aphur's heir. "And let us pledge ourselves now to work for the welfare of our nation until it is assured." He thrust out a hand.

Robur's eyes lighted as he held Croft's palm. "This is a day of wonder for all Tamarizia," he said, and turned the gnuppas south along the river road.

In the end he brought them to a stand before an enormous building, wherein Croft found the flares of fires, and men, well-nigh naked, at work in their glare. Robur led him to the captain in charge of the place, and made him acquainted with Croft's needs. Inside an hour Croft was superintending the makings of certain wooden patterns, to be molded and cast in tempered copper, while Robur looked on, all eyes.

And his eyes were glinting as they left the Palosian foundry and drove toward the royal depots of wines, after Croft had given certain of the metal-workers the designs for a huge copper retort to be made at once.

At the depots, where Croft found unlimited supplies of wine, stored in skin bottles of tabur hide, Jason ordered the building of a brick furnace for the retort when it

was done, giving the dimensions and plans of construction to masons hurriedly called. That task arranged for, Robur drove him back to the palace, and led him straight to his own private suite.

A woman rose as they entered. She was sweet-faced, with brown eyes and hair. Robur presented Croft to her as his wife, a princess of Milidhur, and proudly displayed two children, a boy and a girl. Croft found his reception gracious in the extreme, and learned he was to be the guest of Robur and Gaya while engaged in his work. He was to learn also that Gaya was no uncommon name in Tamarizia, and that it fitted the wife of Aphur's prince. She was a cheerful, bright, and sympathetic soul, who listened to Robur's and Croft's description of their plans, and cried out with delight at what they proposed.

Thereafter the days passed apace, and Croft checked off each as it fled as bringing one day nearer the time set for the formal betrothal of Naia to Kyphallos, whom, he learned, was also a guest of the palace, through meeting him now and again, and questioning the prince, whom, when alone, he now called Rob.

And as the days passed, part after part of the new engine which was to revolutionize transportation on Palos was drafted, molded, and made. Robur's wonder grew, as it seemed, with the making of each new part, and his impatience of the final result became intense. But many hands made rapid work. Croft selected each man who showed any particular aptitude and delegated him to that individual task. The huge retort was set up and was producing pure alcoholic spirit every day. Inside ten days Croft himself began the assembling of the already finished parts. At his own request, Robur was permitted to assist. More than once Croft smiled to himself as he beheld the crown prince of Aphur soiled, grimy, smudged, and enjoying himself immensely, tugging away at a wrench or wielding a riveting-hammer on the growing work of wonder which they built. To gain speed, Croft had introduced the unheard-of night-shift in Himyra. Day and night now the work went on, and his first creation advanced apace. Only on the winding of the magneto did he maintain great secrecy. Over that he and Robur worked alone. It was the main, the essential part, he explained to the prince. Without it the whole thing would be useless and dead. He even endeavored to make Robur understand the electric nature of the device and, failing, told him it was the same as the lightning in the clouds.

"Zitu!" cried Robur with a glance of something akin to fright. "Jasor, would you harness Zitu's fire?"

"By Zitu's permission," Croft said.

Aphur's prince studied that. "Aye," he said at length. "My friend, you are a strange and wonderful man. Jadgor believes that Zitu himself has endowed your mind, and Magur says as much in your favor, also."

"Magur speaks truth," Croft declared, once more sensing a possible means of harmonizing the approaching need for his return to earth, were he to keep the bond unbroken between Palos and his earthly body. "Listen, Rob. Strange things occurred in this body of mine in Scira. At times—when the need occurs—it shall fall asleep; and from each sleep shall it return with new knowledge for the good of Tamarizia's race, and the confounding of Zollaria's plans."

"Zollaria! Hai!" Robur exclaimed. It was the first time Croft had mentioned the northern nation to him.

"To oppose which, Jadgor designs to betroth your cousin to Kyphallos of Cathur." Suddenly Croft grew bold.

Robur frowned.

"Rob," Croft went on, "I would ask a favor if it may be granted."

"Speak," Robur said.

"I would be present at the betrothal-feast inside the next few days."

"By Zitu, and you shall," Robur declared.

"My caste—" Croft began.

Robur laughed and tapped him on the breast with a wrench. "Rise, *Hupor!* If this work succeeds, that will be arranged."

Croft felt his pulses quicken. "You mean—" he began again, and once more paused.

Robur nodded. "That Jadgor, my

father will raise you to the first rank beneath the throne."

CHAPTER XII.

THE NEW PRINCE, HUPOR JASOR.

ON the day before the betrothal-feast Croft finished his magneto, tested it out before Robur's eyes, and obtained a good, fat spark. Hastily connecting it with the now assembled motor, for which workmen were building a chassis such as Palos had never seen, he filled a testing-tank with spirit, primed the carburetor, that he had somewhat changed for the use of the different fuel, and laid hold of the crank.

It was a tense moment, and his voice showed his realization of the fact as he spoke to Robur: "Watch now, Rob—watch!"

He spun the crank around. For the first time on Palos there came a motor's cough. Again Croft whirred the crank, spinning it to generate the life-giving spark. He was answered by a hearty hum. The motor quivered and shook. A staccato sound of steady explosions filled the room in which it stood. Like gunfire its exhaust broke forth. The heavy balance-wheel Croft had arranged for the trial to load it to safety spun swiftly round and round.

A commotion rose in the shop. Captains and subcaptains ran from their work to view the success of that for which they had worked. They stood staring at the throbbing, quivering engine. Croft straightened and stood, pale of face but with blazing eyes, before them. He had won! won! Robur's face told him he had won! It was a face filled with a mighty wonder and delight. And suddenly the crown prince spoke: "Back—back to your work. Work as ye have never worked before. Complete the frame for this to ride upon, the wheels. Make all ready, men of Aphur, and spare no effort to the aim. A new day has dawned in Aphur—in Tamarizia. Inside the hour there shall be a new prince. Salute him, *Hupor* Jasor, who thus has served the state."

They lifted their hands in salute, those captains, and turned away. Croft looked into Robur's eyes. "Rob," he stammered, and put out his hands—"Rob—"

"Aye," Robur said. "Such is the order of Aphur's king did the test we were to make to-day succeed. He will himself confirm it to-morrow night. In the mean time I am told to bid Jasor to the betrothal feast of Naia of Aphur to Cathur's prince. What now of caste my friend?"

Croft quivered. He shook in every limb. The gulf was bridged—that gulf of rank between himself and the girl of gold at the shrine of whose sweet presence his own spirit bowed. He opened his lips yet found himself overwhelmed with emotion, unable to speak.

Robur cast an arm about his shoulders as the two men stood. "Jasor, my friend," he once more began. "Means this thing so much to you? Why? What things have you in mind I know not of. Speak. Know you not that I love you?"

"Aye," said Croft. "Yet Rob, I may not speak of those things as yet." Nor did he feel that he could at present confess the thing in his heart. "Later you shall know all," he declared. "As for the rest—you are my dearest friend."

"Speak when you will," Robur replied. "To-morrow at the house of Prince Lakkon, Jadgor shall name you Hupor before the nobles of Aphur. So is it planned. And when this motur of ours is completed, you shall drive it to Ladhra and take with you noble rank for Sinon, since he has served his state in bringing about your birth."

To-morrow night at the house of Prince Lakkon! The words rang in Croft's brain. Naia—his beloved should see him exalted, made a noble of Aphur. What more auspicious meeting could he desire than this. It was fate—fate. Suddenly Croft felt his face flush and his eyes took on a flashing light. "Rob," he cried. "This is only the beginning. What we shall do for Tamarizia Zitu only knows."

"Would Zitu had sent you ere this then," Robur growled.

Croft noted his change of manner with amaze, and plainly Robur was not unmindful of his regard.

"I question not the wisdom of Jadgor my father," he went on quickly. "Yet like I not this sacrifice of a virgin maid to the lecherous son of Cathur's king."

"Rob!" Croft cried, as his friend and comrade paused and caught a single lung-filling breath and went on. "Zitu himself must frown upon such a thing."

Robur eyed him with mounting interest, and suddenly Croft raced ahead in eager question. "Rob—how long between the night of betrothal and the marriage itself?"

"Hai!" Robur narrowed his eyes. "A cycle, my friend. By royal custom these things are never matters of haste."

"A cycle!" Croft threw up his head and laughed. "Rob, could we make Tamarizia strong beyond any dream of her wisest men inside that cycle, what then?"

Robur frowned. "A promise is a promise, my friend."

"But," said Croft, "much may happen in a cycle—and Zollaria plans."

"What mean you?" Robur seized his arms in a grip like iron. "Jasor—you are a strange man. Twice now have you spoken of Zollaria's plans. What do you have in mind."

"To watch Cathur's prince," said Croft. "Hold, Rob—the priest, Abbu, is my friend. He will help us in this. Magur, too, must aid. Let us watch and—work."

Work—yes, work. With a Sirian year in which to work for such a prize what could a man not do. He threw up his face and met Robur's questioning gaze. "Aphur shall show the way to the nation," he cried. "Zollaria's plans shall come to naught, my friend."

"Zitu!" Robur gasped. "After to-morrow night we must speak of these things to Aphur's king. Jasor I am minded that Magur is right. Zitu works through you to his ends."

The motor coughed and died, having used up its fuel. Croft smiled, and called Robur back to work. Through the day they toiled, and by night the engine was bolted to the chassis, wheeled into the assembling-room by the workmen that afternoon. There remained now no more than the assembling of the clutch and the transmission before the body should be affixed to complete the car. And the body was ready and waiting to be bolted fast.

Croft worked throughout that night. Robur offered to assist, but he refused. He wanted to be alone — to think — think—plan the future steps of those things he would do inside the coming year. He had sworn to make Aphur strong. And as he assembled the final portions of this first work of his genius, he considered that.

The answer was plain. Aphur must arm —and Nodhur—and Milidhur from whence came the gentle, sweetly sympathetic Gaya, Robur's wife. And of arms he knew little, but—he could learn. Only he would needs return to earth. There, not many miles from his own town, was the home of a man who before now had won fame as a maker of arms. Indeed, as Croft knew he had designed weapons afterward adopted by the royal nations of Europe and made by them on a patent lease from this man, Croft's friend. It would be easy, then, to learn what he desired: to bring back the plans of those selfsame weapons and make them here under the patronage of Aphur's king. Then — well — let Zollaria plan and hold what bait she would before Cathur's eyes. Croft chuckled to himself as he worked, and the captain assisting him in Robur's place thought him pleased with their progress and smiled.

"This motur of thine will surely draw the car in lieu of gnuppas, my lord?" he inquired.

"Aye," said Croft with a nod.

"By Zitu! Never was anything like it dreamed of in Tamarizia before thy coming," the captain rumbled in his throat.

Croft nodded again. "To-morrow I shall bring you orders to start all men working on those parts they have made for this, in untold numbers," he returned. "And hark you, captain. Each man shall make but the one part—which he makes best. So shall we make many and build them together at once and produce a vast number of cars, and other motors to drive boats on the Na."

"By Zitu! Then shall Aphur rule the seas indeed."

"Tamarizia shall rule," said Croft with an assurance not to be denied.

The captain gave him a glance. What he read carried conviction to his mind. "My lord," he said. "My lord."

"Lord." They called him that now. Croft chuckled again to himself and went to work. Lord. And to-morrow night—nay, the night of this day as it would be on earth—they would call him "lord" before Naia herself. He would meet her—see her—speak to her, perhaps. He called upon the captain for assistance and redoubled his rate of work.

And as the first rays of Sirius began to gild the red walls of Himyra, he finished filling the fuel tank with spirits, bade the captain open wide the doors of the building wherein they had toiled through the night, and seized hold upon the crank of the engine he had built.

The motor roared out. Croft sprang to the driver's seat. He let in his clutch. And slowly—very slowly the car moved toward the open doors.

One glimpse Jason had of the captain's face—a thing wide-eyed, agape with amazed belief, and then he was outside the massive walls of that foundry womb in which the car had been formed. He was out in the streets of Himyra, riding the thing he had made—the first of many as he had determined during the night. For a moment visions of marine motors, tractors, airplanes, filled his brain; then as a night guard at the throat of a street caught sight of him, and wavering between fear and duty, yielded swiftly to the former and fled with a yell of terror, he came back to the matter in hand. He gained the river road and opened the throttle notch by notch. Swiftly and more swiftly the new car moved. The sweet air of morning sang about his ears. The throb of the motor was a pæan of praise—a promise of what was to come. He reached the palace entrance and turned in. Straight to the steps of the king's wing he drove and brought the car to a stand.

Like their fellow of the street, the guards shrank back in amaze from this strangest of chariots they had ever seen, until Croft, rising in his seat, bade them send word to Robur and Jadgor himself, that he waited their inspection of the car. He himself was thrilling with the creative fire, divine. It was in his mind to demonstrate the new creation in the vast court, deserted thus early in the day. He throttled down and sat waiting while a guardsman hurried away.

Then into the midst of his elation broke the voice of Aphur's prince. "Hai, Jasor, my lord, this is a surprise. Now I see that which last night you planned."

Robur had hurried forth with Gaya by his side, and behind him now came Jadgor, between a double row of guards. While Croft rose and gave a hand to Robur and Gaya in turn, and bowed before the king, the latter advanced quite to the side of the new, and to his experience, wonderful machine.

"You came here in the motur itself?" Robur asked.

"Aye," Croft replied. "And well nigh frightened a night guard out of his wits when he saw me bearing down upon him, as well as carrying consternation into the minds of even the soldiers here."

Robur laughed. "I can well believe that," he agreed. "Had I known not of it I fear I should have been sadly disturbed myself."

Jadgor smiled. "If it carried fear into the hearts of Aphur's guards, might it not do likewise to an enemy's men as well?" he remarked.

"O king, it is in my mind that it would do even that," Croft returned, sensing the deeper meaning back of the mere words as applying to a specific enemy. He gave Jadgor a meaning glance. "May I show you the motur in action, O King of Aphur?" he asked.

"Aye," Jadgor agreed.

"Wait!" Robur cried, as Croft resumed his seat. "Wait, Jasor, I shall go with you. Gaya will be the first woman of Aphur to ride in such a chariot?"

Gaya smiled. Like most of the Tamarizian women, Croft had seen she seemed devoid of any particular fear. She took Robur's hand and stepped into the car. Robur followed with scant dignity in his eagerness to put this new mode of travel to the test.

Then Croft engaged his clutch and the

car moved off, rolling without apparent means of propulsion in circles about the great red court while the guards and Jadgor watched. For some five minutes Croft kept up the circling ere he brought the machine to a stand before the king, and once more rising, bowed.

"Your words were truth, O Jasor," spoke Jadgor then. "In this I see great service to the state. Hail Hupor!" He caught a sword from the nearest soldier, and advancing, struck Croft lightly upon the breast with the flat of the blade. "More of this to-night," he said, stepping back. "In the mean time arrange to build as many of these moturs as you may—also for those which shall propel the boats."

Turning, he withdrew with his guard, disappearing into the palace. Gaya smiled at her husband and Croft. "I, too, shall withdraw now," she began. "I can see you are eager to be alone with this new toy. My thanks, Lord Jasor, for the ride. All my life long I shall remember myself the first of Tamarizian women to mount your wonderful car."

Robur helped her to alight, then sprang back to Croft's side. His face was alight. "Now—go! Let us ride!" he exclaimed. "Let us leave the city along the highway to the south and test the motur for speed."

Nothing loth, Croft once more advanced gas and spark and let in the clutch. Outside the palace entrance he turned south along the Na. Robur, beside him, seemed strangely like a boy. "Approach the gate slowly," he chuckled as they rode. "Let me see for myself what effect we have on the guards."

His wish was granted in a surprisingly short time. As they neared the gate not yet open to morning traffic, a guardsman appeared. Plainly he was watching, yet he made no move. He seemed practically paralyzed at the sight which met his eyes. In the end, however, he suddenly lifted his spear as though expecting to meet a charge with its point. His face was rigidly set. He appeared one determined to die in the path of duty if die he must.

"Open, fellow!" Robur shouted with a grin.

His voice wrought a change in the man. He caught a deep breath, dropped his spear and flung himself toward the levers which worked the gate. "My lord," he said, as Croft drove past where he now stood at attention with the gate swung wide. "My lord!"

Robur flung him a bit of silver and a laugh. Then they were out of the tunnel through the wall and rushing up the well-built road. "That fellow thought us Zutemque himself, to judge by his expression," chuckled the prince. "Jasor, my friend—go faster—let—"

"Let her out!" Croft could not resist the expression of earth in a similar situation.

"Aye," said Robur, staring. "Let—her—out. Where got you that form of speech, my friend?"

"I—it was used on the moment to express the idea intended," Croft replied. "It is as though one released the reins and allowed the gnuppas to run free."

Robur nodded. "Oh, aye, I sense it. Let — her — out. I must remember that. Let her out, Jasor; let her out."

Croft complied. They sped south. Without a speedometer Croft could only estimate their rate of progress, but he judged the new engine made thirty miles an hour at least.

Robur was amazed. So were others after a time. The speeding car met the first of the early market throng and cleared the road of everything it met. Men, women, and live stock bolted as the undreamed engine of locomotion roared past. Their cries blended into an uproar which tore laughter from Robur's throat. Croft himself gave way to more than one smile.

Swiftly they passed the area of cultivation and entered the desert road where Croft had seen the Sarpelca caravan on his first Palosian day. On, on they roared along the level surface between dunes of yellow sand and across golden arid flats. The exhilaration of motion was in their veins. Head down above his wheel Croft sent the car ahead, until dashing between two dunes they came to where a second road joined that on which they ran.

Robur cried out. Croft flung up his head. One swift glimpse he had of a team

of purple-plumed gnuppas reared on their haunches, their forefeet pawing the air, their nostrils flaring, their eyes maddened with fright, and of a burnished carriage behind them. Then he was past, throttling the engine, seeking to bring the car to a stand. While from behind the sound of a strong man shouting, came hoarsely to his ears.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW NAIA FIRST SAW JASOR.

THE car slowed and stood still. Robur had sprung to his feet. Croft turned to look back. The carriage was off the road and dashing across a level stretch of sand.

How it came that Prince Lakkon's carriage was here, neither man knew. They were to only learn later that Naia, wearied by her preparations for the coming feast of betrothal, had induced her father to take her to her mountain home on the previous night, and that now she was returning in time to avoid the later heat of the Sirian day. Yet both men had recognized the purple-plumed gnuppas and the conveyance which now swayed and rocked behind their fright-maddened flight.

"Lakkon's!" Croft gasped.

"Aye, by Zitu," Robur gave assent. "And should Chythron fail to hold them soon, death lies in that direction at the bottom of a gorge."

"Sit down. Hold fast!" Even as Robur spoke, Croft sensed his full meaning and planned. Under his touch the engine roared. He let in his clutch with a jerk which shot the car into motion with a leap. Death lay ahead of the careening carriage behind the beasts he had frightened out of their driver's control. Whether Chythron alone, or Lakkon or the prince and his daughter rode in that rocking conveyance it was his place to do what he could. Leaving the road with a lurch which nearly unseated Robur and himself, he swung the car about and increased its speed. He had told Jadgor he would build an engine to outrun the Tamarizian gnuppa, and here at once was the test. True Croft thought not of that in any such fashion as he drove. His only fear was lest he fail to overhaul the flying beasts in time. His greatest fear was that Naia herself might be in that frantic rush toward death, hurtling to an end, invoked at his hands. His soul sank in a sick wave of horror. Yet he set his lips and clenched his jaws and drove. Faster and faster leaped the roaring car behind the leaping things of flesh and blood he sought to overtake.

And he was overtaking them now. He crossed the second road with a nerve-wracking swing and jolt. Unable to procure rubber for his wheels he had faced them with heavy leather some two inches thick, which lacked the resiliency of air. His arms ached from the wrench with which he crossed the road. But that past he gathered speed with every revolution of the wheels.

"Faster! Zitu! Faster!" Rubor urged at his side. "Faster, Jasor—the gorge is just ahead!"

Croft made no reply. He was almost abreast of the carriage now. But he himself had seen the break in the surface of the flat across which he drove. He set his teeth till the muscles in his strong jaws bunched and drove toward it at top speed. His one hope was that the thing which had set the gnuppas into flight might be able to turn them back.

And he was past them now! Past them, with the gorge directly ahead. He began to edge in upon them. He would stop them or turn them at any cost to himself. And the margin was scant. Nearer and nearer to the lip of the sheer descent he was forced to turn in order to hold his lead.

"Jump! Save yourself!" His voice rose in a cry of warning to his companion in the car. The gorge was very close. He turned to parallel its course and found it angling off at a slant. And the gnuppas were turning too—edging away from the thing they feared—edging, edging away. Croft edged with them, turning them more and more. Chythron was sawing on his reins. Suddenly the beasts stopped in a series of ragged lunges and stood quivering and panting. Croft stopped the car.

"By Zitu! Jasor, you are a man!"

He became conscious that Robur was still with him on the seat, and that he himself was aquiver in every limb.

Yet he forgot that as the purple curtains of the carriage were swept back and Prince Lakkon leaped out, gave Robur and he a swift glance, and assisted Naia to alight.

Robur and he leaped down. They advanced toward Lakkon and his child. "My uncle and my cousin," Robur began; "we crave your pardon for causing you this inconvenience through no intent of our own. Yet must you give thanks to our brave Lord Jasor here for undoing our work so quickly as he might, and turning back the gnuppas from their course. By Zitu, I am assured, had he not succeeded he would have gone with you into the gorge."

Lakkon bowed. "My Lord Jasor," said he, "it appears that I owe you my safety as well as that of my child. Accept my service at your need. I have heard of you and yonder wonder-carriage you have wrought. After to-night I go to my villa in the mountains. You must be our guest for a time. Naia, my child, extend your thanks to the noble Jasor for your life."

Croft found himself looking into the purple eyes of the woman he loved. He thrilled as she lifted her glance. Then, as her red lips parted, he opened his own. "Nay not your life, Princess Naia—some bruises had you leaped from the carriage, perhaps."

"My thanks for the service none the less, my lord," she made answer in her own well-remembered voice. "I like not bruises truly, and at least you did save me those." She extended a slender hand.

Croft took her fingers in his and found his pulses leaping at the contact. What more favorable meeting could have brought him before this girl in the flesh. Prompted by a sudden impulse, he bent and set his lips to the fingers he held, straightened and looked deep into the wells of her eyes.

A swift color mounted into the maiden's cheeks at the unwonted form of homage and the fire in Croft's glance. She dropped her lids and seemed confused for the first time during the course of the whole affair.

Robur broke into the rather tense pause. "What say you, Lakkon; your gnuppas are hardly fit to be trusted more to-day. Enter this car our Hupor has built, and be the first Prince of Aphur to enter Himyra thus."

Lakkon smiled. He spoke to Chythron, ordering him to drive the gnuppas to the city as best he might. Then, with Croft acting as Naia's guide, turned with Robur toward the car.

Nor was he niggard in his praise as Croft started the engine, and placing the girl beside him, drove back to the road and along it to the city gates. He even laughed with enjoyment at the further consternation their progress caused along the road, and when a team of draft gnuppas bolting, scattered a mass of broken crates full of the strange water-fowl Croft had found the first day, in a squawking confusion, he scattered largess to the owner of team and load and bade Croft proceed.

As for Croft, that ride with the girl of his ultimate desire at his side was a delight such as he had never known. Coupled with the sense that he had saved her from possible injury at least, if not from actual death, and at the same time proved his own daring, was blended the sheer enjoyment of her presence and the sound of her voice as she questioned him concerning the, to her marvelous, conveyance he drove. Those questions he answered freely, knowing her loyal to Tamarizia at heart.

So in the end they passed the city gates and made their way to Lakkon's house, where Croft turned in toward the massive molded doors.

Naia showed some surprise. "My lord," she said, "you know our dwelling, it would seem."

"I have looked upon it with longing ere this," said Croft, growing bold through the kindness of fate. For fate he felt it was which had brought them together in a fashion such as this.

And Naia gave him a glance and once more veiled her eyes while a tide of responsive color dyed her face. Plainly she caught the meaning of his words.

"Your name is among those of our guests for to-night," she made response. "Your welcome will be doubly great after

to-day. and—you will accept our invitation to the mountains?"

"If you add your invitation to your father's aye, so soon as I may arrange the work on other moturs," Croft agreed.

"Then you will come," she told him softly without lifting her eyes. And Croft thrilled at her manner as much as at her words. He stopped the car, reached up and rang the gong as Chythron had done that first day he came to Aphur, leaped out and assisted Naia to alight.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SLIP 'TWIXT CUP AND LIP.

AND that night all Himyra was *en fete*. Under the light of fire urns, oil lamps, and flaring torches, whose glare lit up the sky above the walls, the Red City of Aphur made holiday. Crowds swarmed the public squares and clustered about the free entertainments, the free refreshment booths erected by order of Jadgor, Aphur's king, to celebrate the coming alliance between Cathur and the state. Processions of the people moved through the streets, laughing, singing, shouting and making merry in honor of the event. Once before when Robur brought a princess of Milidhur to Himyra the city had flared thus red in the night. Now again Jadgor was making greater his prestige of power and increasing Aphur's political might.

Croft, returning to his quarters in the palace from a day spent in starting intensive work on a hundred engines and a marine adoption of the same, met a surprise.

Upon his copper couch was a noble dress consisting of a golden cuirass embossed in silver, a kilted skirt, gold and silver leg casings, and sandals, a leathern belt, and a tempered copper sword. As he came in a Mazzerian servant rose and bade him to one of the palace baths. Returning from that, Croft donned a sleeveless shirt of silklike tissue and the cuirass over that. Kneeling, the servant adjusted the sandals and rose to buckle on the sword. These things he mentioned were a gift from Jadgor himself, a mark of Croft's service to the state.

Jason had been less than human had he not felt a glow of satisfaction in this sign of royal friendship and esteem. But greater far than that was the knowledge that this night in Lakkon's house he would meet Naia herself as a friend already known, and be lifted to high rank before her eyes. That to-night would see her pledged to Kyphallos, he chose to overlook. A year must follow before she became the Cathurian's wife. Much could happen in a year, as he had said to Robur days ago. Something he had read came into his mind. "Let him who wins her take and keep Faustine." He thought that was the form of the quotation. At least it was the sense. He nodded to himself. Let him who could win her take and keep Naia of Aphur. He, Croft, had a year in which to win the woman he desired.

Robur came into the room. Gaya had gone to Lakkon's earlier in the day to act as Naia's lady in the ceremonial preparations. He suggested that Croft and he be off. Aphurian etiquette decreed that the principal guest be the last to arrive, in order that the assembled company might do him honor when he came. Jadgor and Kyphallos would follow, said the prince.

Croft assented at once. Lifting a circlet supporting a tuft of orange feathers, he set it upon his head, and Robur and he set out, in the prince's own car, drawn by four beautiful gnuppas, their bridles trimmed with nodding scarlet plumes.

Before Lakkon's house they found themselves in a press of other carriages and chariots from which were descending the best of Aphur's life.

The huge doors of the court stood open, and the court itself blazed with light. A double line of guards stood within the portals as the guests streamed in, and a herald in gold and purple cried the name of each new arrival aloud through a wide-mouthed trumpet held before his lips.

Inside the tables were spread much as on the former occasion Croft had witnessed, save that now a dais had been constructed at one end, where were the places of Kyphallos and Naia, Jadgor and Lakkon, and as Jason was to learn of Robur, Gaya and himself. Lakkon stood at the

end of the double row of guards and welcomed his guests. He gave Croft his hand with a smile which lighted his eyes. "Welcome, Lord Jasor—to mine house—to Himyra's happiness, to the honor of Aphur," he said, and bent his knee to Robur ere the two men passed.

It was then Robur led Croft to the dais and mounted the steps as one who knew beforehand his place assigned. Croft hung back, and his companion laughed. "Up," he cried. "To-night you are honored of Aphur above most men."

Tingling at the knowledge, Croft mounted and seated himself at a wave from Robur's hand. The prince gazed over the brilliant scene with a smile of something like pride. "A goodly company," he said.

Croft, too, gazed around before he replied. Surely Robur had spoken aright he thought as he swept the body of the guests where colors blended in an endless harmony of shades, and the white arms and shoulders of matron and maid gleamed in the play of the lights. Lights! He cast his eyes about the myriad of flaming lamps and suddenly he smiled. "Yet would it be even more brilliant were the oil lamps removed and in their place we were to put small globes of glass which should emit a radiance not due to oil, but to a glowing filament shut within them, so that they would need no filling, but would burn when a small knob were turned."

"Zitu!" Robur gave him a glance. "Are you at it again—with your wonderful dreams?"

"Aye." Once more Croft smiled and grew serious as it recurred to his mind that ere long he must again return to earth. "Call them dreams, Rob," he said. "Dreams they may be—yet shall you see them come true. And — listen, my loyal friend: it may be that ere long I shall dream again as I dreamed before—that my body shall lie as Jasor's body lay in Scira —shall seem to die."

"What mean you?" Robur cried. "This you have said before."

Croft shook his head. "I may not tell you more; yet I would exact your promise that when that time comes, as I know it will, you shall set a guard about my body and forbid that it be disturbed until I shall again awake with a full knowledge of what more shall be done for Aphur's good."

"You mean this — you do not jest?" Robur's voice had grown little better than a whisper, and his eyes burned the question into Croft's brain.

"Aye. Will you promise, Rob?"

"I will promise, and what I promise I fulfil," said Aphur's prince. "Yet — you arouse strange fancies within me, Jasor. One would think Zitu himself spoke to you in that sleep."

"Nay—yet what I do, I do by His grace," Croft replied. "And from each sleep I am assured shall come good to the Tamarizian race." And suddenly as trumpets announced the arrival of Kyphallos and the king, he felt light, relieved, free. He had arranged for those periods of unconsciousness for Jasor's body, and need not trouble more about it with the promise he had won from Jadgor's son.

He watched while Kyphallos came in with Jadgor now and approached the dais. Then, attracted by other trumpets, he turned toward the stair. As before, Naia stood there with Gaya by her side. Yet now she was not the same. Then she had been radiant in purple and gold. Now she stood simply clad in white. White was her robe, edged in silver; white were her sandals and white the plumes which rose above her hair.

Kyphallos and Jadgor waited while the guests took their seats. Lakkon advanced to meet the two women on the stairs, gave his hand to his daughter and turned to descend.

Another figure appeared. It was Magur, the priest, robed in blue, accompanied by two young boys, each bearing a silver goblet on a tray of the same metal. He advanced and met Naia and Lakkon as they reached the foot of the stairs.

"Who comes?" his voice rang out.

"A maid who would pledge herself and her life to a youth, O Prince of Zitu," Lakkon replied.

"The youth is present?" Magur went on with the ritualistic form.

"Aye. He stands yonder with Aphur's king," Lakkon declared.

"Who sponsors this woman at this time?" Magur spoke again.

"I — King of Aphur — brother of her who gave her life," Jadgor's voice boomed forth.

"Come then," Magur said.

The party advanced again across the crystal floor. They joined Kyphallos and the king. They ascended the dais and stood before the assembled guests, who rose.

Magur spoke anew. "Naia of Aphur—thou woman—and being woman sister of Ga, and hence a priestess of that shrine of life which is eternal, and guardian of the fire of life which is eternal, is it your intent to pledge thyself to this man of Cathur who stands now at thy side?"

While Croft watched, Naia's lips moved. "Aye," came her response into the ensuing silence. "Myself I pledge to him."

"And thou, Kyphallos of Cathur, do you accept this pledge and with it the woman herself, to make her in the fulness of time thy bride, to cherish her and cause her to live as a glory to the name of woman to whom all men may justly give respect?"

"Aye. So I pledge, by Zitu, and Azil, Giver of Life," said Cathur's prince.

"Then take ye this, maid of Aphur." Magur drew from his robe a looped silver cross and pressed it into her hands. "Hold it and guard it; look upon it as the symbol of that life eternal which through you shall be kept eternal, and which taken from the hands of Azil the Angel shall be transmuted within thee into the life of men."

Turning, he took the two goblets and poured wine from one to the other and back. One he extended to Naia and one to Cathur's prince. "Drink," he said. "Let these symbolize thy two bodies, the life of which shall be united from this time on in purpose. Drink, and may Zitu bless ye in that union which comes by his intent."

Cathur raised his goblet. "I drink of thee deeply," he spoke, addressing Naia.

"And of thee I drink," she made answer, and set the wine to her lips.

And as she did so her eyes leaped over the silver rim and met the eyes of Croft. For a single instant his glance burned into hers, and she faltered, her hand lowered the goblet quickly and she swayed. Yet even so, she caught herself on the instant, as a storm of applause broke from the guests, and sank to the divan, supported by Kyphallos's hand.

