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Everybody's MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY
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Everybody's

NUMBER TWO FEBRUARY, 1923 VOLUME XLVIII

If It's in Everybody's It's a Good Story

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Transition *A Novelette* — By Stanley Olmsted
The loves, the turbulent dramas of a primitive people

Projectitis — By Fannye Jordan Treaster
An indulgent mother finally sees the light

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Sometimes we pay when we shouldn't

Treasures — By Gilbert Frankau
A story of tense interest

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Everybody's

NUMBER TWO FEBRUARY, 1923 VOLUME XLVIII

Loyalty

I ENVY no man who does not know the hard, hot fierceness of life's weary battle. To my thinking, work, hard work, man-killing toil, is a somewhat fine thing—and the good God knows I've seen my share of it.

I've lived among the well-to-do, and those whose clothes are immaculate. I've lived also with the socialist, the radical, the I. W. W. Some of my acquaintances are in jail to-day for their ideas and ways.

I don't judge them. It is not my business to do so, nor do I judge the folks who go immaculate, with no knowledge of life's heavy, heart-breaking burdens of despair and but little sympathy for us, the toilers.

What a fine thing it would be if the children of this, our America, might be taught to think—to think—ah—to think of something deeper than a shallow patriotism! A man's patriotism must begin within himself. If a man has it not, a loyalty to his own soul, how shall he have it for his country? And when all is said and done, do you not think that God, in looking down upon the rolling sphere we call our earth, perhaps ignores our man-made boundary-lines? And seeks within the souls of us to see what lies within? I think He does, perhaps. For man was made before the nations had their birth, and man needs be loyal to his humanity first of all.

Some day, perhaps, when the little pig-eyed men and the big broad-chested men and the people who were born to silk and satin robing all their lives along—when the toilers, the I. W. W. and the radical and Red stand side by side, with popes and bishops, presidents and princes mixed among them—ah—let's hope that all our frailties and fripperies will be overlooked and forgotten, and that the hand that writes out our last pay-check may be a steady, untrembling and very merciful one! I think—nay, I am sure it will. For, after all, we are none of us much else than muddle-headed children toiling feebly in the sun-glare of a hard old mortal life:

Hither we came, naked; hence so shall we go. Whither? What does it matter so long as we've tried to do our job as we've seen it?

BILL ADAMS.

Pidge was conscious of his appealing charm as his head inclined to her, and she heard his words in the lowest possible tone: "Meeting you—that is the real story."

THROUGH these pages moves a figure of to-day that will be a living figure down all time.—Zona Gale

A love-story that will guide the young and renew and strengthen the old.—Edgar Lee Masters

The *Public Square*

Beginning a Serial Novel in Four Instalments

By Will Levington Comfort

Illustrations by C. R. Chickering

A GIRL of nineteen had just arrived in New York with one fat bag. She turned into the curving silence of Harrow Street, which is only three minutes' walk from Washington Square, but some trick to find. Several times she changed hands with the bag, sometimes putting it down and stepping round it, until she came to a door with a room-to-rent sign. This house was painted fresh green, the only thing that distinguished it from all the other houses of the block except the number, which was Fifty-four.

"Here goes me!" she said, starting up the stone steps. She rang. The door before her didn't open, but the basement one below did. A woman's voice called, "Yes?" in rising inflection.

The girl trailed her bag down to the walk and round the railing to the lower entrance, where a dark-faced woman stood regarding her with almost concerned attention—dark eyes that saw too much, the girl decided. The face was un-American, but its foreign suggestion was vague. It might even have been East Indian. If her skin were natively white, it had certainly known the darkening of much sunlight.

"I want to rent a room—a small back room. I saw your sign on the door."

"I have a room, but it hasn't much air," the woman said.

"I don't need much air."

"Come and we'll look. It is on the upper floor, but not quite back. Leave your bag here in the hall."

It was eleven in the morning, but the smell of coffee was in the dark basement corridor, and laughing voices were heard behind the shut door to the right. A man's voice said in a stimulated tone:

"Believe me—and I've been around—Miss Claes is the deepest-dyed sport I've ever met. You could drag her the length of Harrow Street and she'd come up fresh from the laundry——"

"That reminds me—I'm going to start a laundry," a woman's voice announced.

"I'm going to start something myself," came another voice.

The girl, following through the corridor, heard a little breathless sort of chuckle from the woman ahead of her on the dark stairs. The place smelled like a shut room when it rains—a cigaretty admixture.

"They meant for us to hear," the woman said.

They climbed. The next hall was spooky with gaslight; the next was gay with frying sausages. They climbed. The next was the one, and it smelled of paint—the same

green paint as on the outside of the house—on one of the doors and door-frames, but the wood was plainly charred under the paint.

"We had a fire, but we put it out with wash-water before the engines got here—soapy water."

The girl had a picture of threshing soap about in pails of water before applying it to the flames.

"THIS is the one," the woman said, unlocking the next to last from the back on the left.

They crowded into the little room.

"This is fine!" the girl said. "This is what I want. It's just as I saw it."

"You get your water in the hall below," the woman explained. "There is no gas-plate; so you will have to bring your coffee-pot down to my stove in the basement. The walls are ugly, but I'll see that the cot is clean for you. If the wall of the next house across the area were only painted white, you would get more light."

The wall of the next house was less than three feet from the window-sill.

"What is the price?" the girl asked.

"Twelve dollars a month."

"I will pay for a month now," she said, with a small part of a big out-breath.

"That will be nice," the woman answered. "Are you just come to New York?"

"Yes."

"First time?"

"Yes. From Los Angeles."

"And you have had four days on the train?"

"Six. It was a slow tourist train. And I sat up from Chicago."

"Have you lived in Los Angeles long?"

"Always, in and around."

"We don't dare to think of Los Angeles much. To a lot of us here in New York, it's a kind of heaven, southern California—the sea and the mountains and the ten months of sunlight and the cool morning fogs and the ripe figs——"

"I've wanted New York like that," the girl said. "I've wanted New York so badly that I was afraid on the train that it wouldn't stay until I got here."

"That's the way to come," the woman said. "New York waits for your kind. What are you going to do here?"

"Write."