As for Croft, for him the light of the oil lamps flickered and paled. He sat momentarily lost in a mental tumult roused by that glance into Naia's eyes. In that moment he felt he had spoken to her soul —had reached to her inmost spirit, and made himself known. He had not meant to do it. He had not realized while he leaned forward watching the betrothal rite, that all his loathing of it, all his protest of spirit against it, had kindled in his eyes. Not, indeed, until he had plumbed the purple depths of *her* eyes over the rim of the goblet had he known—or dreamed that she could see and know—as now he felt she had known.

Now, however, he stole a second glance to where she sat and found her deathly pale, with set lips and a bosom heaving so strongly beneath the pure white fabric of her robe, that it seemed to actually flutter above her rounded breasts. Her hand stole out and lifted a goblet from the table and she drank. It seemed to Croft that she sought so to steady herself before she set the wine back, and forced herself to smile.

Thereafter came the feast, the music, the dancers, troupe of singers and another of acrobats—the usual gamut of a Tamarizian state entertainment, dragging out its length, before Jadgor rose at last in his place and a hush fell over the court.

Croft, who throughout it all had been strangely silent, roused to the pressure of Robur's hand, and as the prince prompted, he rose.

Thereafter he left his place and knelt before Jadgor while the king drew his sword and struck him upon the breast and dubbed him so a Prince of Aphur, and rising, bowed to the king, and to the guests who rose to salute him in his new-found rank.

But of them all to Croft it seemed that he saw only the fair young girl beside the Cathurian prince. And now, as before,

his eyes leaped swiftly to her face. Only now, instead of an expression of something like startled knowledge, there leaped toward him a purple light of pleasure, of approval, of congratulation, and she smiled, as one may smile in recognition of an old and well-known friend.

Then he found himself clasping hands with Robur, with Lakkon, with Kyphallos, since the thing could not be avoided. Gaya, too, gave him her hand and a word of congratulation, and—Naia was holding forth her rounded, bare arm and the slender fingers which that morning he had kissed.

He took them now and held them in his own. He trembled, and knew it, and even so dared again to meet her eyes.

Once more he found them startled, puzzled, almost confused. A faint color crept into her cheeks. "My lord," she said, "Aphur has given her highest appreciation of your worth. That should mean much to you."

"Aye," Croft found his tongue. "Since it accords me the privilege of a further word with you."

She drew her hand away. "Is a word with me of so great a value?" she questioned with a somewhat unsteady laugh.

"To speak with Naia of Aphur I would dare death itself." Croft did not tell her how much he had already dared for that word indeed.

"You are a bold man," she said as he paused, and went on quickly. "Yet, since you value it so highly, forget not our invitation of this morning or that house in the mountains which is ours."

"I shall not forget, Princess Naia," Croft replied. His brain was in a whirl. She had repeated the invitation. Did she really wish him to come? Had he read her glorious eyes aright. Had she sensed the truth as he had sensed it the first time he had seen her. Did she feel it? Did she know? Had the call of his spirit reached the spirit which was hers? Croft hardly believed that it had. He scarcely believed that her knowledge of that call was a definite thing as yet. Still—he was sure she felt something she herself could not wholly fathom—that her invitation was sincere, dictated by that call she as yet did not understand. Therefore he promised himself as well as her, to accept. And he vowed that before that visit to her mountain home was ended, she should recognize the truth.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

THE DESERTED HOUSE

BY THEDA KENYON

I WONDER with what fair imagining
Your beams were laid, your casements first flung wide
Admitting Love and Dawn Winds—if a bride,
Veiled still with girlhood dreams her work would bring,
And, sheltered in your shade, her soft songs sing—
Songs full of prophecy, and future pride—
I wonder if your pantry was supplied
With neatly-labeled jams—if vines would cling
About your windows? Swinging crazily,
Reflecting half a century's dull care,
Yet filled with senile, slyly-wicked glee,
They leer like madman's eyes, with foolish stare—
And bats partake your hospitality,
Where angels once were sheltered unaware.

Valentine West—Secret Agent

by Percy James Brebner

THE MISSING SIGNORINA

THE minister motioned Valentine West to a seat, looked at his watch, and from a drawer took a small bundle of papers.

"I was particular about the time, Mr. West, because in half an hour I have to introduce you to a man who will assist you in this business, and I wanted to give you the facts first."

Valentine West was not fond of having assistants thrust upon him, but he did not say so.

"Some months ago a young lady was brought to England and placed at a ladies' college at Cheltenham," the minister went on, consulting the papers in his hand. "Her name was Signorina Contini. She was about eighteen years old, was sent here nominally to learn English—really to get her out of the way. I have not seen her, but I am told she is beautiful, which is possibly true since she appears to be a most disturbing influence in the minds of several people. A week ago she disappeared, and she has got to be found."

West looked surprised.

"More a case for the police than for you; eh?"

"I was thinking so, sir."

"Unfortunately this young woman, although of small importance in herself, the daughter of quite a bourgeois family, I am told, has attracted the attention of a very highly placed person — Count Pietro, of Tuscany. If you are well posted in court knowledge, Mr. West, you will understand that such a marriage for such a person would endanger a dynasty. The young woman was quietly exiled and the affair considered at an end. Now it is ascertained that Count Pietro is not to be found. It is supposed he has come to England, found the lady, and has abducted her from her guardians at Cheltenham. The affair becomes a diplomatic one."

"And she disappeared a week ago," said West.

"Over a week ago."

"Then they are probably out of the country."

"The ports have been watched," said the minister. "There is every reason to think they are in England, waiting probably until our vigilance has slackened. The necessity for keeping the matter as quiet as possible to prevent diplomatic complications, of course, increases our difficulty. Yesterday I had a visit from an Italian detective who has been instructed to act with us. He is one of two sent over, and knows both the count and the lady. He is coming here to be introduced to you this morning. You

see the affair is considered serious. Anything in the nature of a morganatic marriage is abhorrent to the count. I understand, and rather than be separated from this girl he would renounce his rights."

"Will catching them prevent his doing so?" asked West.

"That is hardly our affair. We have to catch them since they are in this country. Afterward their own people must deal with them. Are there any points you wish to raise before I have this man in? I expect he is waiting."

"Is it known when the count disappeared?" West asked.

"I believe not. He was supposed to be at some shooting-box but was not there. He may have set out on this scheme a month ago."

"Is there any proof that he is in England?"

"Nothing definite, as far as I know," answered the minister.

"The conclusion is jumped to, I take it, merely because the girl is here?" said West.

"I imagine that is the case."

"One more question, sir: Have you any reason to suppose that the Italian Government is using this affair to make a catspaw of us in some other direction?"

"Such a possibility has not occurred to me," said the minister.

"You have no knowledge of any state affair which might lead you to think such an idea possible?"

"No," the minister answered after a pause. "What exactly is in your mind, Mr. West?"

"Nothing definite, sir. I am merely trying to look at the problem from different angles."

"I do not wish to influence you in any way," the minister said, "but, remember, you have a woman to deal with? Clever enough to entangle the count, she may be clever enough to slip out of this difficulty. I should remember the woman rather than the count, West."

West smiled as the minister rang his bell. It was well known that he distrusted women, and had once publicly declared that in every diplomatic difficulty the rustle of a petticoat was to be heard. The comic papers had not allowed him to forget the statement.

The Italian detective was ushered into the room, a vigorous man, quick in movement, mobile in face.

"Signor Lucchesi, this is Mr. Valentine West," said the minister. "Mr. West is in possession of the main facts of this delicate problem, and is aware that publicity in the matter is most undesirable. Between you, I trust, a speedy solution will be found."

"I cannot doubt it," said Lucchesi, bowing to West. "I rejoice at the association. I have heard of Signor West."

They left the minister's room together, and at West's suggestion went to a nearby restaurant to lunch. The sooner they became acquainted and understood each other the better.

"It is an affair of state," said the Italian; "most important and secret. You are aware I have a colleague helping me?"

"The minister told me so."

"Ricci — that is his name — Ricci is a young man of promise. He has not my experience, but he knows your London better than I do. He is at this moment searching in your Italian quarter. I hold—and Ricci is of like opinion—that one man has not carried this scheme through by himself. He has had helpers who have been well paid, probably. It is as well to see if there are any in the Italian quarter who are making the money fly. You agree, Signor West?"

"A clue might be found that way—certainly."

"We labor under great disadvantage," the Italian went on. "We may not be public. If we might, the thing would be easy. Count Pietro is a striking man, not easily passed by unnoticed, and the girl—you shall see. I have not a portrait of the count, but of the *signorina*—yes. Look! It is a face to stand out from the crowd, is it not?"

He took a photograph from his pocket and passed it to West—the picture of a girl, very dark, with large eyes, appealing and seductive. From the photograph West would not have pronounced her a beautiful woman, but her coloring might be brilliant; and, besides, an Italian's idea of beauty

would probably not coincide with an Englishman's.

"She looks more than eighteen," he said.

"In the south we mature earlier than you do here," was the answer. "She is tall, has a bearing above her station, and has a reputation for beauty. If we could publish that portrait in your papers it might be easy to find her. People would have seen her and would give information. Only we must not make a public case of it. That is forbidden."

West studied the photograph for a few moments, then handed it back.

"There are one or two possibilities which you do not seem to have considered," said West; "at least they occur to me. Of course you may have information which makes them impossible. First, your government may be responsible for the disappearance of the *signorina* with the idea of making it impossible for the count to find her. The government may have become aware there was a chance of his doing so and taken prompt action."

"That is not possible," was the answer.

"It is marvelous what things are possible to a government—any government," said West with a smile.

"It is not so in this case. Should I be here with Ricci? We are here for the government secretly. Our instructions were most precise. I do not know how it may be here, but with us it is impossible."

"We'll rule out that idea, then," said West. "My other idea is that the disappearance has nothing to do with the count at all, and is the result of some other intrigue altogether. The count, I take it, is pretty much like other men, and is young enough to love easily and forget, and the lady may also have grown tired."

"Ah, you do not know us, *signore!* Love is a grand passion with us. You do not know Count Pietro. He is not at all the man you imagine. He is determined, unreasoning, will allow nothing to stand in his way, sees obstacles only to overcome them. There is no doubt this affair is the count's." And then the Italian swore and roundly abused Pietro of Tuscany.

"You do not like him, evidently," said West.

"No."

"He has done you some injury, perhaps?"

"Perhaps."

"Surely, surely, he did not rob you of the *signorina?*" said West, wondering if he had touched the key-note of the mystery.

"Ah, no!" said the Italian. "There is a lady at Pisa. He has not robbed me of love, this count. I say no more, only this: I am glad to be employed on this business—glad that I shall help to bring his plan to ruin."

"We have not begun to succeed yet," said West.

"But to-night we begin," was the answer. "I expect Ricci to have information. Shall we meet to-night, *signore?* We are in rooms, Ricci and I, in Shaftesbury Avenue, a poor place, but we did not wish to attract attention. I am known to the count. I have no wish that he should know I am in London. Will you visit us to-night? It is better than meeting publicly, and you are not likely to be watched, as we might be. We can listen to what Ricci has to say and then we can act. I have my theory already. We shall see whether it fits with what Ricci will tell us."

"Certainly I will be with you. At present I confess I am without any conviction."

For a man so hopelessly at fault, as he confessed to be, Valentine West spent a thoughtful afternoon, smoked innumerable cigarettes, and was annoyed that Cheltenham was too far off to visit before keeping his appointment. There were one or two leading questions he would like to have asked at the school from which the *signorina* had fled. He would go down and ask them to-morrow, perhaps. Some one must have connived at her escape or she had been badly guarded.

The minister's warning to remember he had a woman to deal with recurred to him. The *signorina* might be exceptionally clever, but, if so, her photograph did not do her justice. Arguing along this line, he was inclined to credit the count with the cleverness. Lucchesi seemed to be of his opinion and had evidently formed a theory. He had scouted the idea of the count having nothing to do with the affair. Why? It was surely

an idea worth consideration since there was not a shred of evidence that Pietro of Tuscany was in this country. For some reason the Italian detective had a down on the count, and, although he had denied that love had anything to do with it, West preserved an open mind on the point. He thought the lady of Pisa might be compared to a red herring drawn across the trail.

"How should you go to work if you wanted to steal a young lady from school?" he asked Amos when he brought him his tea.

"See a doctor, sir."

"What for?"

"To find out what was the matter with me."

"Haven't you any imagination, Amos?"

"Can't imagine myself wanting to do a thing like that, sir."

"It has been done, Amos, and I have to find the lady. I may want your assistance. Dinner at seven sharp to-night."

At eight o'clock Valentine West presented himself at the lodgings in Shaftesbury Avenue, rooms over a small shop where foreign newspapers were sold. Lucchesi greeted him warmly.

"My theory fits," he said. "Come in. You shall hear what Ricci has to tell."

Ricci was a youth, evidently artistic in temperament. He looked more like a violinist in a cheap orchestra than a sleuth after crime until he began to talk, and then his shrewdness was manifest. He was a little theatrical in his manner, from an Englishman's point of view, at any rate, but he was undoubtedly clever. He was enthusiastic about his work.

"I give you details, Signor West," he said, breaking off in the middle of his narrative, "because, well, because I am Italian. You are English, and I like you to know what an Italian can do. It is pride. Is it wrong?"

"I am astonished at your insight," West answered. "It makes me feel rather old-fashioned."

"Ah, no, it is only that we have different methods, that is all; sometimes yours are best, sometimes ours. In this case we are dealing with Italians, so perhaps ours are the best. We understand more the working of the count's mind."

"You are convinced he is at the bottom of this affair?"

"Assuredly."

"You feel certain you have not been deceived by your countrymen in the Italian quarter?"

"I can always tell a lie. I can see it coming."

Ricci's information gleaned from compatriots in the Italian quarter was complete and conclusive. Exactly how the escape from the school had been managed they did not know, but it was certain that Count Pietro had planned it. Ricci had discovered two Italians, Neapolitans, entertaining friends very free with their money. Only a few months ago they had fled from Italy to escape the police. They would do anything for pay, and the count had employed them, chiefly to act as spies for him. Through them he had discovered that he was watched, that to come out of his hiding-place was dangerous, that to attempt to leave the country in the ordinary way was doomed to failure. He had the *signorina*, but they were virtual prisoners.

"But not now," said West. "These men were spending their money. They had been paid, therefore the count has moved. Is that so?"

"It is," said Lucchesi excitedly. "It was my theory. I told you to-day I had a theory. He would hide in London with the *signorina* until the watchfulness had slackened, or until he could arrange some other way of escape. He has arranged another way. A friend—I am not sure but I think he is a naturalized German, though his name is English—has put a yacht at his disposal. It is an English yacht, you see. There will be no difficulty on that score. It is lying off Bognor. The count goes to-night. We must reach Bognor before he does."

"He is quite likely to be stopped at the station," said West. "I believe a sharp lookout is being kept for him by the local authorities."

"*Signore*, no one knows that better than the count. His spies have done their work quite well. He is not to start from any of your London stations. He will go a round-about way. We can easily be before him."

"I should think so," said West. "A late train should get us there in time."

"He will not arrive until to-morrow, so Ricci learned. Is it not so?"

Ricci nodded.

"We shall be first," Lucchesi said. "We go and wait for him on board. I shall be able to laugh at Pietro of Tuscany."

"I think I hear hatred in your voice," said West, and, turning to Ricci, he asked: "Am I not right? Does he not hate the count?"

"Just as I do," was the answer, with a little hiss which surprised West considerably. It was indicative of hate far deeper than Lucchesi's. West was puzzled. Were these two engaged in a quest—a vendetta? He looked from one to the other.

Lucchesi laughed.

"We are good haters and good lovers, too, in the south," he said. "It is our temperament—a little difficult for you to comprehend. You are so cold in England."

"I was wondering whether I should find myself obliged to protect the count against you two."

"Ah, you have imagination, you English. Ours is not hatred of that sort—only the kind that will make us laugh at him."

"I'm glad of that. Have you a time-table?"

"Your Bradshaw which I cannot understand."

"I am not quite sure we are wise," said Ricci. "Because I threatened them, and paid them, these Neapolitans told me the truth, but for more pay they will serve others against us. It is possible they may warn the count if they watch us and see us leave for Bognor. I hate Pietro of Tuscany, but I do not deny his cleverness. He might have arranged something with them. No, I do not like leaving openly in this way."

"There is something in what Ricci says," Lucchesi remarked thoughtfully.

"Much," said West. "We will motor to Bognor. Where is the nearest telephone. I wonder?"

"In the shop down-stairs."

Lucchesi and West went down together, and West phoned to a garage after looking up the number in the directory.

"A good car and a reliable chauffeur for a long distance run. That ought to bring us what we want," West said, replacing the receiver. "I did not say where we were going. It is as well to be careful."

"You think of everything, *signore*."

"No, no, only of some things. Our success, if we are successful, will be due to your colleague, Ricci."

"How can we fail?"

"When I am most confident I am most careful," said West. "We have a proverb about not cooking your hare before you have caught him."

"Ah, we cannot fail now!"

"I hope not."

"While we wait for the car we will drink to our success. We have Chianti. Our wines do not travel well. They are not here as they are in Italy, but something of the native perfume remains in the bottle I shall open. Ah, I know a wine you may drink on the hills overlooking Vallombrosa. Sunshine, *signore*, liquid sunshine."

The night was fine. The motor was longer in coming than they expected, the chauffeur explaining that a car fitted for the journey was not in the garage when the message arrived. This car would do the distance well in the time, he said, and he knew the road. As it happened the car did not behave as well as he prophesied. Halfway through the journey the engine began to work badly, and there was considerable delay while the chauffeur, with West's assistance, attended to it. So long as they arrived early in the morning the Italian detectives were not anxious. They were confident the count would not reach the yacht until later in the day. West, on the other hand, showed considerable annoyance. He cursed the car and the chauffeur and the garage which had supplied them, and was not to be appeased by Lucchesi when the car had been persuaded to run decently again.

They reached the outskirts of Bognor after daybreak. It promised to be a fine, breezy day. They had decided not to drive on to the front; they did not want to attract attention.

"You better get some breakfast and come back for us here," West said to the chauffeur.

"Yes, sir. At what time?"

"Midday," Lucchesi suggested. "We ought to be through with the business by then."

They walked through the still-sleeping town to the sea.

"We have not been deceived," said Ricci, pointing to the yacht lying out some little distance from the shore, a pleasure schooner built for cruising her graceful lines suggesting a speedy craft.

They chartered an early boatman to row them out; and early as it was the yacht was evidently awake, for, as the boat approached, two or three men came to the bulwarks to watch their coming — rather astonished at the appearance of the very early visitor.

"The count is not on board," said Lucchesi. "They look surprised; they do not expect him so early."

"I am not so sure of that," said West. "They look as if they were all ready to sail."

"But that is natural, isn't it? They are ready to go directly he comes. You are pessimistic, my friend."

The boatman remarked that it looked as if she were going out with this tide.

"When did she arrive?" West eagerly asked.

"The day before yesterday."

As they came alongside the skipper appeared.

"Hello! What is it? Who are you?"

"Detectives," said Lucchesi. "We want Count Lucchesi, of Tuscany."

"There's no person of that name about here."

"There will be," said West. "We have authority to search."

"I'm not going to stop you," said the skipper. "We're not nervous of the law on this craft. If you're going to wait for this count you talk about, you can send your boat back. I'll send you ashore when you get tired of waiting."

"We may have to wait some time," Lucchesi whispered to West.

Ricci was more prompt with a decision.

"Thanks!" he said, tossing the boatman a coin. "We shall not want your services any more."

The skipper smiled as they came on deck, looked at them critically, and suggested going to the saloon cabin.

"I do not doubt your authority," he said, "but it is as well I should see it."

Valentine glanced quickly round him and nodded his approval. He followed Lucchesi and Ricci into the cabin, and the instant he was inside was seized from behind so effectually that any successful struggle was impossible. A hand was slipped into his pocket and his revolver neatly taken from him. Then he was released. He looked sharply at his companions who stood by the table. No one had touched them. At that moment there was the sound of movement on deck, the strain of cordage and the rattle of the anchor-chain. They were evidently getting underway.

"What does this mean?" he demanded.

Lucchesi laughed.

"A little trickery, Signor West, a little successful trickery. I am Pietro, of Tuscany, and my colleague, Ricci, is the Signorina Contini. It is a pity she should have been obliged to sacrifice her beautiful hair for this enterprise, but it was necessary, and the hair will grow again."

Ricci smiled and put his hand into the count's.

"It is an outrage," said West quietly.

"Sit down, *signore*, and let us talk of this," Lucchesi said. "Be frank and admit there was to begin with an outrage against us—the separation of lovers.

"Scheming must be met by scheming. I stole the *signorina* from her prison at Cheltenham, but we were still prisoners. Your government was warned. We could not get away. The ports were closed against us—keen eyes were probably on the lookout for us everywhere. Any Italian man and woman traveling together would be suspected. So we planned that the government itself should help our escape. I applied to your foreign minister, as an Italian detective, for help in our search. You joined us. With you we could go anywhere. You knew we were detectives. I showed you a photograph to mislead you. It was not of the *signorina*, as you can see. Naturally Ricci did not go to the Italian quarter. She remained in our rooms, hiding, but you

must confess she played her part well. Yet, even with you, we were afraid of the trains. Again the *signorina* persuaded you cleverly and you decided a car was best. Perhaps, as we are, as two men, we might have come alone to join the yacht, but I was afraid. The risk was too great. Questions might be asked, and we could not afford to be questioned. *Signore,* I shall presently have the pleasure of presenting you to the *signorina* in her true character. We have started for Spain, and it is necessary you go with us."

"It should not be a great hardship." The girl laughed.

"*Signorina,* I congratulate you on your cleverness," said West.

"We have beaten you, that makes us very proud. You see, I do not hate the count as much as I pretended. That deceived you, is it not so?"

"It did."

"And confess, *signore,* you rather sympathize with us."

"Upon my word, I believe I do," said West, "but you must remember that a man in my position must not let his sympathy prevent him doing his duty."

"Ah, but you cannot always win. You have done your best."

Later in the morning, under a fresh breeze, the schooner was dancing forth upon her journey when a smudge on the horizon quickly resolved itself into a gunboat coming at a tremendous pace. The skipper looked at her through his glasses, then handed them to the count, and glanced at Valentine West.

"A gunboat," said the count; and then in a different tone, he exclaimed: "A gunboat! It means that you—you—"

"Don't be reckless, count," West said quietly. "You may have the will and the power to settle with me, but that boat knows I am on board this yacht, and if I were not found here you would find explanations exceedingly awkward."

"You have betrayed us!" said the girl.

"Unfortunately it was my duty. I am rather sorry."

"Sorry!" Had it not been for the intervention of the skipper the count might have had awkward explanations to give. There was a knife in his hand, and he had meant to use it.

There were a few moments of tense silence, during which the skipper had taken the knife and the gunboat had come nearer.

"But when did you know?" the girl asked.

"I was suspicious from the moment I saw the photograph. She was not beautiful, and she was much more than eighteen. I was not sure, of course, but I made arrangements with my chauffeur. He drove us to Bognor in my car. By my instructions he was waiting at that garage, but I was careful not to know the telephone number, count. I looked it up in case you might suspect me. I was a little surprised when Ricci showed such hatred for the count and wondered whether I was making a mistake. It was excellent acting, *signorina.* I had an understanding with my man. He was late in coming on purpose, the car broke down on purpose, so that we should not be here too soon, and when I told him to have breakfast and wait for us, it meant that he was to get into communication with the authorities. You see he has done so."

"But why—why not stop us before this?" the count burst out. "Why let us think we had succeeded and then — then this?"

"For two reasons, count. I wanted to do my job thoroughly and see who was helping you, and had I shown my hand sooner there might have been no one at hand to stop you using your knife. I could not tell what kind of man I had to deal with, nor how many from the Italian quarter he might not have in his pay."

The skipper was shouting orders, the sails flapped. The gunboat had ordered them to stop.

It was late when Valentine West got back to Bruton Street that night.

"Did you find the lady, sir?" Amos asked.

"Yes."

"That's good."

"I almost wish I had failed," said West. "Love is a wonderful thing, Amos!"

"So I've heard, sir." And Amos Free went out of the room, closing the door softly behind him.

The Mahogany Hoodoo

by Boice Du Bois

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

WHEN the old Van Vellzon homestead, built early in the last century in the beautiful Shokan Valley of the Catskills by my grandfather, Thomas Cooper Van Vellzon, was taken over for the great Shokan Dam, I was sent up to strip the house of its quaint old Dutch furniture and heirlooms, which was to be distributed among his city-dwelling descendants. For myself I reserved only his massive mahogany desk, or, more strictly, escritoire, which I had shipped to my home, which I made with my old college chum, Charlie Blake, and his mother.

Immediately on its arrival mysterious things began to happen. In the first place, there was a legend in the family that the desk contained a secret drawer, and this we finally discovered; but it contained nothing but half a dozen curious old brass buttons. We had just made this discovery when we were called down-stairs by a messenger-boy, who failed to find the message he was supposed to have, and promptly threw an epileptic fit, during which the top of the desk containing the drawer was mysteriously stolen. Later, though the windows and doors were all closed, some of the buttons, which I had placed on the mantel, also disappeared.

Through my cousin, Edith Berritt, I learned of an old lady, Miss Lottie La Reaux, who had been engaged to my grandfather at the time he strangely disappeared. I went to her, but could get no information of importance, though I did discover that she was vitally interested in the old desk. The day the desk came down an unprepossessing youth had tried to see me at my office, and had been accompanied by a strikingly pretty girl, obviously far above him socially and every way; and when later I recognized this youth in the fit-throwing messenger-boy, I became very anxious to make his young lady companion's acquaintance.

The opportunity came through my stenographer, Miss Davidson, who managed to get me an introduction to her. Her name I found was Lucile Verlaine, and my suspicions were almost confirmed by the fact that she was wearing what was unmistakably one of the big brass buttons set as a brooch.

As a result of my call upon Miss La Reaux, I received an invitation to call in the evening, when she would give me certain papers of great value to the family. I went, but found only a note saying she had been called out of town, and to call again the next night. On leaving the house I was set upon by a gang of ruffians, but fought them off and escaped, losing only my coat. As it was evident they were after the papers I was supposed to have got from Miss La Reaux, and as they had with my coat got possession of the letter making the appointment for the next night, I deemed it wise to warn her housekeeper. In spite of this, however, and a guard I set outside the house, by a clever ruse, they managed to get into the house and steal the papers, as I discovered the next night when I called.

Miss La Reaux, however, did not appear to be much upset by the matter, and at first I was inclined to suspect her, but she proved conclusively that the house had been broken into.

"Admit," she said, "that you are baffled. That you know as little about the so-called Van Vellzon mystery as you did when you started."

"I admit it," I replied sulkily; "but I am not through yet. What was your object in promising to reveal these things when you had no intention of doing so?"

"My promise!" She laughed. "My promise was part of my scheme to keep you from finding out."

She leaned forward, the smile gone and her face set in forceful lines.

"Listen, Thomas Cooper Van Vellzon," she said grimly. "Be admonished. Let the dead past bury its dead."

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for July 13.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FACE ON THE WALL.

FIVE minutes after having taken leave of the gentleman who had so cleverly lived up to his reputation as an expert, I was in the telephone-booth for the purpose of communicating with my cousin, Edith.

"You are to dine with us to-night," was my rather imperious command.

"Impossible! Jim's little nephew is here for a few days and promptly at eight o'clock each night I am supposed to hear his prayers and tuck him into bed. That was the most important clause in the verbal contract, under which his mother agreed to surrender him. Impossible, my dear cousin—impossible."

"That's all right; let him say his little 'Lay me down's' just the same and tuck him into my bed. I will be responsible for his safe delivery in the morning. How old is little—er—what's his name?"

"His name is Jimmie, he's seven years old, and a perfect dear."

"Well, believe me, sweet cousin, I'm a perfect bear when it comes to getting along with his class. Bring him along. You see, we must have you and Berritt at the house to-night, without fail, as important developments have occurred since our last family conference."

"It sounds all right," she admitted.

"Then it is settled. We will expect you at the usual hour."

In recording the above commonplace conversation with my cousin, I am prompted to observe that however insignificant it appears, new and unexpected incentives for the furtherance of our quest were introduced thereby. One of those trifling incidents that seem to "just happen," but which eventually helped us to solve the intricate maze of dark human motives, which had tangled about the old mahogany hoodoo.

Berritt's nephew, a winsome lad of seven, not only proved to be a capital guest, but likewise lived up to the traditional observances of his family, and said his prayers. He did not, however, jump into bed with that Johnny-on-the-spot celerity, which is supposed to follow the pious ejaculation of "Amen."

Instead of that James promptly pleaded for an indulgence. Would we execute a stay of proceedings? Have a heart? Anything in fact to defer the fatal plunge into the feathers? Hence the ten minutes of grace. Hence the introduction of pencil and paper, that James might draw fearsome faces of the human family at large. Hence my bounden duty, as host, to recoil with ever-increased expressions of terror, from the frightfulness of his versatile pencil.

To carry on a sane conversation with my elder guests, and at the same time, to be ever ready at the most inopportune moments, to punctuate said conversation with facial contortions, that would send little Jim into paroxysms of laughter, had exhausted my best combinations of muscular comedy. At the same time James had begun to slight his artistic work. A few random strokes, being quite sufficient, in his estimation, to call for "another funny face." In reality, I was making faces for James, instead of James drawing faces for me. Thereupon Edith insisted upon his bidding us good night, and soon had him in bed in my sleeping-room which adjoined the library.

Like many a previous conference, we failed to unravel the fast tangling skein of mixed motives that existed somewhere behind the mystery we were trying to solve.

"Why not admit that we are baffled, and dismiss the whole business?" asked Berritt, who was amusing himself by spinning one of the big brass buttons we had found in the old desk.

No one answered. Edith had taken up little Jim's pencil and was idly finishing up one of his so-called faces. Mrs. Blake, with work-basket in front of her, continued sewing, while Blake and myself nursed our philosophical pipes.

"I can't sleep, Aunt Edith," said James from the other room, whereupon Edith went in to comfort the wee chap.

In a few moments she returned.

"He wants to know if he can play with the buttons in Aunty Blake's work-basket?"

"Certainly; take the basket right in for him, as I have worked as long as my eyes will permit me to-night."

"Here," said Berritt, tossing both of the large brass buttons into the basket. "Let him have these also."

For some ten or fifteen minutes our conversation had rambled on in a desultory sort of manner, when we were surprised to see little James patter in from my bedroom, and climb onto Edith's lap.

"What does this mean?" she kindly asked, gathering the little fellow in her lap. Without answering he snugged closer, and nervously clutched her hand.

"Just tell Aunt Edith all about it," she coaxed.

In answer, James pulled her head down, so he could whisper the answer.

"For goodness sake, Tom, go in and see what is the matter—he says that he has made a face and is afraid of it."

At the moment I was engineering the ever critical operation of drawing the blaze from a freshly lighted match, deep into the bowl of my favorite calabash, therefore Berritt acting both from courtesy and curiosity, arose and entered the adjoining room.

Contrary to my expectation, he did not immediately return and I could hear him moving softly about the room. Finally he appeared at the doorway and beckoned us to come in.

We all obeyed, with the exception of Edith, who was endeavoring to rock little James to sleep.

"Look!" said Berritt, pointing to the wall behind the bed.

I think that we all experienced the same creepy feeling, as our eyes rested on the object, to which he had called our attention.

A hideous and likewise realistic face confronted us, with two great staring eyes.

Three accidental factors had combined—almost conspired—it seemed, to produce a startling effect.

The strident art of some by-gone wall-paper designer; the big brass buttons, and the vivid imagination of little James, in setting them for eyes.

The artist had furnished a weeping willow, whose low hanging boughs had been converted into a giant head, with flowing locks, by the position in which James had tacked his buttons with pins from Mrs. Blake's work-basket. The final touch of realism was supplied by the trunk of the tree, whose gnarled base became the heavy, blunt nose of the monster.

It was the eyes that riveted our attention.

Elsewhere, we have referred to the bit of diamond-shaped glass that was set in the center of these buttons, but none of us had ever caught the suggestion of staring eyes.

Now that the association had been thrust upon us, they seemed almost uncanny. It was easy to understand why James had recoiled from his artistic Frankenstein's monster.

For the next ten minutes we viewed the glittering brass orbs from every angle of the room. A tinge of redness in the glass gave a bloodshot and haggard stare, which intensified the human likeness. In addition to this a slightly convex surface, directed their baneful glean toward any position from which one might view them.

It was gruesome to say the least, but I am quite sure that had any of our number indulged in speculations, suggestive of the superstitious, it would have been ridiculed.

Berritt voiced the mental attitude of the entire company toward the incident by remarking that, "Imagination had been playing tag with reality."

Then he continued:

"We have reached a critical stage in our investigation of the mystery that goes with the mahogany hoodoo. The dearth of clues, or substantial facts, for that matter, has made us skittish, and until we secure a fresh point to start from we are liable to shy at almost anything.