"Really?" The woman sat down on the edge of the cot. She seemed gravely interested. Her figure was thin, but lithe. One wouldn't know in these shadows if she were nearer twenty-five or thirty-five. She seemed altogether without haste, smiling easily, but slow to laugh aloud. Her eyes looked startlingly knowing as she lit a cigarette—not natural, somehow. At the same time, in the match-light her face had looked tired and weathered. Her way of speaking was like an English person, or one educated in England. "Do you mean stories?" she asked.

"Yes; a book, a long story—set in eighteenth-century France."

"But you seem so young."

"I have written for a long time."

"How old are you, please?"

"Nineteen—but I have lived in a writing-house always."

"Where is your house? I have been to Los Angeles."

"Back in a cañon near Santa Monica, and my father is there now—in his slippers. He teaches every one how to write—" There was something baleful in the girl's blue eyes, or perhaps it was exhaustion, as she smiled.

"Does he write stories?"

"No; metaphysics, but he knows everything."

"What is your name?"

"Musser—Pidge Musser. Not Pidge, really. Pandora is my name, but every one calls me 'Pidge.' My father started it."

"Is his name Adolph Musser?"

In the dimness, the girl's face looked like a blur of white; a little stretched, too, it looked.

"Yes; that's his name," she said in a hopeless tone. "So you know him, too?"

"I merely heard him lecture once."

"I suppose you fell for him."

The woman's black eyes twinkled.

"The lecture was on cosmic consciousness," she said. "I remember distinctly that Mr. Musser outlined four paths of approach."

"Did he talk in bare feet?"

"Yes—and an Eastern robe."

"That was a camel-driver's robe," said Pidge. "Oh, I didn't think I'd hear of him here."

"You won't. May I call you 'Pidge?'"

"Yes; what you like. My father names everything."

"It sounds better than Pandora—at least to me. I must go down now. A little breakfast-party is waiting there. Take off your things. I'll come back soon. I am Miss Claes, and I want to come back already."

Pidge Musser sat in the center of her room, but not quite. At least, she sat in the center of the stiff little cot. She could touch two of the walls. The third was across the narrow aisle from the cot. The fourth was the windowed one, which looked as if it were about to be bricked up entirely. That was quite a distance.

Her room! She was alone—alone, and this was New York! She could live a month and write and write on "The Lance of the Rivernais." She could be herself and not be told how to live and love and write and bathe and breathe, and change her polarity and promote her spirit and govern her temper and appetites, by a man who was governed by anything but himself.

Presently she would go out and look at New York again, walk about a bit, keeping a mental string tied to this green house. Besides, she had to rent a typewriter, but there was no rush. It was delicious sitting here alone in the gloom of midday, making the place her own, a chance at last to take a look at herself and see what she was made of and think of what she was here for.

There was a mirror. It wasn't cracked according to tradition, but its surface had frozen over in a high wind. Everything waved, eternally waved. Pidge hoped she would never shed tears in that mirror. Once she had caught herself weeping, and she looked so abysmal that she was almost frightened out of the habit. With these waves added——

Pidge took off her hat and flipped it over on the cot. Her head didn't look natural, but that wasn't all the mirror's fault. One of the things she had wanted to do for months was to make her hair a shade redder than it was. Of course, she hadn't dared at home, and she couldn't manage it on the train, but there had been six hours to wait in Chicago and a small hotel room that frightened her yet. She had emerged from that room a different shade. She had been against landing in New York one color and then changing. She had wanted to start life new in New York and keep it straight, an absolutely new page, a new book.

Her reddened hair waved. It made her face look whiter, and brought out a red tint in her brown-wool dress.

A little later she sat up straight, because through the wall from the next room back came the buzz of a typewritter. She listened with a thrill. It stopped and went on—unequal stops and buzzes of rapid typing for several moments; then a long, sustained buzz until a sheet was changed. No commercial typewriting. That was "creative" stuff, as her father would say—a word she had vowed never to use.

All this was before noon on an October day in the good year of 1913, before anything ever happened to anybody.

RICHARD COBDEN was twenty-one in 1910 when he took his first job as reader in the editorial office of the *Public Square*, a weekly magazine of opinion and protest and qualified patriotism. This was the publication of old John Higgins, at one time one of the highest-priced editorial writers in New York, but his views became more and more strenuous, instead of mollifying with the years, the end of which is to publish for oneself or subside. Even in the *Public Square* he found himself under a pull. He wanted a living out of his magazine, but did not expect to make money. He occasionally drank himself ill for a day or two. One of his aspirations was to publish a distinguished short story in every issue, the shorter the better.

"But there aren't fifty a year," he frequently said. "There aren't ten, but we get two or three of them."

Once there was an old sculptor who had apprentices. Townsfolk were invited on a certain day to look at the work of the young men. One of the apprentices was greatly worried by the faulty light of the shop. He complained to his master, who is said to have answered in these terms: "Never mind, son, about the light here. It is the light of the public square that tells the story."

From this incident, John Higgins had taken the name of his weekly. This also contained the meaning he worked with in his publication—that, at the last, the works of all men would come into their own of praise or oblivion in the withering light of the public square.

Richard Cobden came of a well-established New York family of merchants and

manufacturers. There was no traceable connection, so far as the family knew, with the English Cobdens, of whom there had been a brave Richard of free trade and free speech. Dicky's great-grandfather was the Richard Cobden who first made the Cobden trowel, hand-forged in a little shop up Yonkers way, and made it so well that stone-masons used to drive from far in and back country to his shop. The Cobdens had made and dealt in hardware ever since, but the trowel was the Cobden *cachet*.

Dicky was fresh from the university when he went to work for John Higgins. He was now twenty-four. His eyes were strong and so were his enthusiasms. These strengths stood him in good stead against the vast masses of evil typing and the revelations of human frailty contained in a myriad manuscript attempts.

There was a mere screen between Cobden's desk and the desk of John Higgins. One winter afternoon, Dicky was interrupted by talk between the chief and the office-boy.

"That colored guy in the reception-room won't go away," the boy said.

"What guy is that?" Higgins asked.

"The one I told you about two hours ago when you came back from lunch."

"What does he want?"

"He's got a story. He says he'll wait for you."

"What's his name?"

"It ain't a natcherl name. Every little while he pulls up his sock."

"Tell him I can't, you know——"

"I did twice, but he won't go."

"Let him sit a bit longer. It's a regular park bench out there, anyway."

IT WAS the dragging sock that really roused Dicky Cobden—a bit of mindless art on the part of the office-boy. Dicky's world was now full of people who thought they had the story of the age—people who wanted to see the publisher himself; people afraid to trust their manuscripts to the mails; a world of such coming up through great tribulation, but only here and there a dragging sock. He took a chance now and volunteered to Higgins to clear that bit of seat-space in the reception-room if possible.

A dark-faced young man rose to meet him outside. "Tired"—that was the word that bored into Cobden's mind with new meaning. There was something potent in the weariness of the black eyes, a deadly sort of patience that rarely goes with brilliance. Dicky was slightly above medium height. The other's eyes were level with his own. The hanging sock was not in evidence, but Dicky felt that the stranger didn't dare to move fast for fear his clothes would part. "Yet he feels clean," he thought; "yet he feels clean." This was important enough to repeat.

"I have a story——"

"Your name?"

"It is Naidu—but not known."

"Are you from India?"

"Yes."

"Why not let us have your story to read?"

"It must be read now."

"This sort of thing isn't done while one waits, you know."

"I'm afraid this one will have to be done so."

"Why, even if it's promising," Dicky declared severely, "it would have to be read several times."

"I'll wait."

"But we have hundreds——"

"I know. May I not see the chief editor?" He turned back to the bench.

"You win," Dicky said. "At least, I'll take the story and read it now, though I'm only a deck-hand. If it looks good enough, I'll try to get Mr. Higgins to look——"

Five minutes after that, Dicky was deep in South Africa. Six thousand words in neat but faded typing, called "The Little Man," about a diminutive Hindu person who appeared to have no other business in life but to stand up for the under dog. He would fight anything, but the British government was about the size of foe he liked best—a cheerful story of most shocking suffering, which the Hindu took upon himself for the natives of Natal—no; not the natives, for the Hindu laborers that had emigrated to Africa. It wasn't writing. It was like living. It slid on with a soft rhythm, and it took Dicky along.

More than this, he saw in the story—or in the curious stillness which the story brought him—something of the sort of thing he meant to write some day. Half-way through, he rose and dumped the sheets he had read before Higgins' spectacles, saying, with slow, measured calm:

"She breathes. She's a leaping trout."

"Get out," said Higgins softly.

"That's only half," said Cobden.

"Where's the rest?"

"I've got it in there—not read yet."

"And you bring this to me?"

"He's waiting. This story will finish itself. I know it will march straight."

Twenty minutes later, Dicky carried the chief's word to the reception-room.

"We want the story, Mr. Higgins says. If you leave your address, we'll mail you an offer to-morrow——"

"I will take two hundred dollars for the story, but I must have the money to-day."

Dicky laughed quietly.

"I'm afraid the counting-room won't appreciate that. It's not adaptable. It's intricate. Besides, your price is severe for us—unknown name and all that. Oh, it's not too much—only for us, you know."

All the time he talked he knew Mr. Naidu would get his money and get it to-day. A man with a story like that could get anything.

"I'll give him my personal check," he told Higgins a moment later. "The office can reimburse me."

"I always forget you have a piece of change in your own name," Higgins remarked indulgently. "Don't ever let it interfere with your work, Dicky."

"My work to-day is to get that manuscript in our vault. Later," he added to himself, "my work is to write a story as good as that."

Dicky and Mr. Naidu were in the street. It was too late for the bank, but Dicky found a friend of the family with currency. It was a rainy dusk in Twenty-third Street near Fifth Avenue when he took Naidu's hand, having turned over the money.

"I have your address. I may hunt you up. You won't forget the *Public Square* when you have another story?"

"Oh, no," said the Hindu; "nor you, Mr. Cobden. Good-by."

Dicky turned to look after him. He felt a curious desire to follow—a sense vague as yet that his way, the way of the Big Story, lay after the Oriental and not toward the office.

MISS CLAES opened the basement door and looked out through the iron railings to the street. Snow was six inches deep and still falling. She took a deep breath appreciatively, as if she found some faint, exquisite scent in the cold air. When she returned to her living-room, the fire in the grate had been started and a small cup of black coffee was on the table. She sipped thoughtfully and then lit a cigarette, which she half finished, standing by the fireplace. A cabinet of dishes across the room from the fireplace was full of color now from the light of the coals—vivid greens and bronzes, pomegranate reds. At length she opened the door to the kitchen. An Oriental standing over the range bowed a silent good-morning.

"Did Pidge work all night again?" Miss Claes asked.

"Her room was quiet between two and five."

"And then did the work go on?"

"Yes; while I was cleaning the halls and until I came down here at nine."

"It is a race, Nagar, between Pidge Musser and her book—which will finish the other."

"Shall I serve your breakfast?" the Oriental asked.

"No, please. Put it on a tray with hers. The child starves——"

"Not in your house!"

"But she's so troublesome to do anything for. She rebels against accepting any favor. Was there a bit of boiled halibut left from last night, Nagar?"

"Yes."

"Make a little omelet with a few flakes of the fish in it and a few asparagus-tips." He bowed. Miss Claes laughed softly. "Apparently our Pidge is in violent reaction against everything that belonged to her life with her father in California," she went on. "His English is rhythmic and erudite. Hers is bluntly American as a factory-girl's. He is lost in books; she has given herself to life. Adolph Musser's passion is to learn; his daughter's is to do. We may well respect the little girl who has come to us, Nagar——"

"The toast and omelet are ready."

Miss Claes brought a little creamy-porcelain urn and held it for him to fill with coffee from the large pot. Nagar held the door open for her into the basement hall. A moment later, on the top floor, Miss Claes tapped at the second last door on the left. Pidge sat at her machine under the gaslight.

"I can't make their swords play!" she

moaned. "Their swords are stiff as shinny-sticks. I thought—I thought, if I ever could get to it, it would run like oil, but I don't know men—not red-animal men like this, Miss Claes. I know pussy men. I know pious men, salvy and wormy men, monks and mummies and monsters, but I don't know honest-to-God men. Here they are—taunting each other as they stab, and their talk sounds—like Shakespeare."

There was silence.

"You always forget to bring your coffee-pot down to the range, Pidge——"

The girl turned back to her type-machine.

"He's a jealous old devil when I leave the room," she said. "I think the person who rented him before I did addressed envelopes all day—kept cranking him back and forth against time. Now, I ride a little ways—then let him stop and browse. We ramble——"

Pidge stopped. Her eyes looked dry and smarting, as if tears were on the verge.