The buttons having been removed from the wall in my bedroom, Edith tucked James into bed with the admonition that silence prevail until the little chap was well started toward dreamland.

"Now you can talk," she finally announced.

"I'm glad of it," said Berritt, "because I think that I have discovered the needful point from which to launch a new line of investigation. I want to ask you, Tommy, why have these buttons been overlooked?"

"How do you mean—overlooked?" I asked.

"Well, your time has almost exclusively

been spent in a wild chase after imaginary documents, hasn't it?"

"Oh, no—not imaginary—I still believe in their existence."

"All right, go right ahead and hug your delusion. Keep after your melodramatic papers that persist in being lost and found, every so often, but at the same time do not forget that you may be side-stepping your most valuable lead by refusing to dig up the history of these buttons."

"Might be," I assented.

"Why not put in a week on them?"

"Doing what?"

"Finding out three things. First: Who made them?"

"Yes."

"Second: Where were they made?"

"And the third?" I asked out of mere politeness.

"When they were made?" he replied.

"Anything else?"

"No; this will be quite sufficient and it will be a man's job at that, but in my estimation, if you succeed, a long distance toward discovery will have been traversed.

"Can't tell," I replied with another monstrous yawn.

"Come," said Edith to Berritt. "If we remain much longer, Tom will be sound asleep."

This, however, was not true. I pondered over Berritt's three questions for at least an hour after their departure, and resolved to find the answers.

CHAPTER XII.

SILVERSTONE THE BUTTON MAN.

TO deliver wee Jamie into the hands of his Aunt Edith was my first obligation on the following morning, after which I hastened to the public library.

Berritt's three questions were dancing through my mind. One moment they would jumble and swirl with a crazy pinwheel velocity—the next, they would straighten out with a jerk that would spread each individual question in clean-cut English.

The least I could do was to comb the library files for such data as would supply the last word on buttons, both ancient and modern.

All in due season I found myself established under the fleecy dome of the big reading-room with seven ponderous volumes on the table before me.

In less than four minutes I was asleep.

This would never do. Knowledge of the button kingdom just had to be acquired from some medium less erudite.

Some concession, however, had to be made to the dignity of the institution. It would never do for me to negotiate one of those precipitate retreats suggestive of vulgar indifference to scholastic privileges. Hence the dignified wait of three minutes before dumping the books on the receiving-counter. It had been a narrow escape.

On my way out I passed through the catalog-room, and saw the sign which reads: "Information."

Surely this was my bugle call of hope, and besides that I liked the face of the young lady who presided at the desk.

"Tell me," said I, "what would you do in a case like this? I want to know the intimate life history of these old fashioned buttons. Who made them? When were they made? Where were they made?"

"Try the manufacturers," she advised, and before I could voice an appreciative "thank you" she had reached for a slip in the hand of the woman who stood next in line, and continued: "Lower corridor—room twenty-four—for that volume, madam."

"It's a fine suggestion; I shall act upon it," I managed to fling back over my shoulder as I was being elbowed along by others who would also drink at wisdom's fountain.

The girl was right—that was it—the button-makers. I had never thought of them. Surely, this was the road to knowledge.

Another library attendant designated the rack where I would find the business directories, from which I selected the names and addresses of at least a dozen firms.

"Where did you get them?" was the question they all asked while invariably, there was a shake of the head, a shrug of the shoulders, and a lifting of the hands at my interrogation, "Where were they made?"

I began to surmise that the public oracle was not infallible, also to question the soundness of any hypothesis that Berritt might advance. His mental blue prints were not always correct.

The combined shrugs and shakes were beginning to have their cumulative effect. My list was about exhausted, but one name remained, and the irascible promptings of the moment advised that I call there just for spite.

It was a firm of pearl button-makers in Canal Street, and I was fortunate enough to meet a kindly disposed old gentleman, who was evidently the proprietor.

He listened to my story with interest, and then said: "Go down to Ann Street. There you will find the only man I know of who has ever made a collection of buttons. It is a hobby with him, and he can probably tell you the things you desire to know. I do not recall his name, but he is a Hebrew and well known in the souvenir trade.

So to Ann Street I went, and in less than fifteen minutes, located the building in which this human edition of button lore was to be found.

There was an alley to traverse, a courtyard to cross, and three flights of stairs to climb.

Then I had arrived.

"Silverstone the Button Man," was the sign on his door.

Walking straight up to the little wooden counter I took the tissue-wrapped package of buttons from my pocket, opened it, and thrust them forward for his inspection.

One by one he gave each button the same careful scrutiny he might have bestowed upon coins of great value; then he spoke:

"I will give you three hundred dollars for them."

Right there I came out of the ether. At last I had started something. One hundred dollars apiece for these buttons, and five of them had been in my possession at various times since that memorable day on which I had gone home early for the purpose of splintering up my grandaddy's old mahogany desk. There were four of them in the secret drawer when it was opened, but two of them were subsequently stolen. The two I had unconsciously saved by slipping them in my pocket upon the arrival of the messenger boy were now on the counter before me, along with the one I had picked up from the floor of Aunt Lottie's sitting-room, and their market value was one hundred dollars apiece.

The question that flashed through my mind was this: Did Aunt Lottie know the value of that button? And if so, why had she not made my thieving act the basis of her accusation against me? I also wondered if Miss Verlaine was aware of any such valuation in connection with the one she wore as a brooch on the night of the dinner-party?

But, Mr. Silverstone, the button man, was waiting for my answer.

"Do you mean to say that this is their value among button-collectors?" I asked.

"Wait a minute, mister; put it this way; I am the only collector of buttons in America, and they are worth that much to me."

"For the purpose of adding them to your cabinet?"

"They would not go into my collection," was his reply.

"Then you would simply act as a broker for some one else? Some one who wanted them—is that the idea?"

"Possibly."

"Who?"

"Ah, mister"—rubbing his hands—"you should be nice now."

"Look here, you have just stated that you were the only collector of buttons in America."

"Certainly—certainly, but I ask you—couldn't there be a collector of just one particular kind of buttons?"

"Yes," I admitted.

"Pos-i-tive-ly there could. Some one, understand, who pays good money. Mister, I ask you—do I look like a fool? Should I be a crazy man to pay you such money—for what? Nothing."

"Mr. Silverstone, these buttons are not for sale. Far graver matters than the question of profit are at stake, and I shall ask you once more. Who is it that buys these buttons?"

A broad grin spread over his face, in which the shrewdness of his race appeared.

"Mister—you make me, I should laugh."

To persist in this direction would defeat my primary object of securing answers to my three questions, therefore I began anew.

"At about what date do you think these buttons were manufactured?"

He threw out his hands with a deprecating Hebrew gesture.

"Maybe 1850. Maybe 1855."

"Were they made in America?"

"Sure—right in New York."

"Is it all right for me to ask who made them?" I ventured.

"Why not, mister—certainly. I as a business man, that's all. If I tell you who buys them buttons I lose a commission. If I tell you who made them buttons, that is ancient history."

He took down a well-worn ledger from one of the dusty shelves and consulted it with the unquestionable intent of giving all the information possible, under the circumstances. For this I would be grateful, and gratitude on my part was desirable, as it might be the missing feather that would turn the business scales in his favor.

"They were made by a man whose name was Verlaine—Andrew Verlaine. Made in New York, but of course, mister, how should I take you by the hand and lead you to the very place. Such a thing I do not know."

He picked up one of the buttons and examined it with microscopic care.

"A cast button—you know—made in a mold, but the—what do you call it—the foundry work, that is bad."

He was by no means aware of it, but two valuable items of information had been furnished by these disclosures. The first related to the name of the man who had manufactured the buttons. Andrew Verlaine.

That he was the father of Miss Verlaine, I did not doubt, and according to her own admission, the button-brooch she wore was closely associated with his early struggles in America.

If this same Miss Verlaine had actually been guilty of conspiring with the messenger boy for the purpose of stealing these buttons, was their motive that of sordid avariciousness?

I turned from the thought with a revulsion of feeling that startled me.

The second revelation came with the collector's criticism of the quality of workmanship; he had said: "The foundry work is bad." And immediately I thought of Mr. Bush's vague recollections concerning the business my grandfather engaged in upon going to New York.

True, these clues were trifling, but at the moment my desperate need of something concrete compelled me to give them due consideration. This Hebrew could tell me more—that I knew—and to secure the last bit of helpful evidence, I resolved to play upon his vanity as a collector.

"Mr. Silverstone, your knowledge of buttons surprises me. You were recommended to me as an expert, and you certainly qualify to the term."

"It is very simple," said he. "You bring me a button and in a general way, I know the year in which it was made by the style. Then first—always—I ask myself, was it made in Birmingham? Look, I can show you just what they were making in England in 1850."

He turned to a page in the ledger and traced his finger down a long list written there. One that included every conceivable material used in the button-making industry. Everything, from mother-of-pearl to pinchbeck, and jet.

As I mused over this list, which meant nothing to me, the Hebrew picked up one of the buttons and walked toward the rear of his small office.

"Mister," he began. "You are a nice man—I like you, but I am sorry I do, because then I talk too much. See, now—this bit of glass—so—I will stand back here in the dark. I ask you—do you see something?

I caught the glimmer of the same baneful, searching eye that had distressed little James the night before.

"It looks like an eye," I remarked.

"You said something, mister—sure. I wish I could talk."

To stand there and beg for additional revelations would have been folly. I wrapped up my buttons, and moved toward the door.

"Wait—listen," he began, pointing his long, bony finger at me. "Maybe I shall take a chance. I give you cash money in the hand, mister—for three buttons—three hundred and feefty dollars. Yes?"

"Good-by, Mr. Silverstone."

"Hey, mister—come back."

I paid no attention to him, but he followed to the head of the stairs.

"Who is it that should be crazy, now? I ask you," he continued.

At the bottom of the last flight he called after me.

"See—see. There goes a man what is sick in the head."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HOUSE OF VAN KLEEK.

IT was but a short distance to Blake's office, so I resolved to make this my next port of call, as my mind was dancing with feverish optimism, and I felt it imperative to seek his counsel.

He paid close attention to my report, and confirmed the speculation that we might possibly be nearing the identity of the unknown who always seemed to be lurking just around the corner.

"This seems to support the soundness of Berritt's assertion, that Aunt Lottie has certain interests that are closely associated with the mysterious personality we have been trying to locate," said he.

"It may also account for her many contradictory moves," I added.

"Are you disposed to value the button man's play of fancy, that these buttons resemble the human eye?" he questioned.

"I think we would be foolish in so doing," was my response. "Because no revealed act of our opponents has led to the conclusion that they are being influenced by superstition. We must admit that their campaign has been conducted with a degree of cunning that would contradict any such motive."

"I know what we can do," Blake said.

"What?"

"Search the county records for legal transactions that may have been registered in the name of Andrew Verlaine."

"That appeals to me—when shall we commence?"

"Right now. I will start Sam on the "Bills of Sale" at once.

Inside of five minutes Sam had accepted his commission, and departed, with the requisite information at his command. Likewise with an invitation to dine with us at the Blakes that evening, where we would all meet for the particular purpose of comparing notes.

"Now," said Blake, "you go back to the library and see what you can learn from the old directories, and I will spend the afternoon on conveyances and deeds."

To my everlasting credit I did not doze over the musty old books of business and residential record, but held close to my monotonous task. That it proved to be a futile one was no fault of mine, and late in the day I started for home with some misgivings as to the ultimate success of our efforts.

Blake met me in the hall—his face aglow with excitement.

"We have it, Tommy—the biggest thing yet."

"Got what?" I asked.

"A bill of sale that will gladden your heart. Sam found it."

"Does it furnish the evidence we are looking for?" I asked.

"Does it! Listen. In 1852 Andrew Verlaine purchased the machinery, metals, furnaces, stock, good will, and fixtures of the experimental foundry of Van Vellzon & Van Kleek."

"Van Vellzon & Van Kleek!" I repeated. "Look here, Blake, that must have been my grandfather."

"Certainly it was. Thomas Cooper Van Vellzon is the name given. But wait a minute, son—who do you suppose witnessed the document?"

"Who?"

"Miss Charlotte La Reaux," he announced in triumphal tones.

"Aunt Lottie," I exclaimed.

"Correct, my boy."

"My affection for Sam is renewed," I shouted. "Do you think he would mind if I embraced him?"

"Don't," remonstrated Blake. "He is

about to sit down to dinner, and it would be a shame to interfere with his appetite."

An adjournment to the dining-room followed, where our discussion of the valuable find was continued.

"Your next problem, Tommy, will be to discover who Van Kleek is," said Blake.

"I may possibly find out who he *was*, but hardly who he *is*. You want to remember that people have a way of dying," I answered.

"Oh, I don't know—how about Aunt Lottie? Is she dead?"

"Hardly," I responded with a grin.

"Granting that he is alive," I continued. "How can we possibly classify him as the individual who is bent on cornering the brass button market?"

"Don't ask me," said Blake. "This is your mystery, not mine."

"One thing, at least, is established by this bill of sale. Aunt Lottie was evidently conversant with the details of the firm's business, and this is a confirmation of Edith's statement to the effect that she was financially interested in my grandfather's affairs. By the way—does this document give the location of their establishment?"

"Yes, the number is mentioned; it is on Washington Street."

"Good—now give me Van Kleek's full name."

"Tobias J., so reads the indenture," said Blake. "But tell us. What line of action do you contemplate?"

"First, I shall visit the site, and pick up all the stray facts obtainable. A business such as theirs required a building that must have left some impression on the residents of that section, and as I recall the neighborhood, the changes there have been but few. Perhaps I can find an old resident who will remember the firm."

The balance of the evening was spent in making a close analysis of the transcript which Sam had made from the records. We literally tore it apart—word by word—but failed to secure additional inspiration from its cold recital of business fact.

The next morning I arose with the enthusiasm of a boy who would hasten to investigate the wonders of a new toy.

Blake was also infected with the same spirit of hopeful expectancy, and we hurried down-town as soon as breakfast was over.

"I like your idea of looking up the old residents," said he. "It may be productive of good results."

At his office I left him and continued southward under the network of elevated structures that merge into a wilderness of steel to the rear of old Trinity.

It was like visiting the Orient as I finally entered Washington Street from one of the quaint, narrow alleys that has defied both time and innovation.

Turkish and Syrian signs flashed their cryptic messages from every building, and the air was heavy with odors other than those wafted from the shores of spicy isles.

To find the number I was searching for took but a few minutes, but as I anticipated, a modern building had appropriated it. It would have required an imagination far more elastic than mine to conceive of foundry possibilities in this new structure.

An approaching police officer looked genial enough to be human, so I ventured to address him.

"Can you give me the name of any of the older residents of this part of the city?" I asked.

"Irish—Dutch—Swedish—Turkish, or Syrian?" he asked with a grin.

"I am not particular, as long as I will not require the services of an interpreter."

"All right, then we will make it Irish. One of my own countrymen. Go down to the next block, and right in the middle of it you will find a blacksmith-shop. Walk in and ask for Denny Coogan—since the automobiles came over he's nothin' to do, but gab a bit."

"Has he lived in this neighborhood long?" I asked.

"Has he! Say, mister, one of his ancisters passed th' hat for th' Dutchmen when they chipped in thim twenty-four dollars for Manhattan, and ever since that day th' hull of th' Coogans has lived right here, where they could count th' toots on all th' steamers that ever stopped at th' Battery."

As this seemed to indicate a term of residence, more than sufficient for my purposes, I decided to make the acquaintance of Mr. Coogan.

He received me with due courtesy, and listened attentively to my story. As I finished he removed his pipe, knocked out the ashes against the heel of his shoe, and said:

"Sure, I knew that firm. Me father worked for them, and as a lad, I'd often be takin' th' old man's dinner up to him."

"What did they manufacture?" I asked.

"Mostly trouble," he answered. "Th' two of 'em was always fightin' like cats."

"Then there was bad blood between them—is that the idea?"

"Not exactly, sir; them two had Dutch names, but what wid fightin' one minute and lovin' one another th' next, they was almost Irish. To this day, mind you, th' one as still lives, comes down here, and talks to me about his old pal, wid tears in his eyes. The fine man he was—th' big ideas he had, and all that."

"The one you refer to as coming to see you occasionally—do you know where he lives?" I asked with as much composure as I could command.

"Yes, sir, and do you know, sometimes I think that he's Irish all th' way through—stickin' th' way he has to th' old Cherry Hill section. Since th' day he was born—mind you—he be's livin' in th' same house over on Madison Street."

"You are refering to Van Kleek?"

"Sure I am. Hivin only knows whatever became of th' other one. 'Pon me wurrod, I don't think that Mr. Van Kleek himself knows, on account of th' whole thing bustin' up so quick. You see, it was this way: "One night me father comes home to his supper and leaves th' two of 'em fussin' wid one of th' furnaces. All right—so come th' next mornin', back he goes, and what does me old man find on th' door, but a new padlock, as big as your two fists—and never once did he see th' likes o' either wan of thim agin from that day. And do you know, sir—not until about five years after th' death o' me father did any one see Mr. Van Kleek in this neighborhood. Then one day he walks into me shop."

Coogan stopped to refill his pipe.

"How long was the foundry closed down?" I asked.

"About three months—then this man Verlaine, as is mentioned in th' bill of sale, opened th' place again."

"What did he manufacture?"

"Buttons, sir."

My further conversation with Coogan revealed the fact that he had but little to add in the way of reminiscence. Without hesitancy, he gave me the number of Van Kleek's house on Madison Street, and after thanking him for both the time and attention he had given me, I bid him good day.

The inclination to go direct to Blake's office and recount the morning's harvest of fact was upon me, but a stronger impulse was urging me to plunge into the midst of things. To make one big stride that would smash all uncertainty or entangle me beyond the possibility of recovery.

That Van Kleek's house was the very crux and core of the mystery which surrounded the mahogany hoodoo I was now convinced—hence my determination to gain an entrance to that house.

Each time my mind grappled with the tangled snarl of facts that had been slowly gathered I found that I could detach certain strands, which evidently led to a common, unknown source and center; but for all that I raged at my impotency, at my inability to correlate all my facts with any degree of certitude.

Perhaps it was this moment of uncertainty which impelled me to adopt a more cautious program than I would otherwise have employed. At any rate, wisdom prevailed, and instead of blindly rushing to do something—I knew not what—the better plan of securing some information about the house and its occupants, was followed.

My way led through City Hall Park, and beyond to Chatham Square—then east to Madison Street, where I quickly located the number I was in search of.

It was a brick house. One that was evidently conscious of its dignity, and scorned association with commerce and trade. It was an arrogant old residence that had refused to bend the knee to an invasion of sweat-shops and factories. Two dormer windows jutting from the room gave a balance of parts to this quaint, old-fashioned house of Van Kleek.

The blinds were tightly closed, and they

were incrusted with the dust of many years. This gave the place an unmistakable air of secretiveness. There was a small iron fence, with a gate leading to the basement door. This was chained and locked.

For the third time I was about to pass the house, but halted, as the rattle of bolts at the basement door warned me that some one was leaving by that exit.

The very last thing I desired was to be seen by any of the household, so I deliberately walked across the street and entered a small store, or office, that was laboring under the dignified title of Steamship Agency.

By asking to examine their telephone-book I managed to place myself near the window, so that it was possible to see who had stepped out into the small, paved yard across the street.

A very old woman was leaning on the gate in a comfortable gossipy fashion, holding a ragged brown shawl over her head. She fulfilled the classical requirements of old age, in that she was wrinkled, bent, and gray. In the course of the next few minutes she laughed and chatted with two of her passing neighbors, and scolded a street-sweeper for slighting his work.

Van Kleek's house might be ideal in all those outward marks which conveyed the impression of secretiveness, but it sheltered, at lease, one garrulous old woman.

An hour passed, during which I concocted various excuses that enabled me to enter the shops, which offered the concealment so greatly desired — then the front door opened, and the man I instinctively knew to be Van Kleek, came out.

That his general appearance disappointed me, I am bound to confess. In dress and manner he was the opposite of the old lady I had seen at the basement door. Just why I expected to find a shifty, crafty specimen of old age I do not know.

As he paused on the upper step I saw a neat, well-dressed man, who carried his many years with an air of distinction. A man who still adhered to the fashionable traditions of his youth. True—his frock-coat was ancient, and the silk hat he wore had long since lost its velvet, but the memory of their day was strong upon him.

Evidently he was waiting for some one, as he glanced at his watch and surveyed the street in both directions. Finally he went back into the house.

The door had scarcely closed behind him when the cause of his anxiety was revealed.

A taxi had drawn up to the curb, and two people alighted.

They mounted the steps—rang the bell, and turned, while waiting for admittance.

My vigil had paid a fair dividend.

One was Aunt Lottie—the other, Miss Verlaine.

CHAPTER XIV.

UNDER A CLEAN, WHITE SHEET.

THERE was nothing to be gained by gazing at the quaint old door that had opened to receive them, but five minutes later I made a discovery that was subsequently of great value to me. There was a flash of light at one of the dormer windows, as if some one had lighted a gas-jet. Instantly I thought of Berritt's man in the street, who, upon the night of the robbery, had kept track of our movements by watching the lights.

Shortly after this they came out, and Van Kleek accompanied them to the waiting taxi. Again I noted his splendid bearing. There was a touch of gallantry in his manner that was quite Chesterfieldian.

Then the taxi rolled away, and Van Kleek, instead of reentering the house, started upon a brisk walk toward Chatham Square.

There was no time to waste, as he might return any minute, so I boldly crossed the street, mounted the steps, and pulled the bell.

It had an ancient brass knob, the bar of which was attached to a wire, and the fire-alarm-clang, which resounded through the house, startled me. I felt as guilty as the man who stands before the conscience-testing youth in the quick lunch-restaurant, and hears him repeat an amount, the quaking one knows to be short.

There was a shuffling of feet within, and I could hear the clack-clack of the old lady's slippered heels against the floor.

She opened the door about an inch—just enough to stare at me with one blinking eye. An eye that inspected me through a tangled wisp of yellow-gray hair.

The uncertainty of my mission, and the woful lack of a definite objective, made me quick to search for any trifling advantage that might place me on firmer grounds. I therefore literally gave the old lady an eye for an eye, and my instant conclusion was that her garrulity matched her inquisitiveness.

"I want to see Van Kleek," was my rather imperious opening.

"He's gone out," she replied, opening the door a little wider.

"Gone—has he? That's too bad. I had a very important matter I wanted to take up with him."

Then as if engaged in deep thought, I turned away from her.

"Well, if he's not in I can't help it—good day," saying which I started down the steps.

"Hey—" she called after me, opening the door, and coming out on the stoop.

I merely paused without offering to go back.

"What do you want to see him about?" she queried.

"No use telling you—it's something that you do not know anything about."

"I'm living right here as Mr. Van Kleek's housekeeper for forty years, mister, and it's got to be real new, if I don't know about it."

Taking deliberate pains to look up and down the street, as if suspicious of the world in general, I mounted the steps, beside her, and then, as if to be absolutely sure that no one was observing, I glanced at the windows of the houses, right and left.

She was visibly impressed, and assumed an attitude of expectancy whereupon I slowly removed the package of tissue-wrapped buttons from my breast-coat pocket—opened them before her, and ventured a knowing wink.

As she looked I noted an involuntary recoil.

"Heaven preserve us—the last three!" she exclaimed.

I could have shouted for joy. Her expression flooded my mind with light. There were four buttons in the secret drawer at the time I opened it, and two of them were stolen that same night. This left two in my possession, and the third I had picked up from the floor of Aunt Lottie's sitting-room upon the occasion of my first call. Therefore, I could not help but assume that the stolen buttons had found their way to this house.

In addition to this, her remark confirmed my theory, that the mysterious button-collector was none other than Van Kleek. Without a doubt I was approaching nearer to the motive that had inspired the various assaults and robberies, of which I had been the principal victim.

My moment of exaltation had evidently found expression in my countenance as the old lady had suddenly become suspicious.

"Where did you get them?" she asked.

"That's something I can only tell the old man," was my quick reply.

Then an inspiration came to me, and before making use of it, I knew that it would be the means of restoring her confidence.

Taking out my watch I gazed at it, as if time was a very important factor in connection with the question I was about to ask.

"Has Miss La Reaux been here yet?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, and there was a new note of respect in her voice.

"Of course you are expecting Miss Verlaine?" I continued.

"Too bad, sir—but she came with the old lady. Why don't you step in and wait for Mr. Van Kleek? He said he would be back in ten minutes."

Ten minutes! I had been talking for at least that length of time. To go in would be taking a big chance, but I simply had to venture it.

"Very well," I replied.

Like many other city houses, built long ago, there was a long, narrow hall, with two doors opening into it. I judged that they led to the usual back and front parlors. They were both closed. There was also the regulation stairway, leading to the floor above. Evidently, but little sunlight and air was ever admitted, as the atmosphere was damp and moldy.

"I can't get over you having them last three," she repeated. "What wouldn't he have given for them a few weeks ago, but as you probably know, they haven't got the same value to him now."

"They ought to be just as valuable to him now," I ventured.

"Hardly, sir—the minute he decided to go ahead, without them, he was a changed man."

"I suppose so, but he should have done it before."

"How could he?" she asked in surprise. "If she wouldn't consent?"

To this I made no answer, although I was wildly anxious to know who it was that had withheld his consent, and why, but I did not dare to overdo it. All I could do was to voice an assent.

"That's right, I guess he couldn't."

In order to draw her from the further discussion of details that might reveal how little I really did know, I again had recourse to a question I knew would be safe. One that was based upon my observation of the twinkling lights I had seen at the upper window.

"Did Miss La Reaux go up-stairs?"

"Of course—by the way, sir—would you like to go up?"

"I might as well—long as I am here.

Then she led the way, talking as she went.

"I seldom go up to that room these days—it gives me the horrors, and do you know, sir, that once you know the story about 'em, they grow on you. I used to think that the old man was a bit queer on the subject, but in time they began to affect me as they have him."

Meanwhile, we were climbing the last pair of stairs that led to the room with the dormer windows.

At the door she fumbled with a bunch of keys before finding one that would fit the lock.

Finally the bolt slid back, the door creaked, and we were standing in an empty room, except for some carefully covered object in one corner.

"If you don't mind, sir, would you light the gas for me?" she requested.

As the sickly flame sent its yellow glare through the gloomy attic room I noted that a clean, white sheet had been spread over the object, or objects, she had brought me up-stairs to see.

"With what I considered was an almost reverential touch, she removed this sheet, and revealed a pile of at least two thousand brass buttons—all of which were duplicates of the three in my pocket.

She turned to me with an expression that required no verbal assistance. "What do you think of that?" it flashed.

For my life I did not know what to say.

From the top of the pile she picked up a button, and said:

"This was the last one to come in."

I took it from her hand and instantly knew where it came from, as the metal back was marred near the outer rim, and these rough points were located just where the pin attachments for a brooch would have been made.

It was the button that Miss Verlaine wore the day she waited in the taxi, and on the night I met her at Miss Brown's, except that the pin had been torn from its fastenings.

Once more I decided to capitalize my discovery. If this was the last button that had been added to the pile, it was but fair to presume that she had given it to Van Kleek during her recent call.

"I wonder that she gave it up," I said.

"Then you know how much she thought of it," was her surprised remark.

"Certainly; it had been made by her father."

"That's right—you do know."

Alas, if the old lady had really been aware of my meager information concerning the vital issue she would have terminated our conversation at once. The necessity of reverting to safe commonplace remarks was upon me.

"I'll warrant that you are glad that the collection is complete and it's all over," was the only comment I could think of.

"All over!" she exclaimed. "Believe me—the worst is to come."

"What do you mean by the worst?"

"I'm talking about to-night—wouldn't you call that the worst?" she asked.

Her assumption was that I knew what

she referred to, and there was but one thing to do—sustain it.

"I suppose so," was my response.

With extreme care she replaced the sheet—turned out the gas—and closed the door, but it was more difficult to lock than it was to open, so I walked down the stairs, anticipating that she would quickly follow. Sundry mutterings and thumpings, however, told me that she was having considerable difficulty.

As I waited on the second floor the familiar sound of carpenter work could be heard in the rear of the house. I walked to the window at the end of the hall, and looked down. A young man was engaged in constructing a heavy oblong box, and as I watched him, speculating, he crossed the yard for an additional piece of timber.

It was my old friend—the messenger boy.

To develop any new move that might have been suggested by this discovery was out of the question, as the old housekeeper's slippered heels were pattering down the stairs, and I had resolved to know more about the startling event that was to take place that night.

We had reached the lower hall again, and the door was opened for me to pass out.

"You say it will take place to-night?" I questioned.

"Yes."

"Well, I am sorry, as I had intended to be here."

"Then you won't be able to come?"

"I don't think so—although—I—promised I would."

"Then perhaps you would like to take a peep into the room, and see how things look?"

"Yes—I would."

Again her keys rattled and she unlocked the door leading into the front parlor.

"Step in, sir."

I found myself in a very large room—one that seemed to extend the full depth of the house. It was altogether too dark to gain any idea of the general details, but as my eyes began to search the gloomy corners I saw that there was a glimmer of light behind the folding-doors that shut off the back parlor.

"Stand where you are," she said, walking toward these doors. "It's a bit gruesome."

Saying which she opened them.

The sight which greeted me was so totally unexpected that I experienced that creepy, chilly sensation which prompts every little capillary growth to stand at attention.

The light I had noticed came from a single jet in the ancient chandelier, and by the aid of its gasping, watery flame I saw the curved outlines of an old-fashioned coffin that was resting on black, funereal standards at the end of the room.

The old lady had returned to my side and placed her hand on my arm. Her act was not for the purpose of restraining me, but simply reflected fear, or superstition, as her trembling arm testified.

I would have given anything to advance and take one look into that dusty old casket. I say dusty, because it was. My vision had now mastered the semidarkness, and I could see the accumulation of dust on the polished top.

Three things restrained me from going forward. The old housekeeper's detaining hand, the distance to be traversed, and the fact that I was supposed to know who laid in it.

For all that, I still debated—should I make the attempt? But I had delayed too long. Some one was calling from the basement.

"Come down here and find that hammer for me."

It was the messenger boy.

"Hurry," said the old lady. "I must go."

In locking the door she looked over her shoulder, and said:

"It must be awful, sir—to think that you have murdered some one."

CHAPTER XV.

THE HOTEL ST. GERMAINE.

AS I hurried out of the house there was a clattering of feet on the stairs leading up from the basement. It was the messenger boy, who had evidently heard the housekeeper conversing with a stranger, and was coming up to investigate.

It was therefore expedient for me to take the front stoop with the same relative speed with which he was negotiating the back stairs, as the last thing I desired was recognition.

Swinging into a rapid walk, and resisting the almost overwhelming impulse to look back, I made for the nearest cross street. At the same time the subconscious registration of my mind signaled that I was being watched. My impression is that he stood at the top of the stairs and watched me turn the corner.

Out of the confused revelations of the day many questions were swirling through my mind. But one, however, staggered me.

Who occupied that dusty casket?"

Had I stumbled upon a new crime, or was this part of my own mystery?

A series of minor questions followed. Why had so many of the conventionalities that are usually respected in a house of death been avoided. There were no floral offerings; no sign of crape at the door.

It began to dawn upon me that all these could be answered by discovering what was to take place within the house that night.

It was folly to think of gaining a second entrance, but as I mused upon the valuable information that had been gathered earlier in the day by watching the house I determined to try it again—that night.

If, as I suspected, the messenger boy knew who it was that had been through the house he would not hesitate at violence should he discover that I was prowling about the neighborhood. A venture such as I was determined to enter upon required the support of numbers, therefore, I would engage the assistance of Blake and Berritt. They should have the honor of becoming members of the vigilance committee.

To find a telephone-booth for the purpose of notifying them of my plans demanded a walk of several blocks, and while traversing this distance I was suddenly confronted by a new phase of the problem I had to solve.

Of what earthly use was it to Van Kleek to collect buttons that had been manufactured by Verlaine?

Only one person could throw any light on this, and that was Miss Verlaine. Why had I not thought of her before?

After all, she was the one person I might approach upon friendly terms, although my introduction to her on the night of Miss Brown's dinner-party had been misleading. She knew me as Thomas Cooper.

That was the only name I dared to use. The only one that gave me any standing with her. To expect that she would grant an interview to Thomas Van Vellzon was out of the question, but at the same time I resolved to correct the regrettable incident during the first three minutes of the expected interview.

One thing surprised me—the ease with which I was waving the chain of circumstantial evidence that involved this young woman, but I accounted for it on the grounds that all my forceful measures had failed, and I was now in the mood to test the value of kinder means.

It was now three o'clock, and it was my intention to go direct to her hotel after telephoning Blake.

" Hello, Blake, this is Tommy—listen—I need your help; must have it, in fact, to-night," I began upon hearing his voice over the wire.

" Where are you now?" he asked.

" On the East Side, but I cannot go into details at this time, suffice to say that I am near the bottom of the whole mysterious affair. I will also need Berritt's help, so get in touch with him at once. Ask him to come down-town to-night with his car, and pick you up at the house, so as to reach Chatham Square by seven o'clock. I will meet you there—wait for me."

" All right, old top, Chatham Square—seven o'clock—sure."

" Better make it on the south side," I added.

" South side," he repeated.

Then I hung up the receiver and wondered if I had been a little premature in calling for their support. In a vague sort of way I knew that some unusual event was to take place in the house of Van Kleek that night. Some culminating incident that belonged to the Van Vellzon mystery, but after all, had the circumstances justified me in asking for their assistance?

Upon reaching the street I again experienced a feeling of anxiety. A suspicion of lurking danger that I could not define. That it was due to the unusual excitement of the day was the only conclusion I dared to entertain.

My note-book supplied me with Miss Verlaine's address. The entry had been made the night of the dinner-party.

Hotel St. Germaine—Eighth Street.

Twenty minutes later I had located it. A quaint old relic of the early fifties. One that reflected the simple dignity which prevailed prior to the Civil War.

At the desk I was again confronted with the awkwardness of my position, but the fear of not being received compelled me to have recourse to one of the blank desk-cards, upon which I wrote:

"Thomas Cooper to see Miss Verlaine."

In a few minutes the page returned and said: "This way, sir."

The elevator stopped at the sixth floor, and I was ushered down the orthodox hotel hall to a suite of rooms that faced the street. At the door a trim maid announced that Miss Verlaine would see me presently.

The cozy little reception-room in which I found myself was in reality a private hallway that linked up the various rooms, of which the suite was composed. From it one might have access to the dainty drawing-room in front, or enter the rear rooms that supported it.

I was not to be tortured by an interminable wait—in fact, almost before the maid had departed, Miss Verlaine entered. The first thing I noticed was that she held my card in her hand.

As I arose she gave me one swift glance—then riveted her eyes on the card.

"Pardon me, sir, but your name is Van Vellzon—is it not?" she asked.

"Yes," I quietly answered, knowing full well that a denial was out of the question.

"May I then ask why you persist in the use of the name of Cooper, when to do so is misleading?"

"Miss Verlaine, I regret having resorted to such folly upon the occasion of our first meeting, but having made the error, its repetition seemed the only thing possible at this time."

My answer was so totally contrary to what she evidently expected, that for the moment she was disconcerted. Instead of an excited and voluminous denial, as she anticipated, I had calmly confessed my error, and I could see that it bothered her. To retain an aggressive manner, under the circumstances, was difficult.

In order to follow up my advantage, I humbly added:

"You are the only one who can help me solve my problem, and I have come to you for assistance."

For just a moment she wavered, then said:

"Step inside and be seated."

The room I entered and which I have designated as a drawing-room was a strange combination of the antique and modern, in that many of its furnishings were undoubtedly Verlaine heirlooms. The very chair she designated as she asked me to be seated, was in all probability one of such, as its upholstered arms of wood were far from modern. The socket of one arm was loose, where it had been glued to the chair-post. Another observation which I made also confirmed Miss Verlaine's tendency to respect family traditions. Tapestry of great value curtained the small recess, or alcove, just behind me.

"What is it you wish to know?" she asked.

"So many things of importance, Miss Verlaine, that I scarcely know where to begin, but I wish to gratify my curiosity first of all. Tell me—when did you discover that my name was Van Vellzon?"

"The first time I met you," she quietly answered.

"Did Miss Brown—" I began.

"No—leave my friend out of it. At least, give me some credit for ordinary intelligence. The initials, T. C. V. V., so conspicuously shown in your hat, did not stand for 'Cooper.' They did, however, suggest the name, Thomas Cooper Van Vellzon."

Her simple answer, with its impassionate delivery, nettled me. This was folly. There were weightier questions to ask.

"Why is Van Kleek collecting those buttons?" I blurted out.

The girl gasped with surprise. It was evident that she had never dreamed of my finding this out. She visibly recoiled and her eyes reflected both fear and terror.

"You—you ask that question of me?"

In her excitement she had raised her voice, and it annoyed me, as I saw no reason why her maid should become acquainted with the subject of our conversation, and a soft tread in the little reception-hall told me that some one was listening.

"Yes—I ask that question and a dozen more, equally as important," was my response. "Tell me—why did you surrender the brooch you claimed to value so highly? And that great pile of brass buttons in the attic—I must know about them."

These rapid revelations were too much for her. She arose from her chair and paced the room. Once—twice—then she stood in front of my chair.

"Oh, why do you persist in meddling in this awful affair? I can tell you nothing; you would not understand if I did."

She stood before me, the most lovely vision of pleading, contrite womanhood I had ever seen. At the same time the knowledge of the fact that she could tell me all—if she only would—hardened my heart. To be so near the solution, and yet see it slip from me, aroused my ire. I forgot that kindly means were best.

"I do persist!" I exclaimed. "And have reserved my most important question for the last. "Did you steal the mahogany desk-top?"

Then—in a flash—all her weakness vanished. She became cold and haughty.

"Yes—I did. Do you understand what I say? Yes—I did, and now it is my turn to ask a question. What are you going to do about it?"

I partly arose in my chair.

"What am I going to do about it? I will tell you—I am going to solve the entire mystery—to-night—by finding out whose body rests in that dusty old casket at Van Kleek's."

"Oh, no—you are not!" exclaimed a rough voice behind me, and then a brawny hand that had been thrust through the draperies was clapped over my mouth.

"Quick—drop that noose over his head—that's it—over the back of the chair—now pull. Choke the fool if he struggles."

A heavy rope was thrust under my chin, and I was clamped to the high back of that old-fashioned chair as · atly and securely as if bound by a hundred feet of rope.

"Now the towel—hurry—so I can shut off his beautiful voice."

It was with no gentle hand that this was executed. I could feel my lips bleeding as they were brutally pressed against my teeth. The hand that covered my eyes while this was being done was that of a woman.

"Steady now while I bind him to the chair."

Each arm was then wound and rewound with rope to the chair-rests.

The job must have been a satisfactory one, as the hand was removed from my eyes and I was permitted to look up.

I had been made a prisoner by the messenger boy.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the conclusion of this story without waiting a month.

THE OVERTONE

BY NEETA MARQUIS

BRAVE words ring out above the strife,
Immortal song on mortal breath—
The chant of all-triumphant life,
The requiem of discounted death:

"They live who know the ecstasy
Of willingness to put life by;
But they are dead who fail to see
The glory of a chance to die!"

Woman Business

by

Grace G. Bostwick

"OH, no," laughed the man from Missouri, "I'm verdant, I'll admit, but I'm not as bad as that! I may have a few coppers concealed somewhere about me, but I'm not trading them for lots in the air. Nice scenery and all that, but not on my level!" He squinted up at the two-hundred-foot cliff that rose straight toward the sky, its surface rough with boulders like raisins stuck in dough.

"I'm not very credulous, as a rule," he continued, "but if you'll tell me what can be done with land like that, I'll try to believe it."

"Why, man"—the woman's fine eyes widened in quick vision—"it's the most beautiful location in all Seattle. Look at that view—overlooking the Sound as well as the city—superb! And close to the main business section. Why, the way this place is growing, in five years' time"—she paused—"yes, in less than that, those lots will be invaluable!"

The newcomer laughed. "You're some real-estate agent, take it from me!" he conceded admiringly. "The men have nothing on you. Why don't you buy it yourself?"

She flushed. "My business is selling—not buying."

"Say, honestly now"—the man took off his hat and ran well-kept fingers through his thick dark hair—"if you had the money and were buying"—he turned a propitiatory smile upon her—"would you tackle that particular proposition? Tell the truth," he admonished.

She eyed him with frankness. "If I had the money and were buying"—her tone was confident—"I'd not hesitate an instant!"

"All right—you're the doctor! Now, see here"—the newcomer cleared his throat with a bit of embarrassment—"I'll buy that vertical stuff and turn it over to you slick and clean. At the end of five years I'll come back and you can pay me six per cent interest on my money. What's the matter with that?" he asked as the woman shook her head.

"I couldn't let you do that." She was noting his clean brown eyes, his straight mop of hair, his kind mouth with the humorous lines, and the obstinate chin. Altogether, it was a pleasant face, as her softened look allowed.

"Why not?"

"Well"—she hesitated—"because there's a fortune in that cliff for some one, and if you're going to buy it, the money belongs to you!"

"Shucks!" He laughed. "Sure you aren't afraid?"

She shook her head, and the soft brown tendrils of hair fluttered with the movement.

"Then it's a deal," he declared, "and we'll go down and fix it up."

"But," she objected, "I'm a—stranger to you, and it's not—not—business."

"What is business?" he asked whimsically. "If I choose to loan you a few hundred to buy a white elephant that's

going to raise the price of ivory, isn't that business? I'd call it a particularly white piece of business—especially if I got my six per cent."

"It's eight per cent here," she interrupted.

"Lord, but you're honest!" he mocked. "Six per cent's good enough for me—five isn't bad!"

She walked into her office with heightened color and an uneasy look in her eyes.

"See here"—she turned upon him—"I can't do anything so crazy! Why not buy this and just leave it to me to handle for you? You said you were going to Alaska for a few years. I'll keep you informed."

"Responsibilities are too much for me. Hadn't you guessed it?" chuckled her client. "That's why I'm off to the North. A dog and a tent and a frying-pan for mine—and I want to forget the color of coin!"

"Go on with the deal," he commanded. "I never ran up against a woman real-estater before, and I want to see what they're like."

She laughed outright. He looked at her intently, and his face softened from its gay mockery. He noted her white teeth with the firm mouth and clear skin. Last of all, the gray eyes that were black-lashed and friendly.

She made out the papers rapidly while he watched her brown head bent above her work. At last she turned. "You are sure—"

"Sure as sunshine, girl!" he interrupted. "Where 'll I sign?"

"You'd better read it first," she remarked dryly.

"Read it—what for?" he demanded. "I guess you know how to make out papers." He glanced up at her notary sign with admiration.

"I want you to remember"—she frowned at him—"that this was entirely your suggestion. That I opposed it and agreed only under protest. The money draws eight per cent," she added primly.

"Eight per cent it is, if you must have it so," he complained, "but I never saw such a mercenary wretch in my life!" He took up his hat and glanced toward the door.

"I suppose I ought to thank you," she began, "but, frankly, I'm out of patience with you. You'll lose all you've got if you come up against some of these sharpers!"

"Don't worry, sister"—there was a dry note in the man's voice—"I'm not gambling with every real-estater that has a sign up—and I've got my steamer ticket. You wouldn't go out and dine with me somewhere, would you?" There was a wistful look in the honest eyes, but the woman hardened perceptibly.

"I couldn't think of it," she said curtly.

"Oh, see here"—the man was clumsy, but his words rang with sincerity—"I'm a stranger and it's darned lonesome! I don't even know where to go for a square meal. I'm no lady's man. You can see that for yourself—and I'm harmless." He grinned at her boyishly, and in spite of her dignity she grinned back, but she shook her head.

"It isn't because it's you," she blushed, "but I never do it—I can't afford to."

"You didn't think I was asking you to go 'Dutch'?" The twinkle in his eyes warned her of his mockery and she stiffened again.

"There, there," he soothed, "you're right—of course you're right, and perhaps I'm glad of it. I'll kid myself along, anyhow. Take care of yourself, girl." And he swung out of the office and out of her life.

It was a busy day in Seattle—a city in which busy days are the rule. It seemed like a hive of giant bees to the big man from the North who made his way cautiously from the wharf to the business district. Gongs clanged, trolleys whirled on their noisy way, cars honked and sirened in his very ears at every turn. A cloud of pedestrians blocked his passage through the dense activity. He slipped in and out of its convolutions till he reached a point where he stood still to stare.

"Well, I'll be darned!" The exclamation left his lips in awe. Where had stood the towering cliff of his memory now lay an open space upon which large building operations were in progress. Two hundred feet of solid cliff and rock had been steam-shoveled and derricked away like a miracle. What had been a useless white elephant

now lay above the city like a guarding sentinel's vantage point while easily accessible. A hundred men were busy at construction upon the building which he could see at a glance was no small proposition.

"The girl won, by ginger!" He looked ruefully down upon his uncouth garb. "And now it's up to me!"

He entered her office with bashful eagerness. It was no longer a hole in the wall but a handsome suite—large and commodious with massive furnishings and soft rugs. He tapped softly upon the door marked "Private" regardless of the astonished office girl.

"Come in," he heard and turned the knob. He saw instantly that the woman he remembered looked tired and worn. The old frankness of her face had become dimmed.

"Why—it's you," she exclaimed as he stood awkwardly gazing at her, "of all people!"

The weariness in her tone warned him, even as he noted the lines about her mouth, the hardened look about the fine eyes.

"You've won!" he exclaimed. "You've surely won out this time!"

Her face changed perceptibly as her eyes narrowed in swift thought.

Watching her he frowned in puzzlement. She had been glad to see him at first—that he knew. But this looked as though—

"I suppose my six per cent is safe," he laughed uneasily. "Lord knows I need it!"

She turned upon him like a flash. "You're not—"

"I am that," he interrupted calmly, "flat as a flounder and five years flirting with gold mines—can you beat it?" His grin was as boyish as ever, his brown and clean-looking face even more attractive, his eyes more childlike.

"Tell me about it." She frowned, biting her lips as she watched him.

"I'll tell you all right," he agreed. "It's what I've come a thousand miles or so for."

"Do you mean"—her eyes widened—"that you haven't any money—any at all?" she persisted.

"Oh," he grinned self-consciously, "I've got the price of a bed and a couple squares or so."

She drew a breath of relief. His keen eyes caught the look of anxiety that hovered about her mouth.

"Then you're all right for the present." She got up and went to the door, holding it open for him. "I'm sorry, but you'll have to excuse me now. I have an appointment, and I'm late as it is."

He backed out without a word, bewildered to dumbness by her unexpected stand. The curtness and formality of her words hurt, and his grin faded.

"I'll be—darned!" he exclaimed as he followed the long stairway down to the ground floor, forgetful of the crowded elevators that passed continually on their way up and down. "I'll be darned!" he echoed as he went down the street slowly, trying to sense what had happened.

"Why, she turned me out. Just turned me out—slick as that! The nerve of her!" he muttered as he thought over the situation. "But maybe she had to use it," he mused, weighing the matter of the money against her surprising actions. "Maybe the poor thing got busted and just had to. Maybe she ain't to blame at all. Maybe— Gee, there's a lot of things that might have happened. Anyhow"—he brightened with a return of his unalloyed humorous sense—"I can butt in again."

He went the next day and found her out. Her door was closed, but he thought that he caught the sound of her voice. He left hesitantly.

He called again, and again he was told that she was not in. That was where his old Alaskan fighting blood showed up.

"All right," he said calmly and walked to the door. Instead of passing out he waited for the stenographer to return to her work at the far end of the room. Then he crossed quietly and without a premonitory knock opened the door and walked into her private office.

She looked up startled. When she saw who her visitor was she rose to her feet.

"I told the girl I was not to be interrupted," she spoke coldly.

"So I savvied!" He stood before her with purpose in every line.

"Now, see here," he offered, "you've got into some sort of scrape. Can I help?"

She started. "Can you — help?" she echoed in amaze.

He chuckled. "I suppose it does sound funny when you know I'm broke, but it's not as bad as that. I could manage to get you a few dollars if it would help any."

She stared at him, and the hot color crept up her face to the very roots of her hair.

"What—makes you think," she asked with an effort, "that I'm in a—scrape, as you call it?"

"Well, I thought when you didn't want to say anything about that money, or see me, or anything, probably you'd lost it some way. I know how things go in this gambling game."

"Yes?" The suspicion of a smile crossed her pale lips.

"Things are pretty much of a gamble, anyway." He smiled down in her tense face kindly.

"What would you say—if I'd—cheated you out of your money?" There was an odd sort of fear in her eyes as she watched him.

"What's the difference if you had?" he asked calmly. "'Twould have been my fault. You didn't want to take my money, in the first place, if I remember rightly. And what's a little money, anyhow? Shucks!" He dismissed the matter from his mind.

"What is it?" he asked as he saw that she was suffering from some emotion that he could not fathom.

"Oh, go—please go!" she begged. "I'll see you to-morrow—honestly I will." And he went.

"I'll be darned!" was his characteristic expression as he again walked down the long stairway. "I can't make the girl out at all —poor kid, she's up against something I don't know about. Fool that I was to butt in and get her all worked up! Well, I'll fix it for her to-morrow."

He met with quite a different reception when he walked into the office the next afternoon. The girl hastened to lead him to the private office and, throwing the door wide, he heard a welcome "Come in!"

He walked straight up to her and held out a fat roll of new bills with a rubber band about their middle.

"Here," he offered clumsily, "maybe this will help some."

"But I thought you were—busted?" She brought out the word without a thought of its commonness.

"So I was," he chuckled, "down to my last fiver, but I knew a fellow that let me have this thousand on a claim I own up in the interior."

"You — you — *borrowed*" — her eyes probed into his soul—"for me—for me!" she repeated in an awed voice. "Thank God!" The tears rolled down her cheeks unheeded. "You don't know what you have done for me. You've given me back my faith — in goodness — in honesty — in men. I've been hating them all and you—" She swallowed like a child.

"I got into trouble over that property." She hesitated. "I suppose you guessed that."

"Go on," he commanded quietly.

"And some land sharks got it away from me." She was talking with embarrassment. "They offered me half of what it was worth, and when I turned them down they went after me tooth and nail. They ordered me to produce my proofs that you were the owner, and I showed them the deed. I had never had it recorded, for that seemed foolish when it was such an up-in-the-air deal. They laughed at me and my 'fake deed,' as they called it. Then they served notice on me to produce some proof of your whereabouts and I couldn't. You will remember that you refused to leave me an address where I could reach you. I hadn't even known your hotel, and there wasn't a soul who knew you. It looked bad. The previous owner had died intestate. They produced and proceeded to put on record a forged deed and they got possession of the property.

"I was in a bad condition financially, and had no money with which to fight them. It was a matter of many thousands, and I knew that it would require one of the best attorneys and that took money. I couldn't do a thing. My hands were tied. And so—" She threw out her hands expressively.

"Don't mind. Don't let it worry you," he comforted. "I don't care a bit. It wasn't much, anyhow."

She flashed him an odd smile.

"Just at the last minute"—she paused as she reached in a drawer and brought out a tiny book and the smile deepened—"an old lawyer friend heard my story and took up the matter for me. We won out and I sold the whole business, improvements and all. See!" She held out the book to him.

"What's this," he demanded, "etiquette for barbarians?"

"Look at it." The suggestion was made with an amused curve of her lips.

She was no longer tired and bored. She looked like the girl she still was, youthful and merry and almost tender in her gladness.

"Why, it's a bank book!" he exclaimed, and there in his own name he saw amazing figures.

"Eighty-five thousand!" he whistled. "Great grief, girl, how in Tunket did you do it?"

She reached out to touch the roll of bills he had brought her with a reverent finger.

"It's nothing compared to this," she said softly. "This is more than money—you borrowing to help me out of my trouble when you thought I'd cheated you! What sort of a man are you?"

Her eyes were misty. Her hand was pressed against her heart as though the latter was too full to hold.

"Why, I'm — I'm — just an ordinary guy," he coughed in embarrassment, "like you'll meet all over Alaska. I ain't no worse nor no better than the run."

"Then all I've got to say is"—her breath caught almost as though it were a sob—"that Alaska must be one grand country!"

"It sure is, girl," he declared earnestly; "there ain't no better on earth. And now, how about my six per cent?"

"Six per cent!" she laughed. "It's all yours—every cent of it! I kept out my commission."

"All mine—h-m!" he scoffed.

"It's your money—see. Here is the paper you signed." She held it out before him, and he saw that it was his name, not hers, that confronted him from the clearly written pages—"And here's your deed."

"Why did you do this?" he demanded, torn by a variety of emotions.

"I did the only square thing." She turned upon him almost angrily—"And I had a hard time doing it, at that!"

"All I will take is enough to get me back." His tone was as stubborn as her own.

"You're going back?" she asked quickly, with a sudden indrawing of her breath.

"I surely am," he replied. "It's a white man's country. And I belong there. I aim to spend a week or so loading up with grub and things, and then I'm going back—home." He spoke the last word softly.

"You won't have to economize," she laughed; "eighty-five thousand will buy quite a bit of grub."

"It's your money!" he affirmed steadfastly.

"Not a cent of it," she defied him.

"See here"—he turned upon her impulsively—"will you think twice this time and go out to dinner with me while we settle this thing?"

She shook her head, but he caught the sparkle in her eyes. A quick hunger leaped into his own—a hunger he had tried to conceal since the moment when the office door had opened and he had looked again upon her face.

"You haven't told me a thing about yourself." He changed the subject abruptly. "How are things going?"

"Oh—to pieces!" Her eyes dropped at his look of concern, and she bit her lips in annoyance at her slip. She hadn't meant him to know.

"You aren't — up against it?" He watched her keenly as she replied.

"Oh, I could pull through, but I'm sick of the game. Business has been slow for years, and you know how it goes in this line when the boom is off." She smiled bravely up at him. "Let's not talk about it."

"And that money lying there—yours for the taking! Great guns, girl, are all business women as straight as you?"

Her eyes evaded his.

"Tell me why," he demanded, "you let on that you had lost my money? Why did you want me to think that? You must have had some purpose!"

"Because"—she edged a little away

from him like a child who has done something a bit uncertain—"I wanted to know if there was really any one—anywhere—who wasn't crazy about money. I thought you—that is—I thought that if I—knew for certain I'd feel—"

"See here"—he caught her by the arm and drew her gently toward him—"there's one way I'll take that money without a word."

"And that is—" Her eyes shone like stars after a rain.

"Fifty-fifty!"

"Fifty-fifty?" she echoed dully.

"And you change the firm name." He did not wait for her consent, but put his great arms about her and caught her lovingly to him.

"Alaska for ours," he murmured, "together. And now," he added after a pause, "will you go out to dinner with me?"

She raised dancing eyes. "Are you asking me to go Dutch?" she dared.

"I'm asking you to go anyway you please, girl," he flashed in sudden passion, "just so you go!"

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BEYOND RETURN

Translated from "Las Oscuras Golondrinas," of Becquer

BY GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

IN MEMORY OF F. W. M.

THE dark-winged swallows will return some day
To nest upon thy balcony again,
And once again their wings will brush, at play,
Thy crystal window-pane.

But those that stayed a little their swift flight
To learn the names of love we whispered o'er,
To know my joy, to see thy beauty bright—
These will return no more.

Once more thy garden will perfume the air
With clustered blooms along thy trellised wall.
The rose once more will blow, mayhap more fair,
At twilight evenfall.

But those rare flowers that long ago we knew—
Each in its heart a flaming jewel bore,
Agleam with Heaven's own tears of purest dew—
These will return no more.

And though it be that some time thou mayst hear
Still other words of love that, echoing, seem
To fall like music on thy listening ear,
And wake thy heart, adream,

The love I offered, kneeling at thy shrine,
Where holy flames like candle-altars burn—
Be not deceived, such love as once was mine
Will nevermore return.

The Murder by Ship

Ben Ames Williams

Author of "Trapped," "Swords of Wax," "The Powder of Midas," "Three in a Thousand," etc.

CHAPTER XVI.

DELILAH SPEAKS HER MIND.

THE sun had risen. Its lancelike rays struck in through the window by which Heinemann had stood. They were fair in Linga's face: and they illumined the interior of the boat-house and the tableau formed by the three. Linga, panting and white-hot with anger, in the doorway, her pistol covering Johnny. John McMorrow Breed on the floor, weak and nerveless with his exertions, torn by an agony of pain, and expecting at any moment the crash of a bullet between his eyes. And Mark Heinemann erect above him, breathing deeply, staring at Johnny and at Linga, his pistol in his hand.

It was Mark Heinemann who was the first to speak. He asked Linga crisply:

"He escaped?"

"Yes."

"In another moment he would have told."

"Yes, in three seconds. Just three seconds more."

"What happened?"

The girl brushed her hand wearily across her eyes. Johnny got unsteadily to his feet and stood with his back to the wall, facing them, watching them. "When I heard you —fighting—in here," she said, "I looked around. It was instinctive. And before I could turn he knocked me down." She rubbed her crimson cheek with a rueful hand. "He—he just knocked me sprawling, dad. And slipped around the corner like a cat before I could move. I ran around and saw him disappearing at the top of the stairs. And I shot once—but he got away."

Mark Heinemann smiled faintly. He was perfectly composed, master of the situation. "Ah, well, there's many a slip," he said. "The information has escaped us. But the man cannot." He glanced at Johnny, and nodded his head a little. "I shall go after him," he said. "You must not be harsh with Mr. Breed, Linga. He is not well. You will—"

"I'm going with you."

He shook his head. "No, stay. Make things clear to this young man. We might have been wiser to do so before."

"I could kill him," she said bitterly. Her father laughed and glanced at Johnny.

"It's not his fault," he told her. "It is ours. Now—I am gone—"

He was at the door as he spoke; and before Johnny could have moved, even if he had wished to do so, he heard the German running lightly up the steps.

Linga still stood by the door. Johnny leaned against the wall. He was panting, dizzy, sick. The girl watched him, thoughtfully; and after a little she slipped the pistol into some hiding-place in her skirt and began to rearrange her tumbled hair.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for July 6.

Johnny was confused, worried. He was already half convinced that he had made a fool of himself. But he said nothing, waited for the girl to speak.

She began, suddenly, to laugh. There was beside the door a bench built into the wall, and she sat down on it and leaned her head back against the wall and rested her hands on the bench beside her, and laughed until she cried. And Johnny, before her mirth, turned slowly from white to red, brick red; and he would have preferred vastly that she should shoot him out of hand.

She rose suddenly and came toward him and took his arm. "Come," she said. "Sit down. You're ill. Not strong. I'm sorry I laughed; sorry I was angry. I—It was disappointment, mostly."

He thrust her hand away; said stubbornly: "See here! I may be a fool! But I want to understand. Who—what are you? What is all this about? What does it mean?"

She smiled at him a little wistfully. "Please sit down." She took his arm again. "You—you're dreadfully pale."

"No," he protested. "No. Listen. Are you a spy? Or aren't you? Are you a spy?" His tone was almost hopeful, he was so dreadfully afraid that he had blundered.

"If you'll sit down," she said insistently, "I'll tell you—all about it—all."

He submitted then, unwillingly; and when he tried to walk he was surprised to find how weak and nerveless were his legs. But with her arm to help, he managed it and crossed to the bench and sat down there. And he looked at her then and said, insistently: "Now—tell me."

She wore a gray sweater and a heavy flannel waist: and she loosed a button of this waist and fumbled inside, and drew out a bit of dainty fabric, a part of some intimate garment. She held it for him to see the thing that was fastened there. A tiny shield. He stared at it.

"United States," he stammered huskily.

"Yes. Secret Service."

"But you were in Berlin?"

She nodded. "Yes," she assented. "Yes. My work was there."

"But you are German," he protested.

She laughed a little, mirthlessly. "The Germans made that same mistake," she said. "I am a German-American. And an American German-American can do much good for this country by pretending to be the German kind." She was smiling. "The Germans are so ready to believe that we are on their side," she said.

He was groping desperately for some solid ground of fact. "Well, then—well, what about Vacherly?" he demanded. "You were trying to get something out of him—about the Skyrocket!"

Her eyes were sober enough now. "Mr. Vacherly," she said, "is one of the cleverest, and he has been one of the most dangerous German spies in all the world."

He could not believe her. "He's an Englishman," he protested. "It sticks out all over him."

She nodded. "It does—stick out," she said. "I thought he was an Englishman—every one thought he was an Englishman—until after he reached this country—until I was ordered—by Berlin—to get in touch with him here. They trusted me, you see."

He broke in, he got awkwardly to his feet. "But, Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "I've got to get after him. He's got to be caught—if this is so. He can't—"

She caught his arm and drew him down beside her again. "No fear," she said. "He is caught by now. There are guards all about this place, watching for him. He could not get away. This was the end of his course—this rendezvous with me here this morning."

She was silent for a moment, and he asked quickly: "How did he get Vacherly's credentials, anyway?"

"He is Vacherly," said the girl.

"Is Vacherly? What do you mean?"

Linga laughed. "The Germans—we Germans—" She was smiling. "We Germans are clever people. Vacherly's father was German-born, but he went to England to live when he was eighteen. You see—he has been looked up in these last days. And he changed his name to Vacherly. And his son went to Oxford; and when the war came he went into the flying corps." Her eyes were thoughtful. "A man so brave

deserves a little admiration, it seems to me. He has been flying for England since the war began; and he has fought for her and been all but killed for her." Her lips hardened faintly. "But God knows how many terribly costly messages he has dropped inside the German lines on those flights of his."

They were both silent for an instant, and then she touched Johnny's knees and said quietly: "Just think of it. The possibilities of it. A British aviator knows most things worth knowing about the British army with which he is connected. And all those things, through his years on the front, Vacherly must have let the Germans know. So simply—just a bit of paper, wrapped around a pebble, dropped from the skies."

She touched her cheek thoughtfully; and Johnny remembered, and his voice was thick as he said: "He knocked you down—knocked you down—"

She laughed lightly. "That was the Prussian in him, don't you see. I was really lucky to escape so easily, it seems to me."

"How did he get into this place here?" Johnny asked huskily. "I don't see how he managed it."

"We are investigating now," she said. "Inquiring what influences were used to get him this assignment."

"And you had him trapped this morning when I interfered," he reproached himself. "Lord, but I'm a duffer."

She told him gently: "It was a natural thing for you to do. We might have warned you. But the harm's done."

"You said he couldn't get away!" he reminded her, startled.

"Oh, he can't get away; but that's not the worst."

He could not find words for an instant; then he asked slowly: "What is the worst?"

She moved her shoulders, as though to shake off a burden. And she turned to him quickly. "I'll tell you," she said. "Just before I came home here I was in Swinemunde. That's a Prussian port on the Baltic, you know."

He nodded.

"I happened upon a terrible piece of information there," she went on. "And I pried around like a little old gossip. And I found out what it was that was planned." She hesitated. "John Breed," she said soberly, "the Germans have sent out a ship full of airplanes and bombs for an air raid on New York."

He cried: "I heard that. There were some letters on the ship we crossed on. They intercepted them."

She smiled faintly. "Yes. I had already reported. I learned the whole plan in Berlin. The ship is to come down the coast here—somewhere. And Vacherly was to deliver to them photographs of lower New York, made from the air, to guide them.

"He took those photographs the day you and he flew over New York. He put the camera into a dummy bomb and dropped it into the river; and his friends picked it up there."

"I saw that!" Johnny told her. "But I didn't think anything—"

"Of course you didn't. But the whole flight was brought about by a man named Hillebrand, Pierce Grantham's secretary. It was he who suggested it. He was arrested last night—after he telegraphed Vacherly the hour for the rendezvous."

"The hour?"

"Nine o'clock. Nine o'clock this morning."

"He was to meet the ship, then?"

"Yes."

"But hasn't our navy grabbed her?"

"She slipped through the line a night or two ago. She touched at Bar Harbor yesterday morning, and sent the message to Hillebrand, through another man. She's somewhere out there"—the girl waved her hand toward the sea—"somewhere out there now."

Johnny considered for a moment, face white. "At least, Vacherly won't meet her now," he exulted.

"No, he won't meet her; but we had counted on getting from him the place of rendezvous."

Johnny's fist clenched. "That was what you asked him just before I butted in."

She laughed softly, touching his hand. "Never mind. You didn't know." She hesitated; then: "It seems to me you were

very courageous to attack father. You're weak still. And he had a pistol in his hand."

He flushed uncomfortably. "Why, I had to. That was the only thing to do. That is, I thought it was." He pounded on his knee with his fist. "And instead of doing something worth while, I spoiled all you had done."

She would have protested. "Oh, you—"

"Now, don't say a word," he told her impatiently. "I know. He would have told you where he was to meet this murder-ship. And then you could have nabbed him, while our ships went out and got the ship."

"I—"

"Wasn't that the plan?"

"Why, yes."

"And I spoiled it."

She looked at him with troubled eyes. "Why, he probably wouldn't have told me, anyway."

"He would. You know he would."

"Well, I—think so," she admitted.

Anger at himself wrenched him to his feet, made him forget his own weakness. "Lord, Lord!" he exclaimed disgustedly. "What an almighty jackass I am. I ought to be—"

She touched his hand firmly. "Now, see here, Johnny Breed," she said severely, "quit calling yourself names. Look at the thing sensibly. You knew him for an Englishman, honest and decent, even if he did talk too much. And you knew we were German, father and I; knew I had spent years in Berlin. And you saw me—cultivating him, and leading him to talk about things he should not have mentioned. What else was there to think or to do? What else was there for any loyal, brave young chap like you to do?"