"Oh, Miss Claes," she went on, "I'm just as crazy as that—I mean my figures of speech. Cranking him back and forth, and in the same breath letting him stop and browse. I wish you wouldn't bring me this stuff any more. The coffee's so good that it hurts—and the eggs. I always cry when I'm hurt."

"You forget my part. I like it here—like to climb from the heart of New York to eighteenth-century France and not leave the house——"

"But you find a twisted, thwarted, cubist sort of France—part Dumas, part Mexican Plaza, Los Angeles, and the rest me— I'm eating shamelessly!"

After another silence, Pidge pointed over her shoulder to the rear wall, inquiring:

"Has Nagar stopped writing? I haven't raced typewriters with him lately."

"Surely he wouldn't stop writing—especially since New York has touched him with her magic," said Miss Claes.

"What do you mean?"

"He has sold a story—a short story—for two hundred dollars to the *Public Square*."

"Nagar—your servant?"

"He's not my servant, Pidge. He merely lives here and works with me."

Pidge regarded the other's face closely. She could see with uncanny clearness in this little dark room where she had struggled night and day for nearly three months, but what she saw now, or was looking for, she hardly knew herself. Her own face was spooky from sleepless strain.

"Oh, I'm so tired!" she yawned, when she was alone once more. "I'd like to be a leaf in the park under the snow—still snowing, and sleep till spring. Only, I'd like some roast turkey first."

INSIDE the moonlit castle gardens, across the moat, into the pictured halls, up the marble staircase, driving straight and true, Lambill Courtenay, a man of the people—artist, swordsman, lover virgin-hearted, rode—no; ran for once on his sprightly feet, straight to a sequestered wing of the ancient and noble castle of the Rivernais, and with his ungloved hand touched the knocker of its inner sanctuary.

"Who is there?" came the cry like the pipe of violins.

"I!" swelled the deep orchestral answer of Lambill Courtenay, Frenchiest of the French.

Then the great oaken door from the forests of Savoy opened. Lambill crossed the threshold. The white arms of Madeleine Rivernais opened and the heavens opened also—for the great maze of life had been untangled for these two—and Pidge Musser's book was done.

Just a book—one of the myriads that you see lying round, like sloughed snakeskins on first- or second-hand book-shelves—but it had been properly wept on and starved for and toiled over, as only youth in its abandonment can toil for its own ends. It had almost been prayed for, but not quite. Prayer wasn't easy for Pidge Musser's defiant soul.

It was arranged for Miss Claes and Nagar to be the first to hear the story.

Nagar sat in a straight chair in the aisle between the cot and the wall. Pidge sat by the window before her machine. Miss Claes lay on the cot with her head under the light that Pidge read by, and away they went. There was an hour or more in the early afternoon when both Miss Claes and her helper could escape from below, and and two hours at least after nine in the evening—this for three days.

Pidge was fagged and half ill and frightfully scared. She would begin hoarsely, and for pages in each reading a cold in the head was an obstruction hard to pass;

Out of the inmost heart of innocence, Pidge was jerked with a crush. Before his next words, she realized what she must face—she, sitting aside from them in the new frock.

besides, she felt she was boring them and that all the massed effects of her pages dithered away into nothing or worse. But a moment came in each of the six sessions when the last monster of the mind's outer darkness was passed. And then, for Pidge, at least, knighthood rose resplendent, days became stately indeed, and chivalry bloomed again. At such times the dark, gleaming hair of Miss Claes became the tresses of Madeleine Rivernais herself, and a little back to the right, in the deep shadows, the face of the Oriental there took on the magic and glamour of Lambill's own. The lance of the Rivernais was won back heroically, and human hearts opened to the drama of love and life.

But on the last night of the reading, after the self-consciousness was passed and all was going well, the magic presently petered out again, at least for Pidge, and she said hastily as the final page was turned down.

"I know how kind you are, but please don't try to tell me anything to-night. Not a word, please!"

There was something in Nagar's smile as he turned and went out that she knew she would remember again.

"I quite understand," said Miss Claes, when they were alone. "To-morrow afternoon, Mr. Cobden, of the *Public Square*, is coming here to see Nagar. He is the one who put through Nagar's story. We're to have tea at four. You'll come down, won't you?"

"Why, yes; of course."

"I believe it can be arranged for Mr. Cobden to look at your book. Would you like that?"

"Yes," said Pidge faintly.

"But I have an idea—it may be only a whim——"

"Yes?"

"I want you to meet Mr. Cobden, but not to let him know just yet that you are the one who has written the story."

"That's all right; but——"

"It's because you look like such a child, Pidge. No one would be able to see all that's in your story—if they saw what a child you are."

RICHARD COBDEN and John Higgins were lunching at Sharpe's Chop-house. It was one-thirty, and the height of the day's business. The tables were packed close.

"You were telling me about that landlady," Higgins said, lifting his spectacles to wipe his red-rimmed eyes.

"I wasn't telling you much," said Dicky. "She's too deep for me—looks to thrive on coffee and cigarettes—eyes that have seen too much, a lot of silent laughter in them, but no hope. And what would you think of a basement room, with flowers in winter and a fireplace with hickory embers, a Byzantine jar in the corner and a cabinet of porcelain which I haven't seen the like of on this side?"

"Go on. Don't mind me," said Higgins.

"Little old Harrow Street," Dicky mused. "Harrow Street curves, you know. There is quite a mass of lodging-houses on each side, and Number Fifty-four, with a green front, is Miss Claes's house. And our Mr. Naidu works there with his hands; only, they call him 'Nagar' in that house—spelled with an 'a' but pronounced 'nog.' *There's* a silent one, a deep one! He can write, but he isn't mad, and he can make coffee to go with that cabinet of porcelain. And there's a little girl there—from Los Angeles, I think they said—red head, brown-wool dress and eyes of a blue you see on illumined vellum out of Italy——"

"Some cerulean," said John Higgins.

"They weren't large particularly, but that extraordinary blue like the ocean—ruffled on top, but still in the deeps. Yes; there was some confusion and dilemma on the surface, but calm wisdom underneath. I never saw such eyes. They come back to me now——"

"They do to me, Dicky. Fifty-four Harrow Street is long on eyes."