He shook his head. "Stop it," he said curtly. "That does no good. It's decent of you to try to cheer me up. But I was an idiot through the whole thing—the whole blooming thing. An idiot."

"You were not!"

"Because from the day that submarine let our ship go by, and from the minute I knew your name—knew you were German—I was—I suspected you were a—spy." He flung up his hands. "That's the thing that makes me wild. Nobody but an idiot could have thought that of a—girl like you."

The girl's eyes met his squarely for an instant, and then they fell before the fierce self-reproach that blended with the tenderness in his; and she laughed a little and said jokingly: "After all, you were—partly right."

"I—"

"The Wilhelmstrasse thought I was a German spy, too," she reminded him. "You weren't the only one. And the Wilhelmstrasse thinks it is extremely clever."

He laughed mirthlessly. "The whole thing makes me sick," he told her. "Just plain disgusted." He turned toward the door. "Come on. Let's go see if they got Vacherly. Maybe he's pulled off another trick. He's—"

The girl smiled. "I don't think he'll get away this time," she said quietly. "We were rather careful in our preparations."

"If he does," said Breed quietly, "I'm going after him. And I'm going to get him if I have to go from here to—from here to there to do it."

She went up the stairs that led to the crest of the bluff, and he followed close behind her. The sun was climbing now, and at the top of the stairs Johnny saw a long, sloping, sun-drenched lawn that led upward to the cottage itself. Here and there on the way were trees, twisted by the sea wind into strangely grotesque yet graceful contortions. He stood for a moment, silent, struck with the scene; and then he turned to speak to the girl beside him.

When he turned he saw that she was looking down the beach beyond the boat-house; and he looked and saw Mark Heinemann coming along the beach toward them, running. In a flash the girl was down the stairs to meet him, and Johnny was at her heels. The girl caught Heinemann's arm, cried: "Dad, what's wrong?"

Heinemann did not stop. Still running, he reached the stairs and sped up them, and raced up the lawn toward the house. As he ran, with Linga on one side and Johnny fighting to keep his place at the other, he told them.

"Got away," he gasped. "Dropped from the rocks on the man at the lower end of the place. Stabbed him in the throat. I found the man there."

They reached the house. Heinemann snatched a telephone in the hall, called into the receiver: "Emergency," and gave a number. In a moment they heard him ask:

"Captain Howell—"

"This is Mark Heinemann. Please arrest or kill Lieutenant Vacherly on sight—"

"What's that—"

"My God—"

"He's here. I'll bring him—"

He dropped the instrument, gripped John Breed's arm. "He got there five minutes ago," he told them swiftly. "Sauntered into the hangar where the Skyrockets are. Had one pushed out, to test the engines. Got in. Started across the harbor. The mechanic guessed something was wrong, shouted at him. Vacherly turned and shot the man—and got away. You—"

Johnny had turned to the door with a leap. Heinemann cried: "Car's ready. Quicker." The three of them scrambled into the machine that stood on the drive before the house; and the motor roared as they dove like an arrow toward the main road. Heinemann was in the front seat, the other two behind. The girl gripped Johnny's arm.

"You're going after him?" she whispered.

He nodded, without speaking. For a moment she watched him, a new and strange timidity creeping into her eyes; and then she begged softly:

"You will be careful, won't you?"

John McMorrow Breed looked fiercely down at the girl he loved, and he said to her curtly: "Careful? Careful? Oh, I'll be as careful as hell!"

CHAPTER XVII.

PURSUIT.

OVER the roar of the great car's engines John and the girl caught a sharp, snapping, barking sound that Johnny knew. He cried:

"Guns!" And a moment later: "Look!"

They had topped a rise, were diving toward the aviation field down a long, even slope. And they could see the destroyer in the outer harbor, with orange flame lancing from the muzzle of an antiaircraft gun upon her forward deck. Two or three miles to seaward of her, and circling across the line of her fire, they saw the Skyrocket!

"If he flies straightaway, he gives them a good mark," Johnny whispered. "That makes him circle—delays him."

They saw the monoplane wheel, seem to balance upon one wing against the eastern sky, and then she was off again on a long, slanting tack; and before they reached the aviation field she had turned again and was heading straight for the sea; and the destroyer's guns, outranged, had ceased to speak.

But the fast craft was beginning to move; she had dropped anchor and was off upon what was for her a hopeless, vain pursuit.

Their brakes ground as they came to an abrupt and jarring halt. Before they had fully stopped, Johnny had leaped from the car, and he knew exactly where he wished to go. In thirty seconds he had reached the hangar where the Skyrockets had been housed, saw the one which remained, balancing upon the water. It was the heavy, bombing plane. Vacherly had taken the fighter.

Captain Howell was there. Johnny saluted crisply. "Shall I pursue, sir?"

"You can't catch him. There's not a machine here that can touch that little Skyrocket."

"I'll chance it, sir. In the big one." He was in the fuselage of the big machine even while he read the assent in the commandant's eyes. "How much gas has he?"

"Enough for four or five hundred miles."

"Am I full?"

"Yes."

He touched the machine-gun mounted before him, glanced at the ammunition belts, filled and ready at one side. "Start it," he said quietly.

"You've six bombs there," Captain Howell called. "Drop them with the triggers when you're out a little. They'll relieve you of that much weight. Good luck."

The engines racketed, cutting off his words. The pontoons began to slide across the water. John Breed looked back and saw Linga on the shore, and she lifted her hand to him in swift farewell. With that to hearten him, he turned to his work again, and when he had the necessary speed, tugged at his stick and lifted, and was free of earth and with the air at his command.

The destroyer was a mile ahead of him, racing at topmost speed in the path of the fleeing machine that was now but a dot against the distant sky. But Johnny, with engines roaring, swept up on the destroyer, and over it, and beyond as though it lay still at its anchor. And he looked down as he passed and saw a score of the crew gathered about the deck-guns, waving their hats to him to cheer him on.

Then land and all the world was behind him; and before lay only the sea and the sky and the dot that was Vacherly, who had struck Linga down. Johnny, manipulating throttle and spark to win the utmost speed, found himself thinking more and more of Linga and of that blow. For the rest, he had no grudge against Vacherly; the man had but played the game, and played it in a splendidly daring way. But for that blow—

The speck ahead was still in sight, but it was smaller. His speed was hopelessly behind that of the other man. He was losing one foot in six. There must be something he could do.

He remembered the bombs in their tubes in his fuselage, and he pulled triggers that dropped one, and two, and three; and he felt the plane lurch with relief as each one fell. He reached for the trigger that would release the fourth, and something halted his finger on the pull. A memory—

Vacherly was going to meet the ship, the raider, the murder ship. If Johnny could hang on, the spy would lead him to that ship. And he must master the ship if his work was to be well and fully done.

For that work he might well need his bombs. He held his hand, drove on.

He began to climb, climb, seeking a favoring wind that would lift him more swiftly on. Vacherly, far ahead, was flying high; and if it came to combat between the two, the higher would have the first advantage. Therefore, for the two reasons, Johnny began to climb.

At two thousand feet he was bucking fitful cross-currents. At three thousand, the machine seemed to struggle like a living thing against a thrusting force. It tacked this way and that, as a boat, held by its prow in a swift current, will swing from side to side. At four thousand, Johnny could not be sure whether the wind served him or fought him; but he held that level for a space, and saw that Vacherly no longer drew away, and was content.

Now and then he lifted the Skyrocket another hundred feet, lurching upward steadily. When he had been half an hour upon the wing, they were then fully sixty miles from land, alone in the skies, with only the dingy sails of a fishing craft or two upon the level sea-floor far below them; he was at an altitude equal to Vacherly's, and not more than six or seven miles behind.

He realized then that Vacherly did not wish to shake him off. The other was deliberately holding back his faster plane, inviting the pursuit; and Johnny wondered why, and was disturbed and uneasy.

These doubts obsessed him for a space; then he put them from his mind. No matter. Whatever Vacherly might plan, whatever he might do, it was for him to hang on, hang on, hang on—

His engines were running smoothly and sweetly; their exhaust came in a roar that was like the purr of a monstrous cat. Now and then he tested the controls, jockeying this way and that for the sake of getting the feel of his craft; and once he took advantage of a level of still and gentle airs to insert the feed-belt into his gun, and inspect it for deficiencies that might cause a jam; and he tried a spurt of shots to make sure the gun was in working condition.

Then he drove on, relentlessly pursuing.

The two planes, after forty minutes of flying, were some ten thousand feet above the sea. Their horizon had expanded until Johnny thought whimsically that half the North Atlantic must be within their view. Yet he knew this could not be so; for on

all the blue below them there were only a dozen craft in sight, fishing-boats for the most part, with a gray blur that might be a patrol boat far away to the southward; and a tug with three coal-barges snaking away to the north.

He thought it no wonder, then, that German raiders had been so successful in keeping the sea. A single ship can watch only a few square miles at a time; and there are millions of square miles that will bear watching. He searched the waters for any craft that might be the ship Vacherly was going to meet, but there was none such within his view.

When they had been almost an hour in the air, Johnny saw, far to the south, a tiny dot of land; and he guessed it must be Cape Cod. That meant that Vacherly, starting almost due north from Scarboro, had made a wide circle back to this point; and Johnny wondered why. He had not watched his compass before; he watched it now; and when Vacherly turned sharply almost due east, Johnny knew that the open sea lay before them; and he thought, with a tug at his heart, that the moment must be near.

Ten minutes later he knew it; for, beyond Vacherly's machine and higher, he saw another speck against the blue. Another plane. And while he watched, it swept toward them, then slowly drew a figure "8" against the clouds.

As though this had been a recognition signal, Vacherly ceased his straightaway flight. He began to spiral and to climb, while the other machine came on.

And Johnny knew his hour had come to fight, or flee, or die!

CHAPTER XVIII.

COMBAT.

WHEN Vacherly ceased to flee and began to climb toward a vantage point from which he might attack and destroy Johnny's plane, he was about six miles to the east of Johnny. The strange machine which had signaled to him was three or four miles farther on. It was, Johnny could see, a biplane; and he knew it must be far slower than the Skyrocket which he flew.

Nevertheless, in any melée between him and Vacherly, that second machine might easily put in a finishing stroke; and John proposed to take no such chance—if the thing could be avoided. Even while he began, like Vacherly, to spiral upward into the blue, he laid his plan. He would elude Vacherly's attack—if the thing could be done; and he would press on then, and destroy the other machine before Vacherly could climb once more to the height on which they were flying.

This plan of campaign left Vacherly the initiative; therefore Johnny contented himself with climbing, climbing, climbing. Vacherly was to the east, and the sun was still low in the skies, so that for minutes on end the other Skyrocket was hidden from Johnny in the glare. To escape this handicap he extended his spirals to the south, and as Vacherly worked steadily toward him, preparing to close, Johnny was able to change their positions so that Vacherly was above him and to the north, with every wire of his machine in clear outline against the sky.

The second machine, at this time, was a mile or two away, and at about the same level as Johnny. He saw this, and he judged the moment most favorable to himself had come. So, to lure Vacherly into the attack, he tilted the Skyrocket upward toward the plane the Englishman was flying, and pulled trigger. Every fourth bullet in the belt was incendiary, leaving behind it a trail of fire by night and of smoke by day; and by these smoky trails, Johnny could see that his fire was cutting dangerously near the other's machine.

He climbed so steeply that the Skyrocket threatened to stall with him, and to avert this, he was forced to straighten out again upon a level, to dip a little to gather momentum. Vacherly, above and behind, took advantage of this instant to attack.

Johnny felt, rather than saw him coming. The thing was inevitable: Vacherly had to attack. And Johnny looked back and up, and saw Vacherly sliding almost perpendicularly down upon him. The other's gun was spitting streaks of fire,

and Johnny felt the shock as a bullet drove through the metal of his fuselage. He pushed his stick forward, and he, too, dove. The two machines were like a falcon and its prey; they dropped almost straight downward toward the sea, and from the prow of the one above spat fire and steel.

Abruptly Johnny tugged at his stick; the Skyrocket answered. He looped the loop, and in the instant that his machine was involved in this maneuver, Vacherly, who could not change his course without danger of collision, shot past him and on downward toward the sea for half a thousand feet before he could check himself.

It was the thing for which Johnny had worked. The other plane, the stranger, was high in the skies above them now, for they had maneuvered over half a perpendicular mile of space in their swift encounter. Johnny must climb, climb quickly.

He reached for the lever which reversed one propeller and warped the right-hand plane. He felt the sickening lurch of the Skyrocket as it began to fall; felt it catch itself and steady and begin to rise; and after an instant it was shooting perpendicularly upward— Half a mile; a mile—

He passed not a hundred yards from the other machine; and he saw the man who drove it. He could almost sense the amazement that paralyzed the other's muscles. When he was a full thousand feet above the biplane he threw across the lever that restored the Skyrocket to normal trim; and on the instant that the wings snapped into their proper adjustment once more, he threw himself forward and down, down, dropping like an eagle on the heavy observation plane below.

He saw, as he did so, that Vacherly had imitated his own tactics; he had converted the lighter Skyrocket into a horizontal propeller, and this snatched him skyward past Johnny's position as Johnny dived. It was like an enormous game of tag in the air, with thousand-foot levels as playthings, and with the earth and the sea so far beneath them that for the fighting men they no longer existed at all.

The biplane below Johnny saw destruction coming. The man who flew it was that Karl von Wederkind with whom Linga had talked over their chess in Swinemunde. He was a brave man, and cool. And he tried to flee, but knew his heavy craft was no match for the thing Johnny flew. That perpendicular ascent had paralyzed the German with astonishment, but only for a moment. Then the wonder of it overwhelmed him; and with all the strength that was in him, he coveted the secret of the Skyrocket for those he served.

He took the way that offered him a chance to give that secret to his masters. Vacherly, in the other Skyrocket, had the secret; if he were free he could find the Trondhjem and deliver it. Therefore Wederkind determined to destroy Johnny at any cost.

This resolution called for a courage beyond admiration, for the reason that the biplane was unarmed. It had not been prepared for combat, because no combat was anticipated in these scouting trips above the Trondhjem. There remained only one chance for success.

Wederkind swung his clumsy craft about and tilted it upward, and drove to meet Johnny head to head. And as his lips clamped over his gasping breath, he prayed the encounter might be swift and sure. And he watched, muscles tense, to swerve his own machine into Johnny's path if the American should turn.

For an instant Johnny was half-stunned by the cold determination of the men; and then he saw the biplane carried no machine gun, and was inclined to mercy. But there was no time for that; no chance for it. He must destroy two enemies or be destroyed. If either of them survived, not only he himself, but others must suffer.

He pulled trigger, and saw the trail of his bullets riddling the other machine during thirty seconds while they met thus, face to face. Then, with a twist, he writhed to one side over the other and beyond; and when he looked back he saw the biplane falling over and over, tumbling and dropping, and righting itself now and then for short, awkward glides. He forgot Vacherly for a space, and let himself go down and down, headlong, watching the biplane fall.

He saw it right itself for the last time,

sail awkwardly into the wind, and then a wing collapsed and it dropped—and struck the water. Johnny was low enough to see the spray fly upward. That last fall had not been bad; scarce more than fifty feet. He wondered if the man in the machine were dead. He thought there was a good chance the chap might have survived, and hoped so, quite honestly. The German had been brave.

He looked up to locate Vacherly, and saw the pseudo Englishman high above him and to the westward. Which pleased Johnny, for now that the other plane was gone, he wished to locate the murder ship before destroying Vacherly; and since Vacherly had flown to the eastward after taking his course from the Cape, Johnny put on all power and took the same eastward way. And Vacherly, behind, and far above, pursued.

But this chase could not for long endure. Vacherly's machine was too swift, it drew up on Johnny, and hung at last almost squarely above; and Johnny, watching for the dive and the attack, yet held steadfastly on his way.

Vacherly delayed. He kept his place squarely above Johnny; but he did not attack. And after a moment Johnny became uneasy at this forbearance. He thought Vacherly might expect reenforcements, and he swept his eyes across the sky ahead of him. But there was no dot there, nothing that might be an oncoming biplane; and there was no cloud behind which a new enemy might hide. Yet still Vacherly held off, flying so high above him.

The strain of waiting irked Johnny, yet there was nothing for him to do save wait. Vacherly commanded the situation; it was for him to strike; it was for Johnny's tense muscles to wrench his machine out of the bullets' path to safety. There was nothing he could do save drive on and on to the eastward, and watch for a glimpse of the ship that must lie somewhere ahead, and watch for Vacherly's dive.

It came at last, so swiftly that Johnny's breath whistled through his teeth. Vacherly, in the light little Skyrocket, seemed to poise for an instant, high in the air. Then the plane tilted slowly forward until the wings were a mere, thin line against the sky, and down and down it came.

When it was within a thousand feet, Vacherly sent a spurt of bullets toward the other machine. They whistled wide. Johnny made no move, gave no sign. At five hundred feet Vacherly fired again, and this time the bullets came in a spitting stream.

At the first Johnny tugged at the lever, and his Skyrocket dropped like a leaf, off on the right wing, as the propeller on that side stopped, and then resumed its beat in reverse direction. He fell, and as he fell he felt a pin prick in his left arm, and then the beating wings above him began to lift, and he rose, swiftly and more swiftly. He passed not fifty feet from Vacherly's swooping plane, and tried a chance shot at the other's machine with his gun as it swept by. Then he was swept upward, and Vacherly was far below.

The blood was running down his left arm, inside the sleeve, into his gauntlet. He was afraid its loss would weaken him, and so, when he had climbed five thousand feet, he threw the Skyrocket into normal, and let it ride easily on the eastward way while with his knife he ripped the sleeve of his uniform. There had been no time to don leather flying costume, and he had been shivering, half frozen, for an hour past, without realizing it in the excitement of the chase and the battle. He ripped open his sleeve, and saw that the bullet had passed through the flesh of the inner arm, between the bone of the arm and his side. It was bleeding freely, but not in spurts, so he knew the artery was uninjured. Nevertheless, he slipped a handkerchief awkwardly around the arm above the wound, and knotted it, and twisted it tight. The bleeding ceased; but his arm began at once to stiffen and swell with congested blood. Also he realized the cold, and shivered till his teeth were chattering.

He had kept an eye on Vacherly while he worked. The spy, eluded in his downward swoop, had imitated Johnny's own tactics once more, and had rocketed aloft until he was again on an upper level, with the advantage in hand. And he gave Johnny no rest now, but dove, gun roaring.

Johnny realized then what he had half guessed before, that the man was no marksman. An airman is half bird, half sharpshooter. He must be not only one of these things, but both. It is of little account to outmaneuver an opponent unless you are able, having done so, to administer the *coup de grâce*. Vacherly was a consummate master of flight tactics; but he could not shoot. A bullet had clipped Johnny's arm; but for the most part they went wild. And they had been fired at what should have been a pointblank range.

Johnny smiled grimly, with a guess at the reason for this bad marksmanship on Vacherly's part. The man, a German, had been fighting Germans in the air since the war began; but he had never downed one. He himself had told Johnny this on the steamer. That seemed a long time ago. He had never downed one. Doubtless he had always been careful, in these mock combats, to aim wide. And the art of marksmanship, like any other art, resents being betrayed, and avenges the betrayal. It was betraying Vacherly now.

A great contempt for Vacherly's powers grew in Johnny, and this time, as the other dived upon him, he was content merely to bank his plane and switch to one side. They were near a collision, and Vacherly swerved wildly to avoid it. As he drove on and downward, Johnny came around, above him, and sent another sheaf of bullets after the diving machine. But he did not pursue. For he had not yet sighted the murder ship. And he wished to be sure of that before finishing Vacherly.

This was his intention, but suddenly a memory swept up in him and drove this cooler strategy from his mind. It was the memory of Linga's crimson cheek where Vacherly had struck her down. And with the thought of that blow, Johnny forgot everything else in the world in his sudden blind and furious anger against the man who had struck. Vacherly was just righting himself, a thousand feet below. Johnny dove for him; he began to fire. He marked the track of his bullets as they swept fair for the heart of the little Skyrocket where sat Vacherly.

But Johnny's very rage betrayed him. For Vacherly, bad marksman though he might be, knew every trick of the air. At the first blast from Johnny's gun, he went off on a wing, and literally turned over sidewise in the air; then straightened out, upside down, and shot away from the path of Johnny's dive. Johnny saw the maneuver too late; he tried to turn. But Vacherly swept up and over and behind him, and in the flash of a second their positions were reversed, and Vacherly had a deadly and commanding advantage.

He began to fire.

Johnny banked his machine far over till the wings were perpendicular instead of horizontal. He tugged at the stick; and he thrust the rudder over.

In this position, flying literally on his side, there was nothing to support Johnny save his own momentum. His elevator was at the utmost angle, and in the position of his plane the elevator served as rudder, the rudder as elevator. Like a motor-cycle inside a racing pit, he began to whip around and around a narrow circle; he was like a fly spinning around the inside of a funnel.

His own momentum tended to force the plane outward on a tangent; but the tug of the elevators dragged it back into the circle once more. The balance of these two forces kept Johnny from a forthright fall ten thousand feet to the sea; nevertheless, he dropped like a stone a thousand feet while he made three spinning circles, and another thousand in two more.

Cautiously he straightened out then, fearful of the terrific strain the wings must undergo. He felt the very body of the machine groan beneath him at the wrench and twist; but—they held. He had escaped from the trap into which his own foolhardiness had thrown him. He had still his chance.

Vacherly had dived after him—too late. Before the other could strike, Johnny had time to swoop upward and past him. But neither man was minded now to pause and maneuver. The fighting lust was awake in each; they had forgotten everything else in the desire to strike and register the blow—to kill. They climbed in long spirals, circling each around the other, each unable

to bring his gun to bear: they went up and up and up. And Vacherly's lighter machine once more enabled him to seize the advantage. He was above. He dived.

Johnny had seen Vacherly swerve once before to avoid a collision; he was suddenly deadly sure that the man would swerve again. Neither God nor man Vacherly might fear, but this thing only—a splintering contact in the clouds.

Johnny wrenched his Skyrocket around, across, back, and so came, head on, to meet the charging plane. Both guns were blazing.

And Vacherly swerved. At the last instant of time he wavered, switched to one side, away. He had dared death through every instant of his life for three years past; but he would not dare a blow that might leave him, twelve thousand feet high, with not so much as a spread of linen between him and that terrific void. So his nerve failed, he wavered, and turned aside.

It was destruction. In that last, face to face encounter, he had been beaten: and in the war in the air the beaten man does not, as a rule, survive.

When Vacherly dodged, Johnny came around in a short circle upon the other's tail. The other tried to slip to one side; Johnny was upon him. He dipped his nose and dove, and Johnny dropped foot for foot with him, slitting the other's machine with spurt on spurt of bullets as he pursued. Whether one of them struck Vacherly or not, he never knew. It may have been some engine flaw, or it may have been a punctured tank. But whatever the cause, the other machine halted suddenly, sickeningly, in mid air; and Johnny saw that the right-hand engine had stopped. The Skyrocket sagged on that side; it slid off lazily like a sinking ship: it caught itself, slid again, then went spinning over and over twice, then straightened out once more.

Johnny, relentlessly pursuing—it is the courtesy of the air to spare a beaten foe, but this man had struck Linga—whipped another round of bullets through the falling machine; and this time one of the explosive balls, or an incendiary missile, touched a gasoline tank. There was a whip of smoke, snatched away by the wind of the machine's fall; then another that clung; and then in a single flash the falling monoplane became a skyrocket indeed. Flames burst from it, streamed far above as the thing dropped down and down and down, lancing the deep well of the skies like a torch, and drawing a black line of smoke against the blue in its fall until it struck at last the water, far and far below.

For an instant more smoke rose. Then there was only a black speck against the ocean's blue; and presently, while Johnny circling, watched from high above, the speck was gone, and the blue ocean rolled unsullied where Vacherly and his bloody plans had disappeared.

Johnny surrendered, for a little, to the reaction of victory. He shut his eyes, relaxed in his seat, not knowing, nor much caring, what might come to pass.

When he opened his eyes again he saw, five miles away and ten thousand feet below him, a ship. She was, he understood at once, a tramp steamer of a familiar, dingy type. A common sight.

But the thing upon her fore deck was no common sight. His eyes widened as he looked. Two long, dark strips, slanting forward and down. He had seen such things before. Some naval vessels had them. Launching rails for airplanes.

He knew then that the rusty tramp below him was the murder ship that Vacherly had come to meet; and the weakness that had overwhelmed him passed away. He swung across the skies to where the steamer lay.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PRIZE.

CAPTAIN OSCAR HOEG, of the Trondhjem, having despatched his telegram from Bar Harbor, appointing the hour of the rendezvous at a spot which had been designated weeks before, jogged slowly southward, well content. The thick weather held until mid-afternoon, covering him from observation; and when the fog lifted, after an anxious moment of scrutiny, he saw that he had the sea all to himself

save for an innocent fishing craft and a three-master working up to Searsport for a lumber cargo.

Shortly thereafter the shades of night enfolded him. Through the night he drove more swiftly southward, listening with some interest to the radio calls the operator picked from the speaking ether. An inconvenient number of them were in a new code which was not included in those which had been solved or secured by the German secret service. Captain Hoeg made copies of all the messages in this code which he was able to overhear. They would furnish a basis for efforts to solve the new enigma.

Dawn revealed the sea clear of dangerous vessels; and at a little before eight o'clock Captain Hoeg reached the appointed latitude and longitude, due east of the tip of Cape Cod; and he slowed his engines and cruised in a leisurely circle, and sent Von Wederkind aloft to search the seas for danger, and to course to the westward, toward the Cape. There was a chance, Captain Hoeg explained, that the man who was to come might have difficulty in finding them. Von Wederkind could serve as his guide.

Von Wederkind departed on this mission. He climbed in wide spirals till he was ten thousand feet in the air, and directly above the Trondhjem where she lay. Then he swung off to the southward and made a wide circle around the ship, scanning the seas for naval craft. Returning, he signaled—the signal was given by means of a dip and a single sharp turn of the biplane—that the sea was clear of danger. Then, in obedience to his orders, he turned westward toward the Cape to meet Vacherly.

Captain Hoeg, on the Trondhjem's bridge, kept his glasses on the biplane until it disappeared into the far depths of the sky. And when he was sure it was gone he still scanned that distant sky with his binoculars for sign of its return.

It seemed to him, and to those with him on the bridge, a long time that they waited. The wind was blowing from the west; and once the captain's first officer thought he heard the far sputter of an exhaust, or of a machine-gun. But they decided that had been his imagination. The sound would not carry so far.

Five minutes later the first officer—he was a man with first-rate eyes and ears—said quietly: "There he is." And he pointed to a spot in the sky, just below a white and billowing cloud. Captain Hoeg turned his glasses on this spot, and he uttered an ejaculation. That was not Von Wederkind—it was a monoplane.

It was the other, the man who was to come, they decided. He must have left Von Wederkind behind. The monoplane would be the faster machine.

Captain Hoeg muttered: "*Ach—was ist das?*"

They saw the monoplane's wings flattened against the sky. The machine was diving, diving—attacking. A moment later they discerned the other craft lower down. Another monoplane. Not Von Wederkind.

The men on the Trondhjem were able to watch every detail of the battle that followed; the battle between Johnny and Vacherly. Captain Hoeg thought of flight; but the thought was driven from his mind by amazement at the maneuvering power of the monoplanes. Their ability to rise like skyrockets.

The aviators on the Trondhjem watched the spectacle with professional eyes. They said at once that Von Wederkind must have been destroyed. Even if he had been armed he could not have faced one of these machines. By the same token it would be hopeless, even if there were time, to assemble one of the craft in the hold and rise to attack. The monoplanes yonder—they were miles beyond anything the air had known before. Their speed alone, and that power of perpendicular flight was so much clear gain. They were unbeatable save by their own kind.

Some of them knew Vacherly; that is to say, they had seen him fly over the western front; and they were able to identify him by certain characteristic mannerisms of the air. They guessed at his opponent. They named one man and another; but most of them agreed it must be some untried American from the aviation camps here. None of them thought of Breed. He was known to be wounded—out of the game.

They saw quickly enough that Vacherly had the speed of the other; and at that

they exulted quietly, and said it was only a matter of time till he should win. But when his dives failed again and again, their eyes began to cloud; they accorded his opponent a good measure of dexterity. Nevertheless, Vacherly must—

Came the final flashing encounter, when Vacherly, facing collision, flinched and turned aside, and then the burst of smoke. The flames. The terrible, hurtling fall.

A cry went up from the men upon the Trondhjem, and they threw off the spell that had held them and leaped to action. The Trondhjem had two guns forward and one aft, but she had none that could be tilted to cover the air. There were only rifles and machine-guns. The men broke these hurriedly from their places of storage prepared to fight. They mounted two machine-guns on the bridge, two forward; and there were other men with rifles everywhere. The Trondhjem's engines began to race; she turned, sped for the open sea.

In the final, swift stages of his battle with Vacherly, John Breed had been too absorbed to mark the Trondhjem, far below him. But when he saw it, and knew it for what it was, his heart leaped exultantly; and he touched, on the panel beside his seat, the triggers that would release his three remaining bombs. The ship below was at his mercy—helpless. He could sink her—smash her where she lay.

His eyes clouded thoughtfully. He could sink her—but there was no need. He would offer her a chance first to surrender; and if she yielded there would be good booty in bombs and planes, besides a stout and serviceable ship. He was directly above the Trondhjem now, circling to keep position there, wondering how he should proceed. He had no wireless, yet he must communicate—must demand the surrender he desired.

He grinned at last with resolution and decision; and he let the Skyrocket ride on the smooth airs of the upper levels, while he slipped a cartridge from the belt at the bottom of the rack where it would not be needed by his gun. With his knife—thrice he broke the blade, yet still persevered—he worried out the bullet and emptied the powder overside.

Then he rummaged from his pockets a pencil and a note-book; and on a leaf of the note-book wrote:

"Shape your course for Newport or I will sink you. A bomb can be dropped as easily and certainly as this."

He signed his name—his full name—"John McMorrow Breed." And then he tore the leaf from his note-book and folded and rolled it into a tiny cylinder and slipped it inside the empty cartridge. He forced the bullet back into the cartridge to plug it; and he clenched it in place with his teeth and dropped it into his pocket within easy reach of his hand. Then he looked down to the ship, far below him, and dove a thousand feet, and another and another until he hung a mile above her decks. He swept a little ahead of her till he was fairly in her course; and then he slid down the steep paths of the air till he was not two thousand feet above her. He knew the Skyrocket now, and knew what he could count on his machine to do.

They were firing at him from the Trondhjem. He could see faintly the flashes at the rifle muzzles; and he marked the groups of men who were handling the machine-guns. His lips set a little grimly, and he circled till he was behind the Trondhjem and dove and swept above her, raking her decks with his own weapon. He saw men fall; and those who did not fall scattered to shelter wildly.

A bullet or two spat on the armor beneath his seat and he laughed.

Beyond the Trondhjem he rose to fifteen hundred feet again; then, squarely in her course, wrenched back the lever that reversed his right-hand engine, and the Skyrocket fell — and caught herself — and hovered.

He slowed the engines; she descended gently, hanging in the air above the spot the Trondhjem must traverse. The ship tried to turn aside, but it was too late for that. She came on.

He was not a hundred feet above her forward deck when he tossed his cartridge, with its message, down upon her; and as he threw his throttle into higher speed he saw the silvery thing strike and bound and fall again and roll upon the boards. Then

the Skyrocket snatched him upward, upward.

Three thousand feet above the sea he brought her back to normal trim and circled and looked down.

The Trondhjem at the moment was headed due east. Her course to Newport lay to the southwest. And Johnny glanced at the clock before him, and decided he would give her five minutes to obey his demand and change her course in signal of surrender. He circled, watched the clock and watched the ship and waited.

For one minute and for two there was no change. Then, and his lips set exultantly, he saw her bow bend away from the line her wake was drawing on the sea. More and more it turned to the southeast, to the south, and so, in a wide circle, around to south by west. And it held there, held there as the ship drove on.

She was his prize, and he knew that he had won.

When they had covered some twenty miles he saw a smoke ahead, and drove on and met a flotilla of destroyers and led them back to where the Trondhjem came submissively. He saw the puff of a gun that signaled her to halt; and when she had obeyed and the destroyers encircled her, Johnny drove downward till his pontoons touched the waves and swung alongside the nearest destroyer to report.

CHAPTER XX.

THE GREATER PRIZE.

THEY made much of Johnny on that destroyer until he checked them. They asked him what service they might do for him, and he said quickly:

"There's a German—he may be alive—on a wrecked biplane somewhere up north of here. I wish you could sling the Skyrocket on board and take me up there and find him."

The thing was quickly arranged, and the destroyer which Johnny had boarded left the flotilla which had taken the Trondhjem in charge and turned to the north. Johnny guessed at the locality where Wederkind had fallen; and when they reached the spot he took the Skyrocket and circled until he located the dot that was the smashed plane; and he led the destroyer to where it floated.

They found Von Wederkind sitting on top of the upper plane of his machine—even that was awash—smoking a cigarette. He greeted them amiably. "I'm very glad you've come," he said. "This raft of mine would not have lasted very much longer."

He was immensely interested in the Skyrocket, and asked Johnny many questions when they were aboard the destroyer together. Johnny liked him. And he told the German as much as could be told.

The commander of the destroyer swung her around, and Johnny went to him. "I say," he asked, "must you go back to Newport?"

The commander hesitated. "Those are my orders, sir. Why?"

Johnny flushed. "I—have a particular reason for wishing to return to Scarboro—as soon as possible."

The color in his cheeks betrayed him. The commander smiled. "You're—entitled to consideration," he assented. "I'll ask permission."

The wireless put him in touch with his flotilla commander; and ten minutes later the destroyer swung around to the west and left Cape Cod on the south and raced across the mouth of Cape Cod Bay with a great wave curling back on either side from the knife that was her prow. They made Scarboro a little after noon.

The news of Johnny's success had preceded him here. When the destroyer swung the Skyrocket into the water, and Johnny skimmed across the harbor to the hangars, he found a throng there that shouted things at him until he choked and stammered with miserable delight. And when he had landed, Captain Howell and Mark Heinemann and —Linga—these three took him between them to the commandant's office.

Harkness and mild little Luke Warner overtook them there; and Warner asked desperately: "Mr. Breed? Mr. Breed? What became of the little one—the little Skyrocket?"

Johnny saw the inventor's distress, and he said gently: "I'm sorry, sir. I had to—destroy it."

The mild little man's face was convulsed. "That — that Englishman?" he demanded huskily. "Where is he?"

"He's—gone."

Warner's clenched fists banged upon the table. "I'm glad, by God, sir! I'm glad!" he cried. "He tried to steal—he—"

Harkness touched his arm, and Warner fell silent, lips still invoking imprecations on Vacherly's head. Harkness took Johnny's hand, congratulated him— departed.

For a space Captain Howell and Mark Heinemann and Johnny talked together, while Linga sat quietly at one side. She did not speak, but her eyes never left Johnny. And again and again his impatiently sought hers.

But it was not till that night, when he went to the Heinemann cottage for dinner, that they were alone with each other. Captain Howell was there; and, after dinner, he and Heinemann went into the library with their cigars. And Linga and Johnny stood for a moment without speaking; and then, still without words, they went out into the night.

Starlight on the lawn, and the sea-wind stroking them. The scent of flowers in the air and the waves laughing on the rocks. A deep, rustic seat upon the headlands, whence for miles on either hand the shore lay spread below them, with lights twinkling everywhere.

They sat there, side by side, for a space. Linga was waiting for Johnny to say something, but Johnny was too happy to have anything to say. But it happened that as his hand moved once upon the bench by his side it touched hers, and their fingers intertwined.

And in due time, of course, Johnny said what Linga was waiting for Johnny to say.

(The end.)

In the Bad Lands.

by Raymond S. Spears

MR. LESTER FRENNER, secretary of the Bad Lands Stock Association, stood looking down at the bones of a steer with thoughts running too swiftly for immediate utterance. That frame of teeth, scraped ribs and torn skin was another of the long list of kills and depredations which the Poison River wolf pack had made, and Mr. Frenner was one of those who had particularly suffered in the raids, just as though the wolves knew and delighted in the fact that upon his order bounties were paid to hunters and trappers who were lucky enough to catch and bring in wolf or coyote scalps.

Old Crook Tail was the leader of the wolf pack, and in all the Poison River Bad Lands no other animal had achieved the same ill fame that Old Crook Tail seemed to enjoy. He ranged with his band from near the Montana line eastward well toward Thunder Butte, an enormous tract of country for a wolf pack to cover. Just now he was working south of White Face Butte, and hunting out from the thickets and dens of the Whistle Butte Range.

On Old Crook Tail was an individual and personal reward of one hundred dollars, in addition to the State, county, and association rewards, amounting to one hundred and fifty dollars all told. Having lost three hundred dollars' worth of stock, Mr. Frenner now drew his check-book and wrote another check, his own personal reward of fifty dollars more.

Thus the hide, scalp, right forepaw and death of Old Crook Tail became a matter of two hundred and seven dollars and fifty cents or thereabouts, for the trapper who caught, or the hunter who killed the tallow-fed old fellow who knew traps, up or down wind; who could smell poison through a gelatin capsule, and who hid by day and traveled by night to avoid the chance of bullets or buckshot. His right forepaw showed one nail missing; he had, when a pup, made the acquaintance of steel jaws, and that was knowledge he had never forgotten.

Frenner rode home to his ranch, two miles, and hopped into his automobile to drive thirty miles to Seim to get his reward notice posted before the bank closed. He was angry clear through, and it was the futile kind of anger which feels itself helpless in the presence of an overwhelming wrong. He had the feeling even that his fifty dollars would not be drawn by any one, because Old Crook Tail had for more than four years been a known, conspicuous and palpable mark for a hundred trappers, not one of whom had ever succeeded in catching so much as a member of the old fellow's band, let alone come within range of his paws.

The new notice, posted in the bank and signed in pen and ink—the original—was duplicated by notices at more than forty post-offices and in many stores and in many lodge-rooms. The Crook Tail pack had caused quite a number of printing-offices to regard him with favor, because every once in a while a new lot of posters had to be made up to cover new offerings, and Crook Tail himself was as carefully described, his habits as fully enumerated, and his haunts as well located as a train-robber's or a horse-thief's or a man-killer's. In fact, the wolf's reward notices were posted among sheriff notices, and everybody who went forth with gun or trap knew the wolf as well as deputy sheriffs and town marshals knew bad men.

As Frenner started to enter his automobile, having made some purchases around town, a little red-haired young fellow walked up to him and said:

"Mr. Frenner, my name is Walter, Newcome Walter; I want to tell you that I'm a trapper and a wolfer—"

"I've talked to sixty-nine trappers and wolfers the past two years, and all they're good for is to catch coyotes, and mostly pup coyotes at that. I'm sick of 'em—"

"I was just telling you, Mr. Frenner, that I'm a real wolfer and a real trapper; I come from Montana, where we eat wolf steaks for breakfast, and a wolf, before he'd eat a sheep, would starve to death—"

"You're some talker," Frenner declared.

"If you'll stake me—"

"Stake nothing!" Frenner swore. "We're sick of staking wolfers who couldn't catch a prairie dog—"

"That's enough of that talk to me," the young man said. "Now, if you want to talk, all right; but if your money keeps its mouth shut, why, all right, too. I got about one hundred dollars I can bet Old Crook Tail's hide is good for the back of an overcoat inside of three months—eh?"

Mr. Frenner had snatched his check-book from his pocket and began to number and date the first blank one.

"Now, looka here, Mr. Frenner, mebby that check 'll be good when the time comes, and mebby it won't—checks don't talk any more'n poker chips into a busted bank. Takes the real, genooine, yeller an' green spondulix to talk; yes, suh!"

Frenner glared, but he went back to the bank and obtained one hundred dollars in cash. The little red-haired man put down one hundred dollars, too, to back up his dignity, and then Mr. Frenner said to him:

"I see you've got some confidence in your own self, and that you want the rest of us to have the same. Now, if you'll put your outfit into my car I'll—"

"Oh, I got a car of my own." Walter turned away and strutted up the plank walk from the east end of the bank to the

west side of the post-office three doors along.

The side bet on Old Crook Tail aroused more interest than any of the straight rewards, and people gathered around Newcome Walter to make his acquaintance, but he would not talk now, and his listening was of a most critical kind, and he kept his informants sticking to the subject of Old Crook Tail and his band.

He learned that Old Crook Tail could smell a trap half a mile, and walk all around it, across it, and pick up non-poison bait from all over a five-trap set of baits. He discovered that Old Crook Tail knew all about poisons, from strychnin—which trappers declared he ate when his heart action grew weak, as a kind of stimulant—and that hydrocyanic was a nice flavor for his beef and sheep, and that he used other poisons as some people use catchup or Worcestershire or salad dressing.

The stories they told around about Old Crook Tail were amusing, entertaining, and exasperating, but Newcome Walter took all the stories away with him when he struck down into the Bad Lands with his box-car flivver. That night he camped down by the South Fork of Poison River Crossing, and the following morning he went with Frenner to see the remnants of the heifer; but they didn't get to the other bones. They found some nice, new fresh bones, and at sight of them Mr. Frenner swore, and Newcome studied them with interest and care.

"A good, lively bunch of wolves, all right," was the only comment the sporting trapper made. "Any sheep around here?"

"Down east, about nine mile."

"They've been eating beef quite a while—they'll be changing their diet d'rectly," Walter remarked offhand. "S'-long!"

He went back to the road crossing and then down to the sheep ranch, where the sheep man put him up for a week. In that week Newcome brought in five coyotes, which filled the sheep man with gratitude, and depleted the Stock Association's treasury to the extent of thirty-five dollars.

Those five coyotes showed that Walter was a real trapper, and there were men around with sporting blood who wanted to bet with the trapper that he couldn't get Old Crook Tail. The trapper seemed reticent. He appeared to grow a little doubtful, and after a time he frankly admitted that the old wolf had him stopped.

"I thought he was just one of those trick lobos," he said. "I'm some trapper, like I said, but he's sure some human in his ways—ornery human!"

Because of his admitted change of mind other bets were urged upon him, but he shook his head. He admitted that he had money in the bank, and that he was a good sport, but he refused to bet any more just then.

"He might pull his freight, and if I don't know where he's ranging, I'd have no chance," he explained. "You know how wolves are thataway. If Old Crook Tail's satisfied with his grub around here, he'll hang around."

Every few days Walter came into Seim. He heard all the wolf news any one had to tell him. Old Crook Tail was raiding around over a country about twenty miles square, and it was clear, after three weeks or so, that he had settled down to raid for the winter snows in that vicinity, sheep, cattle, and young horses.

"If he's going to stay around, I'll bet—but not even." He shook his head. "Not even—no, indeed!"

In a month all the evidence showed that Old Crook Tail had settled down in the Poison River Bad Lands around Seim. Every one, ranchers and trappers, agreed on that. So, at last, did Newcome Walter.

"He'll hang around," he admitted on Monday afternoon, "and that means I get him—right."

"Got any money to bet on it?" Frenner suggested quietly.

"Yes, sir—but not even! I want a fair chance on it."

"I've got a ten to one idea you don't get Old Crook Tail," Frenner suggested.

Walter hesitated, and looked southward across Poison River. His skill as a trapper was challenged, and he showed that he resented the challenge. At the same time, money talks.

"I've got five hundred dollars at those odds—they're fair," Walter retorted.

"Eh?" Frenner exclaimed, and then he smiled as he said, "I've lost five hundred dollars to that old wolf's raids on my cattle, and I want it back. Here goes!"

The bet was posted, and the money put down in the bank. The chance of a trapper taking a particular wolf with a score of other trappers on the range was hardly one hundred to one. No sooner had Frenner and Newcome put their money into the bank, to be drawn by the winner, than other ranchers, homesteaders, and several local sporting men pooled a bit of money, and Captain Carlene, one of them, went to Newcome:

"We've got a little money we'd like to put up on that wolf business, because about all of us want a chance to get what we've lost back—or to win a little on it. Ten to one, eh?"

The trapper hesitated. He wet his lips. Apparently he didn't want to bet. He didn't want, either, to appear to lack confidence in his skill, nor yet to back down on his boast. A wager to trap a wolf, any wolf, within two months, and bring in the head and paw before February 22, was taking a long, long chance, looking at it from even the view-point of a champion trapper.

"Well," Walter hesitated, "I'm a sporting man. I've got two wolves out of that band—they're in my flivver now. I hadn't collected on them yet—"

That fact dampened the ardor of the bettors for a little while. They looked at the wolves, big gray fellows, with the trap marks on their legs. There was no mistaking their size, and the bystanders were willing to believe they were out of Old Crook Tail's band.

"You see—" The trapper hesitated even more carefully, as he laid his cards down, face up, so that every one could see them, so to speak, before the draw. "You see, with these two caught, likely the rest of the band will get to go away."

"That's right," Dick Flate, a fellow trapper exclaimed, "Old Crook Tail shore will pull his freight now!"

"I bet you ten to one, five thousand dollars more to five hundred dollars, that you don't get Old Crook Tail," Captain Carlene said, eagerly waving a handful of money and checks in the air.

"That 'd be a thousand dollars I'd have up," Walter mused doubtfully, adding confidentially: "You see, boys, I've been saving up to get—to get—"

"Married?"

"Yes, sir," the young man admitted, flushing a little, "I shore need a stake—a big stake! If I could win that bet—"

"You better take it!" some one said. "Old Crook Tail's bold!"

"Well, all right," the trapper exclaimed with bravado, "I'll take it!"

That put ten thousand dollars to one thousand dollars in the bank, besides the original bet which Frenner and Walter had put down in the beginning. Walter rode out southward into the Bad Lands after putting down the money. He drove slowly, and with some concern. A few miles down the Buffalo road he cut off across the country and disappeared toward the southwest, where the fork of the Poison River lay, on which he had built his cabin.

No one knew just where he was located, but it was about twenty miles away, and in rough, bad country. He had some traps along his route down, and he was catching coyotes, beaver, otter, and other furs as few trappers had been able to take them. He was bringing down from one hundred and fifty dollars to two hundred dollars a month in hides, furs, and bounties. He was a real trapper.

He even used box traps, he said, buying some heavy welded wire netting, some round bar iron, and heavy sheet iron plates for the manufacture of such contrivances.

"They're fine for otters," he explained to the blacksmith from whom he made his purchases. "Also they're good for prairie ferrets."

When he came to town a month before the end of his time limit, he had one more encounter with men anxious to bet. A long-haired, grinning sheep-herder challenged him.

"You'll never get that old wolf now," the sheep-herder grinned. "I bet a hundred to one you won't!"

It was bad enough to have cattle and horse ranchers jeering him, but when Wal-

ter heard the herder talking, he flared up angrily. He looked into the air for just a moment, recalling how much money he had in the bank.

"I got a hundred dollars at that rate," the trapper retorted coolly.

The sheep-herder laughed.

"C'm'on," he said, and they walked over to the Seim bank. Sure enough, there was ten thousand dollars which the sheep-herder was ready to put down. With only thirty days to run, and the Crook Tail wolf still at large, that was as good a bet as ever a bookmaker laid against a horse with one eye, a lame leg, and a dope record in a good race. If Walter knew he was up against a sporting pool in town, he didn't admit it. He didn't show that he knew he was being baited on.

In spite of having put down all his one thousand one hundred dollars on his prowess as a wolf trapper, Walter had some money from his furs, hides, and bounties, and with these he bought three sheep, which he said he wanted for bait, and took them away down into the Bad Lands with him in his automobile box.

As he took his departure, some one reminded the sporting men in Seim—land speculators, gamblers, and wildcat oil prospectors, as well as the big ranchers around there—that if they didn't look out the trapper would escape with his automobile. He wouldn't really have to walk away, as a properly trimmed bettor should, for being too sure of himself. The gibe was not forgotten.

Old Crook Tail had got to be the biggest sporting proposition anywhere around. When Walter took the bet there was a cheer from the spectators, because everybody liked a good sport.

"By the way, Newcome," one asked a week later, "where's Old Crook Tail ranging now?"

A look of perplexity crossed the trapper's face, and there was a laugh around the circle. Old Crook Tail had moved on. His tracks had disappeared from the Poison River bars, and from the patches of snow among the hills and buttes. The ranchers around all knew what that meant; Old Crook Tail might have gone down around Thunder Butte, or he might have wandered up into the Bad Lands toward Reva, or even into eastern Montana.

"Hard luck!" some one murmured. "How you going to catch him if he's ranged wide?"

"I got to do it!" gasped the little man. "Why, gentlemen—I got to!"

Some laughed, but some shook their heads. Nobody ever did gamble to any extent and not lose out on it. Some of the men felt sorry for the young fellow, who had been so self-confident, and who had wagered almost his last dollar—who was, in fact, living on the coyotes he trapped from day to day.

"I'll come in the 22nd!" Newcome said. "I'll come!"

"Wolf or no wolf, eh?"

"I'm game—if you are," the little man grinned, but the spectators thought it was a white-gilled grin.

Then he rode away over the frozen alkali in his bumping and bounding little flivver. But he turned back when he was quarter of a mile out.

"Look here," he said with an ugly grimace. "You talk about bein' sports; I got this here buzz-wagon—who'll gimme ten to one an' call this two hundred dollars?"

Then there was a yell and a cheer. Every one whooped up for the sport who wouldn't quit till he'd lost his shirt! That was the kind of spirit the prairie down next to the Bad Lands likes!

They added two thousand dollars in subscriptions, and in the bank was put the stakes, and the trapper rode away. Some one questioned whether any one would ever see the flivver again, because the trapper, some time, must see that he was up against it and it would be better to slip away.

"Not him!" the doubter was rebuked. "He's the gamest of the sports, and he'll take his medicine!"

February 22 was a regular old-fashioned holiday in Seim. Everybody came there that day, and they were going to have a big dance that night in the opera-house. The girls wondered with whom the game trapper would dance at the head of the first set?

Ranchers, cattlemen, sheepmen, home-

steaders, nesters, and all kinds of people began to arrive the day before, and they were trooping in all that morning. By noon about every one was on hand, and in spite of the cold, in spite of the wind, they stood out in groups, looking southward toward the Bad Lands road. Up that road would come the trapper, and when his little flivver should come into sight there would be the greeting due a good sporting man.

As the day waned men held their watches in their fur-pawed hands, looking from watch to road and back to the watch again. They turned to look at the sun, and they talked in voices that grew lower and lower and more tense. Those who held the long end of the flivver bet began to grin, as they thought that they would be guyed about the bet they didn't get though they won.

The sunset and the haze of dusk began to settle down. Then they saw in the distant prairie something coming—a black fleck. While they looked they saw two sparks of light spread into the big flare of a coming automobile.

"Hi-i-i!" a cheer went up, and five minutes later the little flivver's chains crackled on the Poison River ice, and with the radiator steaming, Newcome Walter rode up to the bank, where the crowd had assembled.

"Hi-i-i! Good boy! Come to take yer medicine!" some one yelled.

"You bet I have!" the little man yelled in reply. "Look 't!"

He snatched from the box of his car the tarpaulin which covered what was in it. And there, coiled up, was a wolf, and that wolf would weigh one hundred and fifty-five pounds if an ounce. He had the right forepaw with one nail gone, and his tail had been broken when he was a pup, and had a crook in it. On his right foreleg was a light, strong wolf-trap.

Forty men there had seen Old Crook Tail, and this was he! This was the champion stock-raiding wolf of the Bad Lands. There was a yell of congratulation, but those who had placed the bets at ten or one hundred to one—their cheers quickly died out. Some men, in the silence that followed, audibly gulped.

"That's Old Crook Tail," Frenner blinked. "I guess, boys, I reckon, boys—well, we got to pay the bets!"

"I s'pose so," some one said. "Of course we got to pay the bets! He got him—why, he's warm! When 'd you kill him?"

"I killed him this morning at 11.36 o'clock," the trapper replied; "and say, boys, I near had heart failure till I did it!"

Then Mr. Frenner led the trapper into the bank and wrote out the order for the bounties, two hundred dollars. The hide would be worth seven dollars and fifty cents. Then he wrote another order, declaring Newcome Walter the winner of the bets that he couldn't catch Old Crook Tail in three months, and other bets placed subsequent thereto, which amounted in all to twenty-two thousand one hundred dollars against one thousand one hundred dollars and the flivver.

"I—I'd like—I'd like to feel the heft of that money," the trapper almost whispered, and he drew the check that emptied his bank-account. Through the gate of the bank, which had been kept open on purpose, was handed twenty-three thousand two hundred dollars.

"Bully boy!" somebody laughed. "Come out and show it to 'em!"

The little trapper stepped outside into his throbbing automobile. He held the brick of currency in his hands and every one whooped.

"I—I—say, boys—lemme go for a little run around—I—I want to get my breath!" the trapper gasped, and there was a laugh, for people could understand how he felt about it.

"Come back for the dance at 8.30!" some one called, and he nodded as he lifted in the clutch.

He rode on through Seim toward the Yellowstone Trail, nineteen miles north, but no one there thought of that. They were celebrating around the big wolf. It was a grand old celebration, too, and even the hundred-to-one losers joined in. The old fellow had broken out half his teeth on the trap that had pinched his leg.

At eight thirty o'clock the trapper had not returned. At nine o'clock the first set

of the dance began without him. He did not take one of the many pretty girls present to the supper at twelve o'clock midnight.

In fact, Newcome Walter did not return at all. The next any one heard of him he had married a girl up White Hawk way, and was going through Aberdeen, six hundred miles to the eastward.

But the next day some ranchers and sporting cattlemen and a sheepman or two went in four big automobiles on the back track of that little flivver, which they followed easily through the thin snow and the roadway. Away down south there in the Bad Lands they turned with the trail out into the clay buttes of the Prickly Pear Fork of Poison River, and found the shed where the trapper had kept his car.

They found the hand-sled the trapper had used to haul the big wolf down out of the rough buttes, and following the hand-sled tracks, they located a cottonwood log house with a sod roof on it, which was the trapper's cabin. Inside the cabin they found some odds and ends of outfit and a number of big wolf-traps.

That was all right, but the hand-sled track turned up a little draw, and when they followed that track up about quarter of a mile, they found a big pen, completely hidden in buffalo-berry bushes, lined on the inside with heavy wire, and in that cage was a kennel, and a bed in it—a bed of grass and twigs, which had long been used by an animal, and by the smell, that animal was a wolf.

Rabbit hair, prairie-chicken feathers, mutton heads, and bones of dead animals littered up the stage, and some of the big iron wires were bent, and some of the iron rods had been chewed. Right in the pen, however, was a pool of blood, and some wolf hair, where a wolf had been shot.

"Hi-i-i!" two or three of the bettors gasped. "How long—how long 'd that cuss had that wolf?"

"Well, I should jedge, from the looks, from about the day before he began to bet at a hundred to one clip," one of the old ranchers remarked.

"Just about!" Mr. Frenner grimaced. "My, but wa'n't he the—the nervy sport, though! He bought those sheep to feed that wolf!"

"And, say, boys, that wolfer from Montany was some trapper, too. Notice that wolf's sore leg? Sure—well, he put the tap on it the day before. That's right—but it wa'n't on the leg—the real leg. I was noticing last night that his left hind leg had been caught and was all healed up. I didn't think anything then—but, boys, say, I'm doing a lot of thinkin' about that five hundred I put up at ten to one—who-eoe! He got Old Crook Tail, all right. Sure, he did! But say—boys—say—now, who do you figure got ketched?"

"Aw — say! Shut up, Tip — shut up, won't ye?" the others groaned.

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MOTHER O' ME

BY GLADYS HALL

I CAN remember your hair was gold,
And vaguely I know that your eyes were blue;
But the tender cradling of your soft arms
Is the *most* that I know of you.
I can remember the gowns you wore—
White in the summer, and in the cold
Something cosy—and oh, the flaunting
Fairy things you told!
I can remember the way you laughed—
Sudden and sweet—like a bird set free;
But I did not know how *young* you were—
Little, dead mother o' me!

The Undoing of Banbino

by H. P. Holt

WHEN you go a sailing to the region of lonely islands in quest of copra you can, if you wish, leave at home everything with which civilization has blessed you — except cash. Checks, I. O. U.'s, and promises to pay, are matters that do not enter into the philosophy of those with whom you propose to deal. You drop your mud-hook off some coral strand and begin to bargain with an isolated, gin-soaked trader for the accumulation of copra that he has on hand, and you may or may not come to terms if you have cases of beads, or knives, or magenta shirt-waists to offer; but try wiggling a handful of good American dollars under his nose and watch the happy expression that comes into his eyes.

For that reason we had on board the Apia Maid, when she sailed out of New York, money enough to pay for every ounce of copra she could carry. Steve Kent, the skipper and owner, had provided half of our cash: the rest, by a series of miracles, I had raised myself. Every cent I had ever saved and every penny that I could borrow, were there. If the Apia Maid had taken it into her head to go to the bottom I might almost as well have borne her company, for I should indeed have been eternally undone, financially.

But the Apia Maid was the trimmest craft of her kind afloat and cold cash was by no means the most precious thing we had on board.

Merle Kent, the skipper's daughter, had come with us: and ever since I first saw Merle, in short skirts, I knew she was the finest girl breathing. She had eyes that held you as firmly as three-inch manila rope and every year she had become more beautiful. When I grew up and asked her to marry me she laughed, not unkindly, but just enough to show me how foolish I was to expect any such thing. Merle Kent could have had her pick of—but I must get on with my story.

Captain Kent had been battered about afloat long enough. He knew the South Seas like a book; and, what was still more important, he knew there was money to be picked up among the islands in the copra buying trade. After careful deliberation he had retired from the command of the old boat on which he was employed, bought the Apia Maid outright, and prepared to rest on his laurels. I had sailed under him for years. On this trip I was going as chief mate. If all went well I should be skipper of the vessel next time she put to sea. Kent took Merle along with him for two reasons. Firstly he thought she would enjoy the voyage. Secondly Merle insisted on going, which was quite sufficient reason in itself. Moreover the skipper couldn't refuse her anything, any more than I could have done if she had loved me instead of laughing at me.

The vessel was empty when we left New York, save for one batch of cargo which we were carrying out to a planter called Strickland, who lived on the island of

Lanea. We had to pass Lanea on our way to the copra hunting grounds. Strickland was a very old friend of the skipper's, and he told Kent, the last time we called there, that he was on the brink of making a vast fortune. He suspected that there were mineral deposits on Lanea, enough to take his breath away. Under the thin layer of surface earth the island was solid, just as it had been kicked up from the bottom of the sea by volcanic action at some time. All he had been able to do so far was to scratch away on the top, which was wearing, to say the least of it, for a man who needed machinery and dynamite. We had the machinery and dynamite in our hold.

Strickland had urged us not to breathe a word of this to a living soul, as he was not alone in the field. Somehow or other Banbino, the Portuguese governor, had got wind of what Strickland was after. And Banbino was as artful as he was fat. He must have turned the scales at two hundred and fifty pounds. Layers of him wabbled like jelly as he waddled. But he held the populace of Lanea in the hollow of his corpulent hand. He had elevated the art of graft to a positive science; and as he personally owned the only landing place on the island, Banbino's power was painful and peculiar. Apparently he only had to raise a finger and his merest whim became inflexible law. No wonder Strickland had enjoined us to be as silent as the grave.

The moon got into my head on our run into the South Pacific. It has that effect on a fellow if his heart's desire is leaning over the rail six inches from his elbow and singing softly to the thrum of the propeller, while the stars are blazing away like a scene in a fairy world and a warm breeze straight from the islands of romance is fanning his cheeks and toying with an adorable curl on the girl's forehead. The magic of the night seized me. Merle's hair was the color of burnished copper. It seemed, suddenly, that I just could not go through life without her.

Riding bravely, recklessly, for a fall, I took her tiny hand in mine.

"Merle, I wish you'd reconsider—" I began; and then her soft song merged into a trickle of silvery laughter.

This time it hurt. I felt myself bristling, but held a tight rein.

"I'm sorry if it sounds funny, but I'm trying to ask you if you will marry me," was my comment.

"You're not serious, Dicky?" she replied after the briefest of pauses during which I distinctly felt my heart knocking against my ribs.

"I'm dreadfully serious, Merle — more serious than I ever was in my life."

"But don't you ever make love to a girl, Dicky, before you propose to her. I mean, really make real love," she said tauntingly, withdrawing her hand.

"You've never given me a chance, since —since you went into long frocks," I retorted.

"Dicky, you are delicious," she said, and a moment later she was again singing the same haunting refrain. There seemed nothing else for me to do but smoke, so I lit a cigar, but I soon pitched it into the phosphorescent trail astern, realizing that I was handling her in a delicate situation almost as a crew of raw Kanaka deck-hands ought to be handled. The fact was, I had not had time in my seagoing days to study those little arts and graces which are so dear to the feminine mind. Right there, in that bath of starlight, with every fiber in my being aching for this girl, and with the laughter at my second proposal still ringing in my ears, I vowed I would begin to learn.

"I'm sorry," I said, with an assumed air of tragedy. "I don't think I was cut out for a lover. Never mind, I won't bother you again," I added, lying glibly.

Merle stopped singing.

"Now Dicky, don't get angry and spoil an otherwise perfectly heavenly voyage," she said.

And then I lit another cigar and felt as awkward as a pig in a passage.

It was a week later when we picked up the boom of Lanea, and under the guidance of a cutthroat who called himself a pilot we tied up at the one-horse wooden wharf.

Strickland came aboard and shook the skipper's hand as though he was a long-lost brother.

"You've got the things?" he asked eagerly, although he might have known we didn't go to Lanea to gather blueberries.

"Sure we've got 'em," said Kent. "And for goodness' sake don't let your niggers drop any of these cases of dynamite near my ship or—"

"Hush!" said Strickland warningly, looking round to see no one had heard. "If Banbino gets wind of the fact that you have brought dynamite here there'll be the devil to pay."

The skipper frowned.

"What's the idea?" he asked.

"Just this," replied Strickland. "Banbino is negotiating for a monopoly of the mining rights on the island, and he's moving heaven and earth to prevent my going ahead, but he won't be able to stop me because my lease is as legal as my birth certificate. What he can do, though, is to tie my hands so that I shall be dreadfully handicapped for a time, if I can't outwit him. I have communicated with the Portuguese government, and after a while, though it may take a year, Banbino will have his wings clipped, at least to this extent, that I shall have an entirely free hand. But he's framed up a new law prohibiting the importation of dynamite onto the island, on the ground that he fears some kind of a revolution. But, you know, there isn't any one on the place to revolute. Oh, he's clever. Unfortunately, a long time ago I told my foreman, a Portuguese, that we should be stuck till I got some dynamite, and he's put Banbino wise."

"I see," said Captain Kent thoughtfully. "Well, what do you want me to do?"

Strickland looked puzzled.

"He can't touch me once I get the stuff onto my own estate," he said. "The trouble is, if you land the dynamite you might find yourself in an awful fix, and I don't want to drag you into it."

Fooling with the laws of port authorities is a highly dangerous pastime everywhere; but, as I have said, Captain Kent and Strickland were very old friends, and the skipper of the Apia Maid would have done a great deal to serve the planter, especially in such an emergency. Moreover, Strickland had once nursed Kent through fever on some God-forsaken island and saved his life. That made Kent doubly anxious to do what he could.

A smile slowly dawned on the skipper's face.

"The dynamite is in plain wooden cases," he said. "I'll have a stencil cut and mark the cases 'Canned Beef,' before it goes ashore. I don't know anything about any dynamite. If I do that, can you work the rest after the stuff is landed on the wharf? You haven't got a bunch of custom officials in gold braid here, you know."

"That ought to work," agreed Strickland. "If only some idiot doesn't drop a case of canned beef I think I can fix it."

Being rather an expert, I cut the stencil. The thing seemed somewhat of a joke—so far. Before long we had thirty cases on deck, all innocently marked. The winches were screaming. Ten tons of machinery was being lowered onto the ramshackle wharf. Two of our sailors, with the fear of the hereafter instilled into them, were carrying the dynamite ashore up the gangway, and stowing it into one of Strickland's wagons. The "harbor master," a dago with a strong penchant for gin, was safely below in the hands of the steward, and likely to remain there as long as the gin lasted.

Suddenly the enormous figure of Banbino, making heavy weather of it, appeared on the wharf. By his side was a hatchet-faced, angular woman with thin lips and quick ferrety eyes. She hovered constantly either in the wake of Banbino or abreast of him, as though afraid to trust her spouse out of sight.

"Who's the lady?" asked Merle, taking in the vision at a glance.

"That's Banbino's wife," Strickland explained. "She never leaves him."

"What a touching couple!" Merle murmured.

Strickland grinned.

"They say she touches him with a flat-iron or a broomstick, or anything else handy, when she gets her dander up," he said. "She has the temper of a fiend from the infernal regions and she's consumed

with jealousy. Not," he added, "that Mrs. Banbino has no occasion for jealousy, according to what one hears, but it has become an obsession with her, and I fear she is a painful thorn in his side."

Banbino was now at the foot of the gangway.

"Well, capitaine," he called out. "You had good weather, eh?"

"Pretty fair," replied Kent. "Won't you come aboard?"

Banbino already had his weather eye on the cases which the sailors were carrying ashore. He was pretty certain of their contents. He scratched a pudgy chin with a pudgy forefinger.

"Canned beef, eh?" he said slowly. "You got a lot, Mr. Strickland. You let me have a case, eh?"

"Sure," said Strickland, with a pained smile. "I—I'll send one right down to you."