"But you're not getting all I mean, John. Down there in Harrow Street and vicinity, those old rooming-houses are filling up with the boys and girls from all the states west, and the second growths from European immigrants who will do the surgery ten years from now, and the painting and writing and acting——"

"Have some more coffee," said John Higgins. "You'll do a real book yourself one day."

"I'm not so sure of it since yesterday," Cobden answered. "I couldn't take their chances. I couldn't sit down and do a novel and not know how I was going to eat my way through. I couldn't scrub tenement-house floors for the privilege of writing. I

love books all right. I rise up and yell when a big short story comes into the office or breaks out anywhere. I think I know a real one, but a man's got to do a whole lot of appreciating before he gets to doing. I'm not bred right. Three generations of Cobdens have moved softly and quietly, always getting better-to-do in New York. I am the first to break out of trade. They call me a dreamer—my people do—yet compared to those boys and girls down there in Harrow Street, I'm a basket of fish with only a wiggle at the bottom——"

"Get out!" said John Higgins.

"And that little girl said nothing, but watched everybody," Cobden went on. "Watched out of the whitest pearl of a face I've ever seen—those eyes, blue as the Indian Ocean."

"That's the third squirt of blue," said John Higgins. "You'll be going back down there to Harrow Street?"

"Oh, yes," said Cobden. "I'm going down there to live."

"Eh?"

The younger man nodded seriously.

"They're crazy, perhaps, but I'm convinced of one thing: one can't be sane as the Cobdens are sane and ever find the Big Story, much less write it."

"Therefore, the first thing for a Cobden to do is to go insane."

"But it isn't like that, John," Dicky said gently. "I've been brought up to think I knew New York, belonged and breathed New York. The Cobdens are a bit heavy on this idea, having lived here a hundred years. But yesterday I saw New York for the first time. She isn't an old Dutch frump, as we thought, John. She's a damsel! She's new as a new moon——"

"Blue eyes?" said John Higgins.

"No; that's the little girl from Los Angeles. It's the landlady I'm talking about. I shouldn't be surprised to hear she was a Hindu priestess; anyway, she's a sort of embodiment of New York to me in her present rôle. I'm sure some of her lodgers think she's crazy. A decayed actor leaned across the table to me yesterday when this Miss Claes left the room, tapping his forehead, whispering, 'Lovely—eh?—but got the Ophelias.' Moreover, I believe she knows they think her cracked, and doesn't mind. I think she's paid somehow for running her rooming-house, whether her lodgers pay or not. I'm sure she feeds them somehow when they're broke, and holds their dream when they lose it in the day's fight. I've been round New York's dress-circle looking a long time for her kind of ease and poise."

"Is she young?" John Higgins asked.

"Say—I don't know," Dicky said suddenly. "You don't think of her with years—rather as one who has reached the top of herself and has decided to stay there."

John Higgins leaned back, drained his coffee-cup and stared with eyes that smarted at the steaming ceiling.

"Is Naidu going to do us another story?"

"That's the excuse I had for going. We didn't get to that, but they gave me a novel in manuscript to read."

"His?"

"No; I didn't get it straight whose it was. Miss Claes handed it over. Some one in the house had written it or left it there."

"We'd better be going back to the office. Have you read into the novel?"

"Started, but didn't get really going. It's back-age France stuff, and I was a little mad last night on the subject of Fifty-four Harrow Street."

"You're a little mad yet, Dicky, I should say—for a Cobden. So you're going to lead a double life, are you? Rich young New Yorker, with opulent quarters in Fiftieth Street under the eaves of St. Patrick's, vanishing into life down in Greenwich Village."

THE manuscript had been in the editorial rooms of the *Public Square* for three weeks, but there had been no report. Pidge had gone to work in a tin-can factory up Lenox way, pasting labels. There was Fanny Gallup, who sat at her right, elbow to elbow—Fanny of the intermittent pungencies of scent and the dreary muck of talk about boys and boys and boys. Fanny was a child and woman all in one, about Pidge's age and size, one whom you could fancy had been a stringy street-kid a year or two ago, and who would be pocketed in an eddy somewhere out of the main flow of the streets in a year or two hence, with a babe at her breast and another on the way. Just now, Fanny Gallup was in her brief bloom, red in her lips, a lift to her frail breast, the earth driving into her and overflowing with such color and fertility as it could.

For eight hours a day Pidge dwelt in Fanny's frequently tropical aura—hateful, yet marveling. The thing that amazed her was that Fanny loved life so, loved the feel of her own hands when she rubbed them together, loved the taste of sweets and the memory of last night's kisses—loved fearlessly and without reserve, not a pang of dread for what was to come or a shudder of regret for what had happened to her mother or sisters or the other girls of Foley Street. Never a thought in Fanny's head that she was being hoaxed by nature, that her body was being livened and rounded, her face edged and tinted for an inexorable purpose.

Fanny lived her brief hour to the full, and Pidge Musser suffered and revolted for two. Pidge took the dreary monotone of talk into her soul, as she had taken her father's, knowing that one day she would be full.

"Oh, you Musser," Fanny would say, "why don't you come over to Foley Street? You're dryin' up, Redhead. What do you do nights, you damned little party? What do you do all the time, thinkin' and listenin'? Where's your fulluh, Redhead? Ain't got one—wot? Little liar! You're bad, you are, because you're so still. Afraid to trot him out, eh? 'Fraid I'd coax him away? Honest t' God, I wouldn't, Musser, but you'd have to stay off my Albert—m'li'l caveman. Albert's all mine. Come on over to Foley Street to-night. I'll let you have a peep at Albert, m'li'l barber—just one peep, Redhead—not too close. I ain't sure of him yet, but I'll let you have one look. Aw; come on!"

So it was through the hours, pasting apricot labels, lobster, asparagus, pimento, peach and codfish labels. More and more the boys and men folded into one, whose name was Albert.

"I'm gettin' him goin', goin', goin'. Psst! An' he comes!" Fanny would say. "But I wouldn't trust him to you, Musser—not longer than a hairpin."

One morning, Miss Claes heard Pidge go out early to the factory. Hours afterward, when Nagar served her breakfast, Miss Claes mentioned a matter still occupying her thoughts.

"If it hadn't been for my tampering, she would have heard about her book before this——"

"How is that, Miss Claes?"