"No, no," replied Banbino, beckoning to a man on the wharf. "Pedro, you take that up to my house." He pointed decisively at one of the cases on deck.

"Not that one," said Strickland. "Say, I'll—"

Banbino was growing red at the wattles, his suspicions now fully aroused. How much of it was bluff I do not really know, but he picked up the case with his own fair fingers.

We all took a step or two backward.

"For the love of glory!" said Strickland. "Put it down carefully."

"Quite so," said Banbino, gingerly replacing the case on deck. "The importation of explosives, as you know, has been forbidden. Capitaine, I shall have to detain your ship at Lanea until this matter is settled."

The figurative fat was in the fire. Banbino flatly demanded payment of a fine of five thousand dollars, ordered confiscation of the dynamite, and looked as though nothing less would really satisfy him than Strickland's head on a charger.

Captain Kent looked grave. He had a suspicion that Banbino's law would not hold water; but he was not sure whether, if he acted defiantly and sailed away, that would not bring the whole force of the Portuguese government immediately down on his trail.

"The devil of it is," Strickland said, "I haven't got five thousand dollars, nor anything like it. I'm mortgaged up to the hilt."

Clearly an *impasse* had arrived. Banbino refused to leave the ship until the fine was paid, and the skipper and I began to view the situation as nothing less than calamitous. We had the five thousand dollars in cash; but that was to buy copra with. Of course the demand was a species of blackmail, but by whatever name you called it that made no difference to the situation. If we paid the money we might get it back some time, after disentangling miles of red tape; and, to make matters more tantalizing, we were almost in our copra hunting ground. Kent attempted to argue the matter with Banbino, but the old villain was as fierce as a bear in a nest of hornets, and as hard as adamant. Things were at their blackest when I saw a curious expression flit across Merle's face.

"Dad, I want you to give me a hand in this," she said while Strickland and Banbino were at it hammer and tongs. "I don't promise anything, mind, but it's a chance."

"Rubbish, girl!" replied the skipper. "I wouldn't even have you speak to a pig like—"

But Merle Kent silenced her father with a look. He knew there were moments when further discussion with that young lady was useless. He received peremptory orders to hide himself in the chart-room and so, unostentatiously, he faded from the scene on deck. Merle also disappeared. A few moments later, acting on instructions, I approached the Portuguese.

"The captain wants to see you in his cabin, below, sir," I announced. "I think perhaps something can be arranged."

Puffing and fuming, Banbino descended the companionway, his wife casting a petulant look after him.

Banbino must have been amazed when he found, instead of the skipper, nobody but the prettiest girl in all the South Seas awaiting him in the cabin. On the table were pen, ink, and paper.

"The capitaine—is he not here?" the Portuguese asked with an anxious glance over his shoulder. He knew the very heavens would descend on him were his spouse to learn that Merle and he were alone there together. He mopped his massive brow with a handkerchief. "Diabo! I came here to see the capitaine," he spluttered.

"I am captain here for the present," Merle said. The light of battle was in her eye. I was just within reach, in case of necessity, but also just out of sight. "Please sit down. I want you to write something," she went on.

Banbino collapsed, like a jellyfish, into a chair.

"Diabo!" he exclaimed, picking up a pen. "What is it I write?"

"You are going to write a letter to Captain Kent and another to Mr. Strickland apologizing for your very suggestion that dynamite was imported to Lanea on this ship."

Banbino flung the pen down on the table.

"No, no!" he exclaimed. "And the fine —five thousand dollars. That must be paid!"

Merle leaned forward over the table and fixed him like an overfed beetle, with her eyes.

"Then I shall scream!" she said bluntly.

"You—you—" Banbino began, aghast.

"Be quick, or I shall scream right now!"

Banbino, betwixt the devil and the deep blue sea, made an attempt to rise. Merle opened her mouth wide.

"No, no," he commanded, shaking with suppressed anger and fear, but not attempting to pick up the pen again.

"I shall scream aloud that you tried to kiss me," Merle prodded remorselessly.

Banbino was nearly foaming at the mouth. Suddenly he wilted like a lettuce leaf in the hot noonday sun.

"What is it I write?" he asked feebly, drawing a sheet of paper toward him.

Merle dictated crisply, and for a few minutes the Portuguese wrote as if it pained him a great deal. Then he attempted once more to rise.

"One moment, please," the girl ordered, motioning him back into his seat. "Dicky," she called softly to me, "see that Mr. Strickland's wagon starts away with that canned beef, and then let me know."

A little later Banbino was permitted to regain the deck. His wife, whose patience was now exhausted, addressed him angrily in Portuguese, and he answered her with apparent meekness. He shot a hungry look at the wagon which was disappearing in the distance, and then shaped a course for the gangway and the shore.

"Here, Mr. Strickland," Merle said, handing him one of Banbino's letters. "You may need this."

Strickland glanced through the document, and his jaw dropped.

"How, in the name of Heaven, did you—" he began.

"That's a state secret," replied Merle demurely.

Ten minutes later we had cast off. The skipper was on the bridge. Merle and I were leaning over the rail, in the sheltered place behind the after wheel-house, watching the island of Lanea disappear astern.

"Merle," I began awkwardly, "you're a marvel. I wanted to come in and choke the old villain, but I had to laugh, all the same. Your dad's tickled to death. But," I went on, still grinning, "I never guessed you'd go as far as that when you said you were going to frighten him. Suppose he'd got nasty—suppose—"

"Well, you were there, handy."

"I know, but—"

"Dicky Curtis, don't be an idiot," she said. "Do you think I could stand by and see an old thief like that rob me—rob us—rob—I mean, if we hadn't been able to buy any copra this trip, where do you suppose we should have got the funds to get married on?"

"We? Us?" I stammered, hardly believing my ears. Then it came home to me with a rush, out of a clear sky, so to speak. Nobody could see us where we were. I put my arms round her suddenly, and held her tightly while I kissed her a dozen times or more.

"Dicky — Curtis," Merle said, in between kisses, "you—kiss—are—kiss—an —kiss—idiot!"

That Satchel

by William Almon Wolff

EMBREE had left New York because the city had suddenly bored him too much to make it endurable for another day. It seemed to him that every one he liked was away, or else was too busy to pay any attention to him. Moreover, he had just received word of the engagement of a young lady upon whom he thought his own affections had been securely pinned. When he really analyzed his emotions, he found that he was going to be able, probably, to get along very well without her. But he was quite unreasonably angry, none the less. He had paid this girl a good deal of attention, and she had seemed to like him better than any of the other men who so honored her. And besides, half a dozen men who had also heard of her engagement extended their sympathy. That, it must be admitted, was enough to anger almost any one.

Embree left town in a reckless mood, driving a new car with which he was not as yet thoroughly acquainted. He was bound, vaguely, for a little bit of a place near the water, where he took a crowd sometimes to shoot ducks. This wasn't duck-shooting season, and there was no especial reason for going down. But, at the same time, there was even less reason for going anywhere else. And the road was lonely, which encouraged him to think of speeding—that being an excellent vent for such feelings as possessed him.

He tried to break all the speed laws there were. The idea of tilting against a few rural speed traps before dark rather appealed to him. But no one seemed to mind how fast he went; he didn't see even a constable in the first fifty miles. That took all the fun out of going too fast. Moreover, the roads were wretched after a three-day rain, and he finally slowed down, because it was so much more comfortable to drive at a respectable pace. The result was that darkness overtook him while he was still a good many miles from his destination. He switched on his lights; then a whim made him darken them again.

"Who knows?" he said to himself. "I might start something if I go along without lights!"

The idea appealed to him. Then he thought of something more. He knew the straight road to his place very well, but the byways were a sealed book to him. He decided to get lost, by the simple expedient of turning to the right every time he came to a crossroads. This was an idea fantastic enough to promise results of some sort, and he laughed aloud as he put it into execution. He didn't think it would matter much what the results were; the chief thing was to do something out of the ordinary. He might be arrested! And he determined not to give up easily; to act exactly as if he were a fugitive of some sort. It was easy, as he drove along in the darkness, to imagine himself pursued. His motor, powerful as it was, made almost no noise; from its eight cylinders there came only a faint hum, that blended into

the noises of the night, rising now on both sides of the road.

He enjoyed the sensation so much that mere speed ceased to amuse him. His first two turns brought him to a much better road, and he might have given his engine a chance to show what it could do. But he preferred to slip along, with the engine throttled down. He was driving through a lonely region. To his right, flat land spread away, and across this expanse of waste there came a faint breeze, salt laden, that carried with it the murmur of surf. For a time this seemed to be the only sound. But then, behind him, he heard a new note in the hum of the night—a strident, insistent clamor, that grew louder continually, the unmistakable din of an automobile engine being driven at high speed. He turned to look behind, and saw a shaft of light, unmistakably the headlights of a car.

Instinct led him to seize the chance to back into a lane that turned off to the left. He went only a little way; then sat, his hand on the wheel, his engine shut off, waiting for the other car to tear by. Why he did it he couldn't have told. It was just a continued obedience to the whim that had extinguished his lights and sent him roaming about a country he didn't know. He had not long to wait. The glare of the headlights grew brighter, and then, in a roaring swirl of dust, a powerful runabout fled by. At the sight of the woman who sat alone at its wheel he whistled. A long veil streamed out behind her; her eyes, covered with goggles, were fixed on the road ahead.

Instantly Embree began to be consumed with curiosity.

Why was she going so fast? She was getting every ounce of power, every last bit of speed, out of her car. There was something mysterious about it: the sight of this solitary woman, driving at such a terrific speed, on this lonely road! Why? What urgency could move her to take such a risk? Risk there was, at such a pace for any one; surely something out of the ordinary must hold the explanation. He started his engine: then with a sudden start stopped it again. For on the road immediately under his eyes a jet of mud had spurted up, a pebble flung itself against his radiator. And on the still air, with the beat of the flying motor dying down, rose the sound of another engine.

Embree flung himself from his car and leaped to the road. Sure enough, another machine was coming, flying. As he looked he thought he saw a faint flash, even in the dazzling glare of the distant headlights. He leaped back: a bullet whistled by, within three feet of his head.

"Golly!" he said to himself. "Something stirring here, all right!"

He went back to his car. Had he been seen by the people in the second car? Had they been shooting at him? Then he remembered the first bullet that had kicked up the mud—when he was out of sight. No. They must be firing at the woman in the flying car ahead! The thought made him jump; sent him flying to his car. He was going to have a hand in this game, whatever it proved to be! And his sympathy went out instinctively to the woman. Who—what—was she? Why was she running away—from people desperate enough to fire at her from a pursuing automobile? Well—perhaps he could find out! He was grateful for the powerful, silent motor of his new car, just turned up to concert pitch. He could depend on its eight cylinders; he rather thought that nothing short of a Vanderbilt Cup racer could hold him on the open road.

There were three men in the car that dashed by his hiding-place, some seconds after he had reached the wheel of his own car. One was crouched over the wheel; the other two stood up in the tonneau, and one carried a blue-barreled revolver—a weapon of a type common enough a few years ago on the Western plains, but not often seen in the metropolitan district. Embree swore angrily at the sight of it. What sort of men were these, to be firing at a woman? To be sure, there wasn't much danger of a hit, but that wasn't their fault. And it was a danger, too, that was going to increase every minute, for he was sure that the pursuing car was gaining. It was a bigger, more powerful machine than the one the girl drove.

"Here goes!" said Embree. He threw in his starting switch; for a second the engine roared, as it sprang into life, then dropped its note to a smooth, low-toned purr as the car glided into the road and took up the chase. Small danger that his presence would be detected until he was ready to call for cards in this mad game. His engine was nearly noiseless; even if the men in front looked around they could hardly see him, with lights out. It was risky work, but he was in the mood for risks. He wanted to get to the bottom of this mysterious business.

There were reserves of power still in the big eight-cylinder motor when Embree had narrowed the distance between him and the car immediately ahead to what he thought was a safe margin. He was less than two hundred yards behind, and he could see the tail-light of the girl's car very plainly—perhaps a quarter of a mile ahead of the second machine. The chase, he guessed, was nearly over. The pace of the leading car seemed to be slackening a little; it might be that the girl was running out of gasoline. With his free hand he reached for the automatic pistol that lay in his coat-pocket. He took comfort in its menacing shape; he would back the little weapon, with its deadly sputter of bullets, against the more powerful .44 ahead, with its slower action. There were ten shots to six, too; that might count. Not that he was ready to start shooting yet; he wanted to know a little more before it came to that. But he was glad he had brought that automatic along!

Then, suddenly, the girl's tail-light disappeared, winked out, and vanished. At first, on the strange road, this puzzled him. But then all trace of the second car vanished too—perhaps a minute later. He guessed what was up; the road had curved sharply. He had purposely dropped back a little, for the second car had been slowing up. Plainly, its driver, knowing the road, had wanted to take the turn at a safer pace. But now he hurried on; he wasn't afraid of the turn. He saw it plainly now, as he came toward it; it was outlined by a line of trees, scrubby pines, at each side.

Then, as he changed his gears for the turn—he did make that concession to common sense!—there came from ahead a roar, a sudden, fantastic flare of light, showing over the trees. Instinct checked the rush of Embree's car; he stopped it short, within a dozen yards, and listened. A hoarse cry in a man's voice sounded; then another explosion, fainter than the first. The fantastic, ominous glare, high above the trees, reflection of some devil's work that was going on below and beyond the turn, flared up for a moment, staining the murky sky a dull, menacing red, then died down and left the darkness darker than before. A confused sound of shouting rose. And then, close beside him, there came the rustling of what might have been an animal in the low bushes beside the road, but followed by a muffled cry that only one sort of animal could ever have emitted. He swung around, amazement in his eyes, to see a girl—the girl!—staring at him and his car as if she had seen a pair of ghosts.

For half a minute, perhaps, both of them were too amazed to do anything but stare. He saw a tall, slim girl, in a long motor-coat that ended just above her ankles, and streaming out, in the light wind off the sea, the veil he had noticed as she sped by. He could not really see her features, but the pose, the figure, with its long, graceful lines, that the coat, wrapped about her limbs by the wind, could not wholly hide, all spoke of youth. And, standing there, so quiet, so calm, so wholly unafraid, she appealed to every instinct of chivalry that was in him, to his innate admiration for courage. He scarcely noticed at all the satchel that was in her hand.

"Suppose you let me help!" he said impulsively. "Where do you want to go?"

"Oh!" she gasped. "You're real! Take me away from here—anywhere—away from those awful men in front! My car blew up—I got away from them by slipping back through the woods."

"Jump in!" he said. He flung open the door; the next moment she was beside him. There was no tonneau in his car, but the two seats were roomy. The bag lay at her feet as he swung the car around, finding the turn in the narrow road a matter of some difficulty. So close were the quar-

ters, indeed, that he had to abandon his disguise of darkness. The touch of a button filled the road with light. It was only for a moment. But in that moment there was a great shout from behind. One of the men of the other car had seen them; the next instant a din of voices rose, calling on him to stop, to wait. The girl sat silent; he yelled hysterically.

"Come and catch us!" he cried. Then, in a lower tone to the girl: "Duck!"

The car was moving. But over their heads whistled a bullet; another tore the cloth of the folded top; another caromed off one of the sides. For a full thirty seconds, perhaps, the fusillade continued; then it stopped abruptly. Embree had counted six shots; he guessed that the gunman had had to stop to reload. And the time that would take would give them a big start. He called exultingly to the girl:

"They're rotten shots! Now we're moving!"

"They're coming, too," she said, looking back. At once he switched out his lights, and she gave a little approving cry. "But you're too fast for them, I think. Can you turn off to the right—oh, perhaps a couple of miles along here? It looks like a little lane, but it leads to a State road not very far away. We could double on them, I think."

"I know it!" he said. He laughed happily. "That's where I was hiding when the first act of this show went by!"

But a look at her face sobered him at once. It was tense with determination, and there was a tragic look in it, too, as if this were some affair of life and death into which he had stumbled so gaily.

"I—I'm sorry," said Embree diffidently. "Please believe that all I want is a chance to help you—in any way—against any one who is giving you trouble—"

"You've proved that!" she said unsteadily. "You know, I'm taking this all so much as a matter of course, when it isn't, at all. And—I daren't explain yet what it's all about. You can't guess, can you?"

"Never was any good at riddles," he said very cheerfully. "But it doesn't matter! Hello—here's where we turn off, isn't it?"

He had pushed his car along, for the first time that night, and they had been going at a speed almost incredible. The headlights of the pursuing car were almost dim, so much ground had they gained.

"There's a good chance that they won't know we've turned here," said Embree excitedly. "Here goes—"

"Oh-oh!"

The girl screamed suddenly. In the road, just to one side, stood a tall figure in khaki. Near by, on its side, lay a motorcycle. Embree had slowed down; the man in khaki called out sharply:

"Stop! I've got a warrant—"

He leaped back as Embree's car, beautifully responsive, grazed his elbow. The next second there was a slight shock; a grinding, tearing sound, and they were flying along the lane, once more being peppered by bullets from behind. But this time there seemed to be no close shots. Embree was laughing.

"He won't use that motor-cycle again tonight!" he said. "Hope I didn't shake you up too much when I went over it! Glad I didn't get him—but he had to take his chances! The fool—trying to hold me up that way!"

He looked at the girl then, and he could see that her face was very white.

"Why are you taking such chances for me?" she asked him. "Didn't you hear him say he had a warrant?"

"I don't believe everything I hear," said Embree shortly. "And, anyhow—"

He stopped, because he didn't know just how to go on. After all, this was a pretty reckless proceeding of his. It was the sort of enterprise in which stopping to think did not pay. Even a glimmer of thought made him reflect that there was something suspicious—and worse—about this girl. Men didn't act as her pursuers were acting without justification. They would hardly go around using firearms so recklessly unless the law stood behind them. The man who had talked about a warrant stuck in his memory. But then, even while such thoughts were rushing through his mind, counseling caution, a feeling of his way, at least, he got another glimpse of her face—and cast caution to the winds. Right or

wrong, he was for her—with her! Suppose she was a lawbreaker—he didn't care!

They were humming along now, and he began to think that there were no more breakers ahead. He slowed down; even if the other car did turn into the lane and follow, it must have stopped at the turn to consider the obliterated motor-cyclist—assuming that he had some connection with the men in the pursuing car. Embree's car had proved its mettle; he wasn't afraid of being overhauled.

"What next?" he asked the girl. "I'm perfectly willing to keep going—but you must be trying to get somewhere."

She wrung her hands.

"Yes!" she said. "Oh, yes! But I never thought they'd suspect me—and now I don't know what to do! I'm afraid I was so sure that if I brought this satchel they'd never follow me! I want to get to Crayville, but now I'm afraid to go straight there. They may have people waiting for me there, or on the roads that lead to the town. If I could get to a telephone!"

"Crayville!" he said, surprised. "Why—I was going not far from there! And there's a telephone in my place. I've got a little bit of a place there—use it to start from when I want to shoot ducks. You could telephone from there—and I don't suppose there'll be any cordon around it yet, anyhow. Shall we try to get there?"

"Yes—that would be best," she agreed after a moment.

Embree didn't want to suspect her; didn't want to think that she could possibly be engaged in any illicit enterprise. And yet her very acquiescence in his suggestion stirred up the devils of suspicion that were lurking in his mind. She was trusting him altogether too much. Their acquaintance, to put it mildly, rested upon an unconventional basis. For him, a man, that was all right. But a girl with a clear conscience—again he threw off the feeling. He didn't care. And at least, if she did trust him, he could see to it that her trust was not misplaced. He didn't care much what sort of trouble he got into himself.

He told her where his place was, and then she guided him, since he himself was hopelessly lost. They struck the main State road she had spoken of; a turn, a mile or two before they came to Crayville, would take them to his place by a detour. The road was very straight now; looking back, from time to time, the girl sought the lights of the other car. She saw them at last—just as Embree began to notice, with disgusted anger, that a cylinder was missing.

That was just the beginning of an assortment of engine trouble. He didn't have to stop, but his motor was seemingly possessed of a devil of obstinacy. The thing mystified him; he couldn't account for the warnings that it conveyed. And their speed had been more than cut in half. Behind them now the lights of the other car were rapidly growing brighter.

"Acts as if she were short of gas!" said Embree. "But my tank was full when I left town—and there's supposed to be four hundred miles."

The explanation dawned on both of them together. They stared at one another.

"One of those bullets—" he said.

"It must have hit the tank!" she gasped.

"And that gas must have leaked for miles!"

"Can you make it?" she said tensely.

"Don't know!" he said. "I'll keep going till she stops though."

They did make it—the engine stopped as they came up before the little bungalow-like house, on the water's edge. Luck had favored them, too; in a veritable network of causeways the pursuers must, for the moment, have lost the trail.

"Here's the key," said Embree. "Don't keep a light going—you'll find the telephone in the big living-room that you walk into, on a stand right by the door. I'll push this car out of the way and try to mend that leak. I've got plenty of gas here if I can make the tank hold it."

She was inside in a moment. It seemed to him that she was full of relief at the chance to telephone without being overheard. But he didn't care. By this time he was full of the thrill of the struggle with the girl's pursuers. They had become his enemies as well as hers.

"As well be hung for a sheep as a lamb!" he muttered to himself as he worked. "Anyhow—she's all right! I'll go bail for that!

She may be trying to help out some worthless skunk of a brother or something—"

A chilling thought struck him. He hoped it wasn't a worthless, criminal husband she was trying to help! Not that he was ever going to care for another woman, of course; he had made up his mind to that. And yet —well, it didn't seem right that it should be that way.

It wasn't much of a leak that he had to repair. Nor, for that matter, did he make much of a job of his emergency attempt at first aid to the tank. There wasn't time for the niceties of soldering, and he did what he could with his tire outfit, hoping it would serve. Then he dived under the house and through to the other side, to reach his supply of gasoline. He could hear the girl's voice as he opened the back door; for a moment he was in the room with her, and he couldn't help noting that she stopped speaking.

"Yes—yes—I'm still here—wait a minute!" she said then.

He jumped angrily for a table-drawer at that. After all, there were limits to her trustfulness! Illogically, he was irritated. But he got his electric torch and slammed the door behind him—so violently that it sprung open again, had he noticed it.

The gasoline he had come for was in a small boat-house; to get at it Embree pulled out a little motor-boat that he kept there. He found his cans, shouldered one, and went hastily back to the front of the house —to meet the glare of the headlight of the pursuing car!

"Hands up!" said a sharp voice.

"Don't be more of a fool than you can help!" snapped Embree. "Can't you see they're up already?"

"Take that can away, Jack—then frisk him," said the man behind the gun.

This order was obeyed, and the spoils of war included the watch, money and other ordinary possessions a man carries in his pockets. But no gun! Embree, who knew there should be a quite new and extremely serviceable automatic pistol among them, had all he could do to conceal his surprise. But his captors, not knowing about it, were less surprised.

"Well," said the man with the gun, "How do you get into this game, anyhow, my friend? You don't look like a robber?"

"Of course I don't," said Embree easily. "It's not done that way any more, you know. Not since gentlemen burglars found the going so easy!"

"Come off!" growled the other. "You'll laugh on the other side of your face pretty soon! Where's that girl—and the money?"

Embree pursed his lips, whistled a few notes, but made no other reply.

"Don't be a fool!" urged the man with the gun. Embree detected a note of anxiety in his voice that was rather surprising. "We know she was in your car. You don't want to go to jail, do you? Well—come across! We've got you—and if you come through with the money you can take your car and go to Jericho, for all we care!"

"You've got me, you know," said Embree pleasantly. "You're confusing me with some one else. You've got all the money I happen to have with me—sorry it isn't more! And, as for the girl—I don't know what you're talking about!"

The one with the gun came forward. He dropped his hand confidentially on Embree's shoulder.

"Say, look here, friend," he said. "I think I'm on to you. You're one of these rich, don't-give-a-hoot fellows—what? And you met this girl—and swallowed her hard-luck tale? You're acting like that chap that used to have scraps with windmills—some kind of dago name, he had! It's all very nice and romantic out here at night. Sure, I know!

"But when we slip the bracelets on you, and take you back, and you're charged with being an accomplice in a robbery—that won't be so nice, eh? Oh, I suppose the girl's told you some pretty story! But robbery's what it is—just plain robbery! Money taken right out of an express-car! See here—here's my badge. You can see it—I'm an express company detective!"

The badge was all right, and so was the man's whole tone. Embree happened to recognize the badge. He had had dealings with a man who carried a precisely similar one, in connection with the loss of some property of his own. For a moment he wavered. He had heard of thieves who used girls in their work.

And he had no mind to help such a scheme as that to go through. He was on the verge of giving up. But then, without reason, unless a memory of the girl's face with her clear, pleading eyes could be called a reason, he changed his mind.

"Oh, I believe you, right enough!" he said. "But I can't help you out. The girl's not here—and neither is the money!"

He raised his voice purposely, so that the girl might hear. If she got out by the back way—there was just the ghost of a chance that they might not find her!

For a moment the detective, baffled, studied him. Embree was so little the type who would be in league with thieves that the man must have been puzzled.

"I guess we'll make sure of that for ourselves," he said. "Give me that electric torch, Jack." He got it, and called to the man in the automobile. "Come with me, Bill. Jack—you stay here and see that this chap doesn't get away."

"Oh, I'll stay—this is where I live!" said Embree. "Don't mess things up inside more than you can help!" Again he raised his voice, that the girl might know they were going in. "You don't mind if I fill my tank, do you?"

"Not a bit," said the detective. "Watch him, Jack. Keep your gun handy."

The detective and the chauffeur went into the house. In a moment the lights sprang on, and their voices came to Embree as he filled his tank. The car was turned toward the causeway that led to Embree's house—and away from it. And suddenly Embree felt something tap his foot, very gently. He looked down; a white sleeve lay along the ground. The girl! With a thrill of sheer admiration he realized what she had done—crept under the house while they searched for her above. Again he felt something hard against his foot; then he stooped and straightened up with his automatic in his hand.

He looked toward Jack, who was on the other side of the car, but keeping Embree within his range of vision.

"Well—that's done!" he said, setting down the empty gasoline-can, screwing down the cap, and walking around toward Jack. He moved, deliberately, away from the car, so that Jack turned to face him, with his back to the car. Over Jack's shoulder, in the light from the headlights of the other machine, Embree saw the satchel the girl had clung to so tenaciously drop over into the car; saw the girl, too, climb in, and watched, his eyes sparkling, for the right moment. He drew a little closer to Jack.

"Got a match?" he asked, and fumbled in his pocket. "Oh—you've got my cigarettes, too."

Jack's eyes left him. Embree's hand holding the pistol rose; he brought it down, with a nice precision, on Jack's head, and the man went down without a sound. Embree knew the effect of that blow. Jack was out—but he would come to in a few minutes and be none the worse, except for a headache. Embree leaped over him, reached the running-board as the girl started the engine, and got the two front tires of the other car as the detective and the chauffeur leaped from the door of the bungalow. Two more shots settled the headlights; Embree's car slipped through the darkness unscathed by the rain of bullets that came from the house.

"Quick work!" shouted Embree in her ear. "Gad—that was splendid!"

But she was shaking like a leaf now; he had to change places with her, and relieve her unsteady hands of their task in guiding the car. And now, for nearly half an hour, he drove like one possessed, his one thought to put as much distance as possible between them and the detective. He turned and twisted in a veritable labyrinth of roads, losing his way hopelessly, but caring nothing for that. Then, at last, he slowed down. The girl was steadier now.

"Don't—don't think I'm not grateful!" she said. "I heard you, of course—and you were splendid! Any one else would have believed them—"

"Oh—as to that!" he said, in a strange tone, that made her sit bold upright. "I—well, I'd started—it didn't seem to matter much. But—really—have you got to see this through? Wouldn't it be better to return the money?"

"Oh!" she said. "You did believe them! Then why—"

"Well, the chap's got a detective's badge

—and it's genuine enough," said Embree, almost sulkily. "That part of it was straight—"

"So is the rest!" she said defiantly. "I did take the money when I had no right to do so! He has a right, I think, to try to get it back from me!"

He drove on, in silence, for a while.

"Oh, well, I don't care!" he said. "I dare say you've got some perfectly good reason for all this! Only it seems rather silly—not to say dangerous!"

She wasn't proof against the flattery of that, and she laughed, delightfully.

"He said you might be arrested and sent to prison," she reminded him.

"Well, a lot of our best people are going to jail nowadays," said Embree. "I don't know that this is any worse than giving rebates or being a bathtub trust, or something like that!"

"I suppose it isn't," she agreed. "And I don't mind telling you, now, that I've got the very best reason in the world for acting like this. I'm not mad—and I'm not a real criminal, either, even if I am violating some silly law that doesn't know what it really means itself!"

"You don't want to tell me any more?" suggested Embree.

"I—I want to," she said. "But—I'm afraid you wouldn't believe me! You've been wonderful—won't you be even more so, and see it through without making me tell you?"

He invented two or three appropriately impassioned speeches, all in less than a second, and then compromised with a flat, colorless, "Yes!"

"The worst part of this whole thing is still coming, I'm afraid," she said soberly. "I told you I had to go to Crayville. And I'm surer than ever that they'll be on the lookout for us there. Those men we got away from at your place will be there, you see—because they know I've got to get there."

There was just one point of light about Embree's car. It came from a tiny electric bulb that pointed to speedometer and clock. He looked down. It was half past four. In the east, toward the sea, the darkness was beginning to break.

"What do you call morning?" he asked. "What's your time limit?"

"Any time after eight, I should think," she said.

"Then the best thing for us to do," said Embree, "is to swing right around a big circle. There's time enough—we've got a lot of that to kill, in fact. And if we slip away around, we'll come to Crayville at just about the right time, from the other side."

The girl clapped her hands.

"There's only one thing," said Embree, hesitating. "It 'll mean going through some fairly big places. Is there any danger of our being stopped if we do that?"

"No!" snapped the girl. "There's a limit even to what those people would dare to do!"

"All right!" said Embree.

And so began a wild but still controlled progress through a community, rapidly becoming suburban in its character, as they neared Philadelphia, that would have startled all beholders, had not most people been still abed. Embree switched on his lights, as they slipped through the first sizable town, and began at once to feel more respectable, and less like a motor bandit. Milk-wagons, an occasional stray policeman, watched their flight, which though it seemed to be aimless, was not. Embree knew his roads now, and his twisting and turning was full of purpose. It grew lighter constantly, and at last he had the luck to find a garage that was open. Here, quick repairs relieved his anxiety concerning his tank, which had begun to leak again, and he got his gas. And then when he came to make payment and felt for his wallet, his heart dropped into his shoes.

"I—er—I—why—I've left my money at home," he gasped. Jack had it! He had forgotten. And he faced the garage man with that frightful look of guilt that only the innocent can manage to assume. He stared appealingly at the girl, but she, if she really understood, seemed to be indifferent.

"G'wan!" said the garage man rudely. "I've heard that sort of tale before! Pay up or I'll hold the car till you do!"

He advanced menacingly. But Embree had been through too much. He looked around hastily; there was no one in sight.

He sank a blow in the garage man's stomach that dropped him, writhing, and was a quarter of a mile away before that aggrieved mechanic came to himself. But he was indignant. He turned to the girl.

"Couldn't you have let me have the money from your satchel?" he demanded.

"No!" she said. "I couldn't!"

They glared at one another for a moment, and then she laughed.

"I couldn't—really!" she said. "Please believe me!"

Embree regretted his assault upon a man who was only demanding his rights. But he couldn't foresee the complications that were bound to ensue. He expected to return, later in the day, and offer appropriate salve. But the next town enlightened him. People were up and about by now. And, waving to him as he approached, were two policemen with motor-cycles.

Instinct warned him. He had lost that ability to look a policeman in the eye that the ordinary, upright citizen never appreciates at its true value. He was a lawbreaker, and he turned his car as soon as it was plain that these officers wanted speech with him, and went scooting back the way he had come. Behind him sounded the pursuing motor-cycles, but he wasn't afraid of them.

"Oh, Lord!" he groaned, as he turned off at a crossroads. "Now we daren't strike any towns, even! I hope we don't have to commit murder, or arson, or any other crimes before we finally get to Crayville!"

There was a hysterical note in the girl's answering laugh. As a matter of fact, though Embree tried to take the business lightly, they could neither of them see what little humor lay in it. It is not easy, in a country as populous and well settled as that of southern New Jersey, to avoid incorporated towns and villages. Roads, naturally are built between such places, and Embree felt that his car hadn't been made for cross-country work. But he managed it, and by the time the sun was fairly high in a cloudless sky they were on the crest of a little hill, that enabled them to look over flat country to the sea, with the smoke of what the girl said was Crayville in the middle distance.

"We're going to the bank," said the girl. "Do you know it?"

"I've cashed checks there—keep a little account," said Embree. "Red brick building—opposite the post-office?"

"Yes," she said.