"She looked so young I felt it would prejudice Mr. Cobden against her work, and advised her to keep her name out of it for the present. Now, Mr. Cobden is fascinated with Harrow Street, but he seems to have no time or thought for a romance of eighteenth-century France."

"She will not tell him?"

"No; she keeps it dark between them," Miss Claes said, "and he would put the book through in a week if he knew. He would see it with the same eyes he sees the author. I told her what she could do with a word. I even told her that I might speak to him—let the truth slip out. She caught me in her hands, those hard little hands, strong as a peasant's. 'Not for worlds, Miss Claes!' she breathed. 'Not for worlds!' "

ONE rainy Sunday forenoon in early February, Pidge and Dicky were sitting in the latter's "parlor," the front of his two rooms on the second floor. This room opened through a single door to the main hall, and with folding doors to his sleeping-quarters.

"Of course I mean to write," Pidge was saying; "but I've got to know more about life first. I've always meant to write since the day I learned that print wasn't created in heaven or somewhere above the clouds, like Moses' tablets, and had to be written all out first by human beings. But I'm not ready to begin"—and Pidge silently added the word "again" for her own composure.

"But they told me when I first came that you hammered the type-mill night and day," Dicky said.

"I think they must have heard Nagar's typewriter in the next room part of the time. Of course, I'm always writing at something."

Her face flushed. Evasion irritated and diminished her. She was sick with strain, anyway, from keeping the secret.

"Right from the first," Dicky said, "you seemed to have a first-hand knowledge of stories—the kind that only comes from trying your hand yourself."

Pidge wasn't comfortable in this room. Always, as she sat in the presence of Dicky's altogether thoughtless freshness, Miss Musser had a hard time to forget herself and was frequently on the verge of becoming defiant and bad-tempered.

She suffered, because every evening, almost, Mr. Cobden invited her out to dine, and not once in four times could she pass the frowning negatives of her own soul. He chose to regard her as superbly honest and unaffected. She really needed those dinners, too. All the future novels and heart-throbs needed them. Occasionally she met him after dinner for a walk or a picture, and once she had been lured to an up-town theatre. Just once—never again in the brown-wool dress!

She felt, as she entered the theatre-lights that night, that she had been betrayed. She felt also like something that Mr. Cobden had found in the street, or that she was helping him make good on a first-of-April bet. Pidge hadn't been to more than three "talking shows" in all her nineteen years; to her, a show-house was a place of darkness, except the screen.

Alone in her room afterward that night, she made a great vow: that when the torrent of dollars turned loose on her—and it was bound to sometime—she would buy outright chestfuls of lingerie, cabinets of hats, shelves of shoes and a book of orders for frocks to be delivered at future dates. She could keep clean then, if a sand-storm settled down on New York and lasted a year.

Usually Dicky came in from work ahead of Pidge in the evening and watched for her at the head of the stairs.

One raw, cold, noisy night, she was a bit done up and tried to slip softly past his hall door, but Dicky was there.

"Hard day?" he called.

"Yes," she said, pushing on. "Everybody's tired and cross the whole length of New York, like a sore spine."

"You haven't had dinner?"

"No; but I don't think I'll go out."

"I've been waiting, hoping not to dine alone. There's a little place near where I used to come from up-town, thinking it an excursion—just a neighbor of ours now, the Hob and Hook, where they make a stew like Dickens tells of in the old English inns—smoking in the pot for twenty-four hours—and there's tea for tired folks, and no end of scones and honey——"

"No; I'm not going out again to-night," Pidge decided abruptly.

"It *is* a bit savage out. I'll go and get some things. Nagar will fuse a pot of tea, and I'll bring supper ready to serve within thirty minutes here. Oh, I say, Pidge; have a little thought of somebody else!"

She weakened. Alone a minute afterward, she lit the gas and stood before the mirror that waved.

"If I turned loose just once and ate all I wanted, he'd never speak to me again!"

PIDGE had been absolutely blurred with fatigue at the end of the first days, but her hands were hardening, her back adjusting to the monotonous work at the big pasting-table. She was actually learning, like the other girls, the trick of sinking into a sort of coma for an hour at a time. Other hours she would think of the book she had written, the book round which there was a conspiracy of silence.

The first Sunday afternoon of March was the afternoon of the new frock—a cheap little one-piece frock—bought on Seventh Avenue, neither wool nor brown. It had a tissuey and boxy smell. It was rapturously, adventurously new. Pidge had an omen as she put it on that this was a sort of day of all her life, that never another frock would mean quite the same.

She was alone with Miss Claes when Dicky Cobden came for her at six, according to a plan made early in the week. They were to cross to Staten Island and find an old Georgian mammy whom he knew somewhere back of Stapleton on the wet roads, a mammy who could cook chicken and beaten biscuits.

Dicky seemed only to see her face. A great wonderment came up in Pidge's heart—not disappointment exactly, but a sort of soul-deep wonder—that he did not appear to see the new frock. Could it be possible that a man was like this, a man who managed the details of his own attire with practised art—that he had never known what she had suffered in the brown-wool dress, that he had not suffered with her in all that tragedy of shabbiness and dirt? Had he really not felt ashamed of her that night under the lights in the up-town theater? Cobden was speaking.

"You won't mind, Pidge, just a moment or two, if I talk of a little matter to Miss Claes? Oh. I don't mean for you to leave; in fact, I'd rather not. It is just a report about a long story that should have been made before."

Then, out of the inmost heart of innocence,

Pidge was jerked with a crush. Before his next words, she realized what she must face—she, sitting aside from them in the new frock.

"About that book manuscript," Dicky went on. "I have ordered it sent back to you, Miss Claes—doubtless be in the post to-morrow."

Pidge stared at him like a child being whipped for the first time. All that was left of the meaning of the book in her own body and mind, and all hope concerning it, had suddenly been put to death. But the rest of her remained alive in a stupor of suffering; her eyes stared. She saw Richard Cobden as never before, saw him as a workman—as they saw him in the office.

"The thing is young, Miss Claes," he went on. "There is fling and fire to it, but its freedom is the freedom of ignorance. It does not carry conviction to a sophisticated reader; at least, it didn't to Higgins and myself. I'm not saying that some publisher couldn't take hold of it and make a go. In fact, I've seen stuff like it in covers mount up to big sales, but the human male isn't handled in it, Miss Claes. This is a sort of young girl's dream of what men are. They drink and fight and love and die and all that, but——"

"There, there, Mr. Cobden! Don't try so hard," Miss Claes said laughingly. "I'm sure you've given the book its chance."

But Dicky meant to finish his report.

"That's just the point," he said. "Its chance with the *Public Square* is all I'm talking about. This is a shop-girl's book, and there are myriads of shop-girls. The *Public Square* would like to have their patronage; yet one pays a price for that. John Higgins—this is the best thing that can be said about one of the best men I've ever known—John Higgins has never yet consented to pay that price."

Pidge Musser found her head turning from side to side as one who tries to find in which neck-muscle a troubling lameness lies. She stopped that. She glanced up at Cobden, who was pressing on his left glove with his bare right hand. Then she became aware of Cobden standing at her side. In a moment he would speak. She did not wait for the moment but rose.

"Shall we start down toward the ferry?" she asked.

"Sure! I'm ready now."

In the moment that followed, Cobden did not seem to notice anything wrong. At the door, Miss Claes's hand raised and hovered above Pidge's shoulder, but did not touch. Pidge was grateful for that, for the dam would likely have broken.

THE hardest thing on Dicky these days was that Pidge was working in a factory. This was never far from the central arena of his mind. It chafed and irked. He would have done anything to spare her that, nor was he free to regard this point without considerable feeling. There was very little of the philanderer in his breed. Mostly, the Cobdens had chosen their women carefully, after long, cool, studious courtship; having decided and courted and married, nothing short of death could break in. Dicky was different in that he had no choice in the matter of Pidge. She came up in his heavens and possessed them like the rising sun. There were not two suns in his system.

One evening they talked of Miss Claes, of her changeless good humor and worldliness, her startling tolerances and easy-riding awareness of what was going on.

"But do you think she's really right in the head?" Dicky asked.

"I think the more ignorant one is the more crazy he thinks Miss Claes," Pidge said abruptly. "She may be crazy, but she's kind. Sometimes, as I look at her, it comes to me that she's been through all this—this life-fight and love-fight and money-fight—that's she's a sort of post-graduate merely marking time. But I love her most because she pays her bills and knows about plumbing and streets and common things."

"Every little while when she talks, I feel as if we were going through a tunnel," Dicky said. "But what makes her so different?"

"She had a lot of Hindu training, if that's what you mean; only, she's not taking it out in talk. She's making it work."

"Can one get books—on this sort of thing?"

"You're always getting me into this lately, Dicky," Pidge said. "I don't like to talk about it. I floated up through zones of Hindu stuff from a child. Better leave it alone. Stay in your head—stay down."

"What do you mean, 'Stay in your head,' please, Pidge? '

"Any one who amounts to anything stays in his head. He's not complicated by souls. All the comfortable world calls you a 'nut' for what you say and the way you look when this Eastern stuff gets you going. You get so absorbed that you lose all touch with the things down here, the things you are really here to do. You stop making money and go round saying the Lord will provide. You don't really let Him; you let other people support you and call it God's work. You call yourself the 'elect,' and yet you can't do the things that average people do. Mainly, you talk. You stop work to talk. You settle heaven and God and the soul with talk. Oh, Dicky, that's why I hate it all so; that's why I'd rather be a factory-girl; that's why I'm all lame and tired about ideals and supermen and abstractions—because I've heard so much talk. It's the first thing I remember."

"But you've *got* all this stuff, Pidge. That's what makes you—makes you——"

"It is what makes me nothing! It is what keeps me from being an honest-to-God mill-girl. It is what keeps me from everything that means something to other mill-girls. It is what keeps me from taking life as I find it. It is what keeps me from seeing Miss Claes straight, or from being interested to know just how deep or mad or marvelous she is—because so many words have been dinned into my ears before."

"Nagar doesn't talk at all."

"I don't dare to think," said Pidge. "If he is one who has stopped thinking and dreaming and talking, if he is silent *because he is beginning to know*, why, we're lucky, Dicky, even to be in the same house with him. But I'm not even thinking about it. Oh, I'm not even interested!"

IT WAS early April, a dark and rainy afternoon. Pidge had been in the can factory three months. For two months the manuscript of the "Lance" had lain in the bureau drawer of the little upper room in Harrow Street, not being given a second submittal. The secret was still kept. Richard Cobden had not spoken of the story since his report that Sunday afternoon to Miss Claes.

Pidge had just left the factory and was running in her rubbers through the blur of rain toward a down-town subway entrance. A sort of mocking laughter was in her ears, "And this is New York!" the burden of it.

She sat in her cane seat in a down-town express. The main crowd of the city was coming up-town at this hour. At least, she was spared that packing. She breathed the dense, tired air, but her old wonder of New York came back as she thought that she was being flashed at fifty miles an hour from the junction at Ninety-sixth Street down to Forty-second Street under the busiest streets and corners of America. Mere men could manage much. Then the old agony stole in—"the freedom of ignorance." Surely no one had ever been punished for doing a book as she had been punished—that it was so poor as to prove a temptation for John Higgins to publish it because of its chance of falling exactly into the fancy of these—the myriad of shop-girls in the up-town locals and expresses crashing by in thick ropes of white light.

She was so tired. For somebody's shoulder to lean against! Pidge knew what Fanny Gallup felt, what the other factory-girls felt when they pushed out so brazenly toward men—in very clumsiness from hard pressure, spoiling their chances of being treated square. Yes; she was really learning what the girls felt as they hunted their own in the masses of men they passed—how tired, hungry, blurred, unsatisfied their hearts—anything to escape the withering grind of the mills and the counters and the shops. She knew the secret bloom they felt, the terrible brief drive of it—childhood, girlhood and youth all passing like the up-town trains—a home, a man, a child of their own, the one chance for a breath of life. Of course, they talked of nothing else, and read nothing else.

It wasn't that Pidge loved shop-girls and mill-girls. She didn't love herself for sharing their lot. She wasn't sentimental at all. She recognized bad management somewhere that forced her to this work. She had to have bread, and outer and under clothing. She paid the price, but there was nothing good or virtuous about it. She didn't hate Dicky Cobden when he spoke of "shop-girl literature;" she knew how rotten it was, but there was something in her that belonged to it or she wouldn't have been in the

factory. Moreover, that something had helped to write the "Lance."