"All right! Now—you get down, so that the doors will hide you. I'll cover you with this rug—you'll be warm, but you'll be out of sight. Perhaps they won't know me."

She obeyed. Somehow she had lost her air of authority and strength; she was very willing to surrender the leadership to him. And, when she was disposed of, Embree began to drive, slowly, with his eyes fixed on the road ahead, toward the town. For a long time the road remained empty. But at last he saw what he had feared—a group of men, a rope, stretched right across the road, between two trees. He was searching his memory desperately by now; trying to remember what he had seen on many trips along this same highway. And at last he saw something that served as a clue—when he was within fifty yards of the barricade. The men were waiting for him quietly, without any sort of demonstration; evidently they were sure of him. And now, with a sudden turn of the wheel, he sent the car off the road, down into a ditch, up the other side, and through a flimsy rail-gate, that splintered and went down before the hurling ton-weight of the automobile.

From the road came a sudden outburst of shouting. Men appeared in the field, leaping the fence below. But Embree's memory had served him well. It was a pasture lot into which he had driven his car; the going, though rough, was possible, as that in a plowed field could hardly have been. And now Embree turned and headed straight for the men who had rushed over with some idea of barring his way even now, deprived though they were of the rope that in the road would have given them the upper hand. But Embree was not to be blocked. He zigzagged as he bore down on them, and they scattered before him. These men lacked the nerve of the ones he had encountered in the night; there were no shots.

And, five minutes later, with only a wild

hue and cry behind, Embree stopped before the bank, dragged the girl out and carried her, rug, satchel, and all, inside. A long line of people stretched away from the bank's door; the bank itself was full. But an old man, with white hair and bloodshot eyes, came out from behind the grating and gasped:

"Eleanor!"

She gave him the satchel.

"Here's the money!" she cried in a voice so loud that all in the bank could hear her. And then, having done her part, she crumpled up, and Embree caught her in his arms again as she fainted!

He took her inside. And there, in the president's private office, when she revived, angry with herself for collapsing, in a few moments, he learned the truth.

The white-haired man was her father, President Chambers, of the Bank of Crayville.

"Some people here and in Philadelphia started this run, to get hold of the bank if it failed," she said. "They had powerful friends—dad couldn't get hold of cash until he did raise some, yesterday, in Philadelphia. It was sent in this satchel by express—and they tampered with some clerk, and got it sent through on the wrong train, by what could be made, when it was too late, to look like a mistake! My brother got hold of the satchel somehow—we thought there would be more chance to get it here safely if I brought it! You know the rest—thanks to you, I got it here in time. You see—we'd have got it, eventually, of course, but by that time the bank would have had to close its doors."

"I see!" said Embree. "By Jove—you've got nerve! And you didn't have the keys—that's why you couldn't let me have it for that man who fixed the car—I say—let them send this telegram."

He scribbled hastily on a scrap of paper, and showed her an order to his bankers in New York to transmit a hundred thousand dollars at once to his account in the Crayville Bank.

"I know all about runs on banks," he said. "You have to have cash to meet them—and a bad run will wreck any bank that isn't helped. Well—I can manage a bit more, if it's needed! And I guess I've done enough things in the last few hours to need a little money handy for bail myself!"

But there was no more trouble. A check soothed the garage man—and the men who had tried to get the satchel faded silently from sight. Their whole game was spoiled as soon as the money reached the bank, even though there had been a technical robbery when Eleanor Chambers had carried off her father's property.

Did Embree stick to the misanthropic resolution to have no more to do with women that he had had when he left New York? Well—that would be telling!

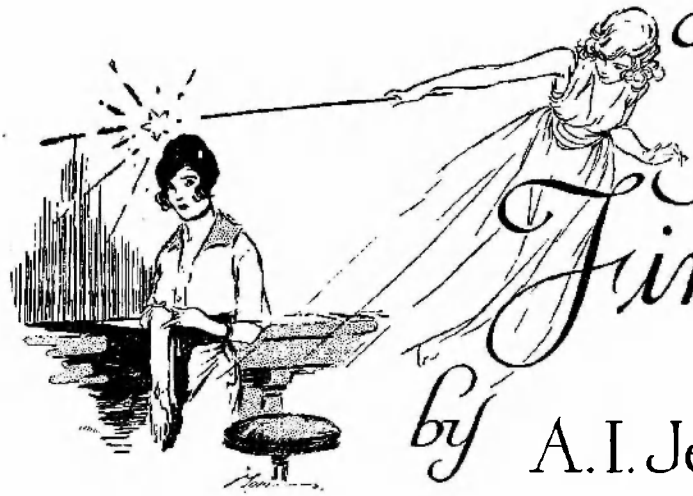
ASSUAGEMENT

BY MARJORY MEEKER

THE parched earth whispers and yields,
Burnt hill and plain;
But over the asking fields
Soft falls the rain.

The lily, weary with noon,
Faints in the light;
But over her trance steals soon
The assuaging night.

O Love! Must my heart then die
For such release?
O Love! Will you pass me by
Who can bring peace?



The Find

by A. I. Jenkins

MARIE lived in the suburbs—"the rhubarbs," Nettie Hopkins, who lived in the next block and worked in the same store, wittily called them.

"And it's some exciting time riding back and forth—two hours a day nipped right out of our budding young lives," Nettie complained.

"I don't object to the ride particularly," Marie confessed, "it shortens the evenings anyway."

"If I spent my evenings like you do I wouldn't mind either," retorted Nettie with a contempt so poorly blended with pity that the latter failed to flavor.

Marie didn't reply. She was reluctant to discuss her father's exactions. They were not numerous but wonderfully inclusive, being summed up in an order for Marie to come straight home from work and stay there until time to go to work again. To be sure she was expected to wait on him, and do the housework in the interval, and not allow these duties to be interfered with by the intrusion of outsiders. Aside from this, and the delivery of her weekly wages into his hands, he laid few restrictions on her.

"See what I found on the car coming down," said Marie to Nettie one morning when the latter floated in one car late. Marie had caught the usual six forty-five.

"Gee!" admired Nettie originally, "do they fit?"

"Just like a glove," tittered Marie, which was a fairly good joke, for it was a pair of gloves that she held out for Nettie's inspection—white ones of the best quality.

"Gee!" said Nettie again, "it's a wonder you didn't hand 'em over to the con."

"I did, but he said they wouldn't fit him," admitted Marie with an annoyed little blush which knew it would be due in an instant and so beat Nettie's comment.

"He's stuck on you, kid. Honest, did he tell you to keep 'em?"

"He said 'forget it,' but I wouldn't if I'd known anything else to do," answered Marie.

The first sale of the day demanded change just then, and she climbed to her little platform aloft between counters and took her gloves with her.

"That's swell organdy Pitty Sing's waltzing around with," Nettie remarked a few minutes later as the dainty window-dresser passed with a bolt of the sheer stuff under his arm. A scarf of it floated out behind, the pattern a cool green vine climbing over lattices of square bars.

"Go great with your new white gloves, M'rie."

Marie's eyes rested on the gloves a moment, then followed the organdy dreamily.

"A touch of rose would be awfully pretty with it," she murmured.

"That organdy's cheap," Nettie announced when she came in from lunch. Marie carried her lunch and didn't view windows and price-tags at noon. "I'd like

to have a dress off of it—liven it up with some purple satin or something."

"Rose would be pretty with it," offered Marie.

When she left the store in the evening she took a look at the price and her heart gave a gentle flop. She peeped into her pocketbook at the gloves.

After she had prepared supper, made four changes in old Gabelle's tray — the fourth a renaissance of the first—carried it to and from his couch the same number of times, washed and wiped the dishes, set bread — the next day was Sunday, when she always had plenty of time to wash and iron and bake — swept the kitchen, read aloud eight chapters of the "Contingency of the Laws of Nature," put the clothes to soak, wound the clock, and helped old Gabelle to bed, Marie settled down to an evening of pleasure.

For six years previous to her death, Marie's mother had made the living for the family with her needle, and she had left a trunk half filled with odds and ends of fabrics. Some of them were so lovely as to be a delight to the eye—at least an eye like Marie's, gray and darkly fringed with long lashes, and sensitive to good color combinations, and to sheen of silk woven somewhat nearer to the heart's desire than the silk of war times.

Marie often delved into this treasury, but seldom with a utility idea uppermost. She never went any place except to work, what need had she of fancy duds? Tonight she sought and found a bit of rose.

On the street-car Monday morning Marie addressed herself to Nettie Hopkins—casually:

"Nettie, could you lend me two dollars?"

"Sure—next pay-day. I ain't got a cent now."

"I meant next pay-day," hastily amended Marie. "I've saved up a little, but I need two dollars more."

"I should think you'd have a lot saved up," observed Nettie, explanatorily running her eye up and down the shabby figure beside her.

Marie's prejudice against drawing aside the family portieres once more, blocked the avenue of conversation. The truth was that the courage, self-sacrifice, and ingenuity exercised by Marie in saving up the modest sum referred to, if expended on the battle-field of Europe, would have won for her the Croix de Guerre and revealed her even to Nettie's undiscerning eye as—well, not exactly the Marie Nettie thought she knew.

Nettie was a good scout, however, and remembered, and Marie got the two dollars and added it to the dinky sum she had saved and bought the organdy.

It made up charmingly, and Marie looked charming in it—partly because her eyes became stars at the transformation she saw in the glass in her two-by-four room late at night when she finished the dress and slipped it on and drew the white gloves over her hands.

Then suddenly the stars were all squenched away in dew—the dew of tears, and the new organdy threatened with ruin by being dumped on the bed with Marie inside it.

All dressed up and no place to go can be a joke or a tragedy.

It was that same night that Marie's fairy godmother concluded she had loafed on the job long enough. She hustled out early the next morning in the guise of a newsboy—not such a bad guise, either—and dropped a Sunday paper at old Gabelle's door.

Gabelle never took a newspaper. He looked on them with supreme contempt. The old fellow had been something of a scholar in his day. It was from him Marie learned to use good English. The charm of her accent was her own, but undoubtedly she had old Gabelle to thank for a pretty taste in diction. It was about all she did have to thank him for.

"Father, did you order the Sunday paper?" she asked in surprise when she opened the front door and found it heaped up there.

"Certainly not," denied old Gabelle testily; "bring it in."

He was soon so absorbed in it that he didn't notice when Marie filched the society section and made off to her room. She soaked it in for nearly an hour before

she came to the item which, as the novels say, was to shape her destiny. Her godmother must have been getting nervous. Then she saw it.

The wedding of Miss Faith Larrabee to Captain Richard Hickman Sears will take place at high noon to-morrow at Trinity Cathedral, the Rev. Charles Mathewson officiating. A large number of invitations have been issued, and the marriage of this popular and well-known couple will be one of the most important society events of the year.

There was more, and Marie read it—every word—but she had made up her mind by the time she had got that far. Trinity Cathedral was one of the old churches that had refused to be elbowed out by business buildings. It was just around the corner from the store where Marie worked. She for the wedding!

High noon—a large number invited. It was a pipe. For once she would have a chance to wear the new organdy and white gloves. She could take them down to the store with her, slip them on and skip out without being noticed by more than a few hundred people. If she was late getting back—well, she could run into an automobile—just gently—or she could—oh, there were a dozen different ways.

Only one item stumped Marie—the matter of shoes. No amount of polish could hide the fact that her shoes had lost their shape.

She appeared before old Gabelle who was still reading the news.

"Father. Oh, father."

"What?" shouted Gabelle at last, scowling up over a corner of the paper.

"I'll have to buy some shoes in the morning."

"Can't those be soled?" demanded Gabelle sourly.

"They've been soled twice," explained Marie, counting once for the time she bought them.

"They look pretty good yet," snarled old Gabelle. "I guess you can get along for a while."

Marie went back to her bedroom, and with the scissors, and steady hand of a surgeon, performed a major operation on her right shoe. The wound gaped nicely by morning, and with a hideous wrench old Gabelle parted with the price of a new pair.

As a cashier, Marie was a wonderful wedding guest. There is more beauty found behind the store counters anyway than in our best families—law of compensation, no doubt. Things didn't work out exactly as she had planned, but almost, and she was there, her eyes sparkling under the long lashes, her pretty face a glowing rose, peeping from beneath a white lace hat. That hat was one of the things that had gone a bit better than she had planned. A friend appeared in it for the first time that morning, and Marie simply walked out under it.

She sat about half-way up the big church, looking exceedingly demure in the dim R. L., and not in the least lonely. She had sorta snuggled up to a party of swells who arrived in a limousine at the time she arrived on foot, entered with them, walked up the aisle with them—even sat with the overflow from one pew. This left a space on the side of her next the aisle, which was lucky, because if it had been otherwise her godmother's early morning sashay would have been wasted.

The young man who appropriated this space was a regular and personable follow. Friendly, too. He evidently knew the limousine swells, and bowed to them with a fine show of sound, white teeth. Then he gave Marie the once-over—politely—and started.

"Pardon me, Miss Enslow, for a moment I didn't recognize you."

Marie smiled and inclined her head ever so slightly.

That brought him to. Evidently Miss Enslow would have been more responsive.

"I must ask your pardon once more," he begged. "I thought you were an acquaintance."

"I am sure it is quite all right," murmured Marie in her soft accents, then, because she was the soul of kindness, she added: "Possibly we have met before."

"No—no we haven't," declared the young man with conviction. "I wouldn't forget it if we had. I'm entirely to blame."

"Really, it can't be so terrible," soothed

Marie, "people very far removed socially would not be likely to meet here."

"That's so, too," said the personable chap gratefully. "I — I'm Howard Porter."

"I'm Marie Gabelle," said Marie sweetly. She was as sure he'd never heard it before as she was that he would never hear it again.

They were absurdly contented. Music *trembled through the soft cathedral hush* and they supposed it was their souls singing harmoniously together. After a while the wedding pair marched to their fate—the bride wasn't nearly so pretty as Marie, but her clothes cost more—and all too soon the hour of the organdy and white gloves was over.

"I want to meet you again," Mr. Porter said, turning and holding out his hand to Marie. His eyes said much more. For the first time Marie faltered. She hadn't intended to carry her innocent game of pretend beyond the church doors. She stammered as she replied:

"We—we are expecting to go shortly to New Orleans to live." She had an aunt living in New Orleans—a grouch who never paid any attention to her, but to whom she wrote dutifully once a month because she had promised her mother she would—and that was the place she thought of first.

Mr. Porter's face was radiant.

"Then I'll certainly see you. My business takes me there every few weeks. I may call? Where—what will your address be?"

That was the moment to settle the whole thing. She wasn't under the least obligation to have an address in a city to which she was just moving. But Marie was hopelessly lost. She murmured the number of her aunt's house.

Mr. Porter's smile, speaking eloquently of his fixed intention to see her there, was the last thing she saw as they became separated in the crowd.

Marie tried to forget her whirl at society—and her fellow wedding guest. Instead she worried her head nearly off. Aside from the church doors having closed on the heaven she had glimpsed in the face of the right man, there was the thought of what would happen when he appeared at her aunt's door in New Orleans. She thought once of writing the old lady and begging her to be merciful and gloss over her remorseful niece's iniquity—to save her from the contempt of the one man whose contempt would burn the joy out of life. She thought of writing to Mr. Porter. She could say they had decided to go to Timbuktu instead of New Orleans, but she *really hadn't much heart for more lying.*

As she sat perched in her small tower, conning the problem about a week after she had kicked it up, her glance fell idly to the passers-by below, and there encountered the direct gaze of the Porter chap himself.

It was an instant in which breathing was out of the question. So was anything else that was normal or indicative of animated life. Marie just stared.

She had nothing on Howard Porter. He stared, too, but his was a stare of astonished inquiry and not recognition. Wide, startled eyes glowing in the chalk-white face of a little cashier failed to stir in him any memory of a rosy face peeping from under a lace hat and a pair of softly shining gray eyes veiled by long lashes.

It was a full minute after he passed before Marie understood. She was saved, but it was like saving a man from shipwreck who was doomed to walk the plank. Marie tucked her head down on her arm and shed a few hot tears, then straightened up and wrote him a letter in which she revealed the bitter truth to the last miserable detail.

She had a most irritating time digging up an envelope, but found one after a while. With businesslike carefulness she put her name and address in the upper left-hand corner. Then it was closing time and she hadn't any stamp, and it looked like the girl at the desk where they sold them was going to get away. She didn't, though, and Marie got her stamp and put it in her pocketbook until she was outside so no one would see the name on the envelope.

Once outside she dropped the letter in the box. It was hard to let go, but she had really let go when she raised her head from

her arm an hour before, so what was the use, and why was she ever born anyway?

When she reached home she found old Gabelle in a state of wild excitement. He began shouting the minute she opened the door.

"You are rich, my child. Your days of toil are ended. Your aunt in New Orleans has died and left you her property, her money—everything!"

Marie stood still just inside the door.

"Her fine home in New Orleans — we will go there at once," raved Gabelle.

Marie crossed the room to a chair. Old Gabelle carried on, but she didn't hear what he said. She had slipped her hand inside her blouse and was clutching a white glove. Suddenly she began to cry—not scanty, hot tears, but a plenteous tribute to the ironical twist her greatest thing in the world had taken.

She opened her pocketbook to get out her handkerchief, and as she did so a tiny scrap fluttered to her lap. She touched it with her finger and found it sticky.

"The stamp," she murmured impatiently.

"The—the stamp," she repeated bewilderedly.

"Why—the stamp," she laughed exultantly, "the letter won't go! Yes, I understand, father, I'm a rich girl—oh, a very, very rich girl. Yes, we'll go to New Orleans at once."

PLAYING WITH FIRE

BY GEORGE IRVING BUSHFIELD

LITTLE you guessed,
As I tenderly pressed
You close to my throbbing heart;
That the look in my eye
Was only a lie,
Helping to play a part.

Ardent my plea,
As I vowed there must be
In your soul some answering flame.
But the passion that awed
Was naught but a fraud,
Only a part of the game.

Spurred by my pique,
All in vain did I seek
To waken a thrill in your breast.
It was nothing but guile,
For I knew all the while
Mine was a selfish quest.

Alas for me!
How could I foresee
I was storming my own heart, too?
For I wooed all too well—
I weakened and fell
Madly in love with you!

Heart to Heart Talks

By the Editor

ONE of the strangest, most romantic, and least-known countries in the northern half of the western hemisphere is the inland district of Lower California. It is a wonderful country, perhaps one of the grandest and most beautiful in the world. A country rich in legend, rich in dramatic history, rich in an amazing atmosphere of old romance; yet the surface of its literary possibilities has scarcely been scratched by the fiction-writer's pen. True, the wonderous missions that hundreds of years ago were built by the dauntless frays and priests to sit like jewels—miracle jewels—among the mighty crags of the mountains have been written of and stories told of them, but these are practically all stories of their prime. Little has been told of them as they are to-day—of modern Lower California—but next week we are giving you the first part of a four-part serial—

A THREEFOLD CORD

BY H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "Sword-flame," "Mr. Shen of Shensi," "Nuala O'Malley," etc.

all the action of which takes place in this wonderful country, among the marvelous ruins of those once rich and powerful mission churches. We can tell you little of the story here, but we know you will like the three hardy adventurers, who bind themselves into a "threefold cord" to accomplish a purpose which— But that is the story, and when, next week, you make the acquaintance of Patrick Owen, Los Angeles lawyer, Kezia Rends, skipper of the Mollie, and Denis Ajax Yore, the fearless Irish mining man, who never deserts a friend, we know you will name it a good one.

* * *

THE national temptation of the American people to make business three-fourths of human life has earned for us the reputation of dollar madness. On the other hand, the vulgar excesses of our idle rich have provoked the satirists of Europe to regard us as Lesbian idlers. Neither the vulgarity of a too opulent minority nor the commercial preoccupation of the many furnish the clue to the real creed of the unspoiled Yankee. While as a people we have still to achieve the classical standard of a happy medium between two extremes, we still remain the only genuine practical idealists in the world. As long as we let a false commercialism frame a slogan for us like "business is business," we are a long way from the test of Greek civilization at its supreme moment of achievement: "Not too much of anything." But one need not be suspected of sentimentalism nor accused of socialism in refusing to subscribe to this jungle philosophy of business. Human beings are of infinitely more value than business men, despite boards of trade and politicians, and America at this momentous moment is staking her all, not for new territory or old, not for money or money's worth, but for the imperishable ideals of freedom. Any man or body of men who stand out for the "visionary better-impulse" principle as opposed to "the cold-bloodedness of business" have an irresistible attraction for all generous-hearted and open-minded people. This is why we know you are going to appreciate

THE POLLARDS OF WEST GAP

BY HENRY PAYSON DOWST

Author of "An Honest Man," etc.

because this is a story which traces in detail a philosophy of life that would make all human life richer if it were commoner. The Pollards were

no shallow optimists because fate had protected them from the seamy side of life. Quite the contrary. And they were no quitters because fate and a powerful foutilusher, who had, with malignant cruelty, sought to undermine the moral foundations of a young girl's house of happiness seemed to have them hopelessly entangled in a net. "THE POLLARDS OF WEST GAP" is not only an absorbing story with all the complex elements that go to the making of a vital situation, but it is a timely and valuable solution of a current problem, that confronts many an eastern as well as a midwestern community. Meet the Pollards in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and we can promise you you will never regret the introduction. Lucy and Clarke Pollard have that— But there, we prefer to let the Pollards tell their own story.

A WIDELY accepted and sufficiently accredited experience dowers a drowning man with a disconcerting panorama of his past. Soldiers and sailors, it would appear, have a look into the future. In any case, accounts from the front and from the military hospitals all indicate that men who never troubled about the other side of the moon are now rather turning to religion and the supernatural as furnishing a key to the dark door of death. Naturally each school of thought and philosophy has an explanation for the phenomenon according to its own pet bias. But art, which, with the hands of the skilful collector, turns everything into her own image and likeness, pauses not for explanations. With the unerring instinct of creative art, Philip Fisher, Jr., in his exquisite story, "QUEER," seizes on a thrilling encounter, in which the supernatural offers the only medium of escape. Not every one will feel compelled to abandon the safety of "Cocklane and Commonsense" to account for— But just get next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY and you will find all the evidence in the case.

ODD how our modern experience has so frequently dulled the saws of the ancient sages. The Romans, with their penchant for law and order, used to distil their wisdom into polite proverbs. One favorite refinement of their digest on human folly ran like this: *"similis simili gaudet."* Like delights in like. Could anything be wider the mark? Is it not a notorious fact that in our vicarious emotional adventures we want to reach the exact opposite of our daily routine? School-teachers delight in tales of crime and passion, clergymen wander all over the West, to say nothing of the South Seas, and politicians go in for plays and stories with a "strong heart interest." Every mother's child of us is fascinated by the glare and glitter of "a gambling hell." We may never have "opened a pot" or placed a chip on a roulette layout, red or black, but we are itching to know how it is done. You may never expect or desire to "bust the bank at Monte Carlo," but you would like to see it done. Very well! Young Folger did it, and after reading "WHEN RED WAS BLACK," by Stephen Allen Reynolds, you will want to exclaim with Big Dick Slade: "Well, I'll be d—"

WHEN she went for her first interview with the great impresario she picked up the latter half of her name from a magazine. If the big man failed to be impressed by the name of Jen McTeague Fifine Fontainebleau his warm humanity went out to succor the poor battered waif, which some freak of fate washed up from the undertow onto his polished bit of sheltered beach. But when she returned from Australia no name or fame were necessary for the appraising eye of the great man to recognize here was a great artist. But Jen, when she stepped forth upon the stage to acknowledge the plaudits of her audience, suddenly had it borne in upon her that not even— But this is not a pen-portrait of the great artist, and, besides, every one will want to decide for themselves what really was the greatest gift the generous gods of Ulu gave to the dancer who came from "Bennie Limbo's Place." You will get Jen's history in "THE GIFT OF ULU," by Maryland Allen, in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

SOME years ago—to be exact, back in the nineties—when the esthetic decadents were stirring England with "The Yellow Book" and Arthur Symons was editing *The Dome* and Max Beerbohm had just begun the task of writing his "works," a book appeared with the arresting title, "The Green Carnation." It was a "naughty" book for those days, and Robert Hitchens was slow in acknowledging the authorship. Some of you will remember, and the word "carnation" in connection with a title might have an unpleasant connotation. But don't rush to conclusions. "THE MAN WITH THE CARNATION," by Percy James Brebner, has nothing in common with Hitchens's hectic hero. He is a regular fellow, and when we tell you he is an old friend, Valentine West, Secret Agent, he won't need any further introduction. Percy James Brebner, West's sponsor, has never written a tenser incident of West's varied career than the morning he put a carnation in his button-hole and walked into the War Office to confront the man who had read, as he supposed, the confirmation of his death over his morning coffee. Look for "THE MAN WITH THE CARNATION" in next week's magazine, if you appreciate an honest-to-goodness detective tale.

WANTS NO OTHER

TO THE EDITOR:

Enclosed please find fifteen cents in stamps, for which please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for May 25. I have been unable to get this issue

anywhere in this vicinity. I do not want to miss this issue because of the fact that I do not want to lose one single chapter of "The Strange Case of Cavendish," the "Chase of the Linda Belle," or "The Queen of Clubs." I consider them all excellent stories.

I have been a great reader of magazines ever since I was old enough to read that kind of literature. I have read many kinds of magazines, which contained stories by many good writers, but early in 1916 I chanced to purchase an ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and was so pleased with its contents that I have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY ever since, and can truthfully say that I have read *no other* magazine since that time. There is no other magazine that can compare with the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. I was pleased with "The Moving Finger," "The Joyous Trouble-Maker," and "One Who Was Afraid" of your more recent issues. I have not yet started to read the June issues, as I wait to get all chapters of a continued story before I read it. Of course there are so many wonderful stories in your earlier numbers that I could not begin to name those I liked the best, so please send me the issue of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for May 25, 1918, and oblige, your admiring reader,

CHARLES M. BAUM.

Deimel Building,
Herkimer, New York.

LIKES DETECTIVE STORIES

TO THE EDITOR:

Recently I read a letter in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY wherein the writer had fault to find with detective stories. If a person does not care for that type of story, very well, do not pick, for others do. How many people stop to think of the time and thought an author gives to write a detective story? It is not easy to write a detective story by any means, for the author must spend considerable time "doping" out a plot. It is one thing to sit down and read a detective story, and it is quite another to write one! I have read the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for two years, and I have always been pleased with the stories. Lately I secured most of the *Cavaliers*, and I spent many an otherwise weary hour happily last winter. Gregory seems to have made a hit with his last story, "The Joyous Trouble-Maker." Well, he deserves it. In fact, all your serials are corkers, and now I'm going to bother you with some questions. When are you going to print another story by Edgar Rice Burroughs? I haven't read anything of his since "The Lad and the Lion," which appeared about a year ago. And George Allan England? Has he gone away? Is he writing another one of the fascinating imaginative stories that we are all waiting for? Please get him to write something. Please get Giesy and Smith busy on another *Semi-Dual* story. Outside of *Tarzan* I don't think there is any character in fiction as popular as *Semi-Dual*. Well, I've said enough for this time, so good luck to you and the ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

EDWARD SCHULTEN.

Gloster, New Jersey.

ONCE READ, ALWAYS READ

TO THE EDITOR:

I am enclosing thirty-two cents in stamps, for which kindly forward me the copies of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for March 23, March 30, and April 6. I have started "Who Am I?" and "The Moving Finger," and I must have mislaid these three copies. I have been a constant reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY ever since the combination with the *Cavalier*, and think you are publishing a wonderful magazine, especially for the price. My wife would never read magazine stories until one day she picked up a copy of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and since that time has become as strong a booster for it as I am myself. I have started a number of other people into constant readers by lending them one of my copies. Kindly hurry the three issues along, as I am anxious to finish my stories. Best wishes for a continuation of your great success, the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, from

N. J. WATERS.

722 Bartram Avenue,
Collingdale, Pennsylvania.

LITTLE HEART-BEATS

Enclosed find one dollar and fifty cents, for which kindly send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for three months, beginning with the May 4 issue. I have read the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for nearly a year, and I think it the best I have ever read. I like all the stories, but my favorites are the "Master of the Hour," "A Good Indian," "Suspense," "Valley of Bleeding Hearts," and "One Who Was Afraid." I would like to see a sequel to Mr. Shen of Shensi" and also to "The Lad and the Lion." When I have finished reading my magazine I pass it on to my friends, and they all say it is the best yet. Good luck to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

MISS E. TIMMS.

Weyburn, Saskatchewan, Canada.

I have been a reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for about two years, and will say I truly like all the stories. Of course, there are some with a little more pep than others. My children all like to hear E. K. Means's stories; they have a big laugh over them. I was very much impressed with "Suspense," by Isabel Ostrander; also "One Who Was Afraid," by William MacLeod Raine. "A Rendezvous With Death," by Max Brand, was a dandy. If some soldier boy that is fond of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY will send me his address, I will send him the thirty-eight last numbers of the

magazine. Well, hoping we will have as good stories in the future as in the past, will say *adios*,

E. D. MAYNARD.

Sinton, Texas.

In the last number of your magazine I note a story, "The Man in the Chair," which struck me as very unusual. The style is vigorous and natural, the plot strong, and the character delineation clear and forceful. It is filled with incidents of absorbing interest.

I shall never again see a lame beggar in a rolling chair without thinking of *Dan*, and wondering if there is any similarity of history or character.

I hope to see more of the same sort of "good stuff" in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

Very truly yours,

I. D. PETERS.

1820 Floyd Avenue,
Richmond, Virginia.

Enclosed you will find ten cents. Please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for May 25. I like your magazine very much, and I wish you worlds of success. The stories are fine. Please don't take the continued stories out.

MRS. FRANK D. COOK.

R. F. D. 6, Box 22,
Lansing, Michigan.

Enclosed please find ten cents, for which please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for June 1, 1918. Am very much interested in "The Three Elks" and the "Chase of the Linda Belle." I like Max Brand's stories and all Western ones. I do not think the ALL-STORY WEEKLY can be beaten; in fact, it is unxld.

Sincerely,

MRS. SADIE F. COOK.

15 Prospect Street,
Atlantic, Massachusetts.

Enclosed find thirty cents, for which please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for May 4, 18, and 25. I live in the country and the magazines are always sold before I get to town. I have subscribed to many magazines, but the ALL-STORY WEEKLY is my favorite. "A Good Indian" and "The Voyage of the Nantook" were dandies. The story, "The Border Legion," which was printed many months ago, seemed good, though I only got to read the beginning. Is it in book form, and where could I get it? Thanking you in advance, I am,

T. S. BECKMAN.

Dayton, Iowa.

Enclosed please find fifty cents, for which send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for March 2, 9, 16, 23, and 30. I became acquainted with your magazine quite recently. On the first day of the Easter holidays one of the tenants of my house asked me if I would like to have fiction magazines. I assented readily, having nothing to do during the holidays. She gave me more than a score of ALL-STORY WEEKLYS, and until yesterday, when I finished them all, I was not seen for an hour without them, before and after school. All the stories were good, the stories that appealed to me most being "Fate's Honeymoon," "The Thunder of Doom," and "Steamboat Gold."

A future subscriber,

LOUIS STRITZLER.

307 East Twenty-Seventh Street,
New York City.

THE ALL-STORY WEEKLY is the best of all. I am a boy of twelve, but I sure do enjoy your stories. The best are "The Moving Finger" and all the war stories. Give us some more like "The Devil's Violin." Ben Ames Williams is a dandy. Give us some more of his stories.

An ALL-STORY WEEKLY reader,

MAURICE THORNTON.

Lincoln, Nebraska.

After reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY through its different names a good many years, I write to thank you for the inexpensive way you have allowed us to read so many first-class, clean, greatly interesting stories. Victor Rousseau's "Sea Demons" was vividly attracting to me, although I had the dictionary handy. I was just wishing you would publish another from him when I read the announcement the next week of "Draft of Eternity." I liked "The Cosmic Courtship," the Pellucidar, and the Mars tales. E. K. Means is my husband's favorite. The "Chase of the Linda Belle" was A1.

Yours truly,

Quincy, California. HELENA GREENING.

I have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for about a year, every edition, and I read everything from cover to cover, even the advertisements. I am very much interested in the story, "The Queen of Clubs," by Elisabeth Sutton. "The Three Elks" is fine, and also "Chase of the Linda Belle." I did not care so much about "The Strange Case of Cavendish" or "The Devil's Violin," but as a rule all your stories are very interesting.

My favorite story was "The Triple Cross," as I like war stories. Respectfully,

SUSAN A. RICE.

Kenova, West Virginia.

Enclosed find four dollars for the renewal of my subscription to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, as I do not wish to miss a copy. I like most of the stories fine, but thought "The Joyous Trouble-Maker" the best ever; also liked the "Chase of the Linda Belle." What has become of Paul West? I enjoyed his poetry so much.

MRS. MAY HENDRIX.

Franklin, Missouri.