Somebody's shoulder! Three months of tin cans was teaching that very well. And there was a shoulder, straight and steady—a kind of mockery about it, because it was so fine. None of the girls at the big table where she worked would have asked more. It meant books and pictures and all the dining-tables of New York, plays and dresses, cleanliness and all the little coaxing cushions and covers of this arrogant modern hour. It meant all the old, solid, established joys of place and plenty, all the writing she liked.

And this life of the factory—hadn't she earned release? What more could come of the grinding monotony of the days but a more passionate agony to escape through the underworld or the upper world—through any route at all, even death itself? Was there a further lesson than this? Somebody's shoulder! He had the native kindness of clean breeding, also that consideration for others of one who is brought up in a large house. He had an ardent interest in books and life. He was warmly established in the hearts of other men—first and last a man's man, which it behooves a woman to inquire into.

There was a tired smile on Pidge's lips as the train halted at Fourteenth Street.

The only blunders he had ever made were in her presence, because he cared so much. He seemed continually in awe and wonder before the thing he fancied she was, as if he had never really looked at a woman before. Of course, another man might act that way, but it was different the way Dicky did it.

There was enough of the artist and dreamer in him to keep life from being tame, yet not enough to make life a maze and a madness. He had health. Money was to him like an old custom, so established as to be forgotten.

DICKY was standing at the head of the stairs on the second floor of the Harrow Street house.

"Hello, Pidge!" he said.

"Hello!" she answered, pushing past, but he caught her arm.

"Let me go, please! I haven't washed yet."

But he drew her by the hand toward the open door to his front room. The brighter light from there streamed out into the dim hall.

"My hands are sticky from the paste. I'll come back. I'd rather come back."

"It's about that—about your hands, Pidge. I've waited as long as I can."

Somebody's shoulder! She wasn't safe to be trusted right now, yet she couldn't pull away. If she ever got up-stairs—even for a minute in her own little place, before the mirror that waved—she would see it all clearly, but here and now she didn't want to see clearly. She wanted to give up and rest. She wanted what he wanted—wanted to give him what he wanted, which was the tiredest, most hopeless girl in New York to-night. She was dying of all her strains and failures and rigidities and fightings, and he wanted to take the load!

They were standing under the hanging lamp in his room. The light was white; his face was white. It was leaner than ever before, more of a man in it, more of a boy in it. His will was working furiously to make him speak. He held her right hand up between them.

"It's about your hands, Pidge, about the factory. Listen; you make me feel like a tout or a sot—as if you were out killing yourself to support me. I've been home two hours and you just coming in!"

"There's half a million girls in New York just coming in."

"I know. We'll get to them later, but now there's only one—only one Pidge. I want her home to stay. I want to make a home for her. Why, Pidge, I'll let you alone if you just let me do that."

"I believe you would."

She was looking up at him hard. She didn't fully understand, but the boyish cleanliness of him struck her fully that moment—the power of his will, which she felt was mainly the fierceness of his decision to speak. It wasn't the burn of terrible hunger for her. He was young as a playmate—that's what shook her now. He wanted to fix her place, to let her hands soften again, wanted to let her rest and breathe—not what the other girls laughed about.

"Why, Pidge, I've got to take care of you. I've got to straighten you out—if it's only to marry you and go away."

Something in her heart cracked like a

mirror, and a sob broke out of her. It was as if a car that had been running along by itself suddenly left the road and went into a cliff—a warm, kind cliff. Somebody's shoulder! And she was sobbing!

"I told you I was so tired. I told you I wasn't safe——"

"Ah, little Pidge—" He was patting her arm and pressing her close.

It had come. This was it. It *was* rest. The other girls knew. The awful cold ache was broken—warmth of life pouring out of her—heavenly ease in the flood of tears, and something of the dearness of dreams was in his passion, not for her—but to do something for her.

The first whip-stroke fell when Pidge remembered how she looked when she cried. But if she could keep her face covered! She didn't stir. Was this the fulness of days? All the consummate essences of ease he brought—no hunger, no dirt—and really she had fought long and hard.

"Everything you want, Pidge," he was whispering. "I'll take you to my mother. She's a regular sport, Pidge."

"She'd have to be," came from the incorrigible heart in his arms, but not aloud.

The second whip-stroke—"The Lance of the Rivernais!" She had failed, and the failure wasn't the book but herself—the thing in his arms. She didn't stir, but there was coldness of calculation to her thinking now—that he meant ease and rest and expediency, not the ripping, rioting, invincible man-force that was to come one day and carry her off her feet.

This was the third whip-stroke—that he meant propinquity—the nearest, the easiest way. She pushed him from her.

"I'm not washed," she said. "I don't mean from the mills. I'm not washed, or I couldn't have—couldn't have! I'm just like the rest—dying for a shoulder to cry on. You're all right, Dicky—so right and fine that I'm ashamed! I'll always care for you. I'll always be warm at the thought of you. I'll always remember how I went to you—how dear you are—but you can't give me freedom. You can't give me peace. My soul would rot in ease and peace and plenty. I've got to earn my own!" She looked up into his face, and her own took a fright from it. "I know I'll suffer hells for hurting you—but I can't help it. I had to know! If I had to spend a life in misery—I had to know that there isn't anything you can give that will satisfy—" His mouth was partly open; his head twisted peculiarly and lowered, as if his shoulder and neck were deformed. He was shockingly white under the lamp. "Oh, I'm such a beast and I'm so sorry! I really wanted terribly—to stay. But, Dicky Cobden—it wasn't for you. It wasn't for you that I wanted to stay—it was for what you *have*—more!"

COBDEN kept his quarters in Harrow Street, but for days at a time did not appear. Pidge Musser fancied this was easier. There was a faint cackle of derision from somewhere in her depths as this idea of it being easier repeated itself in her mind; in fact, there were many conflicting mysteries in Pidge's deep places. "I laid my head on his shoulder," she once said to herself, "but it didn't take. Now we are to be strangers."

She didn't care to probe, but at unexpected moments, when she was busy at the pasting-bench, or nights and mornings, passing in and out of sleep, the faint note of mockery would sound. When she passed Dicky in the halls or met him at one of Miss Claes's little tea-parties and he would bow distantly or indulge in formal commonplaces, the mockery would stir itself in Pidge's profundities, indicating that something somewhere was idiotic. He looked positively diminished as he kept up his formalities, and she liked and respected him too much to feel pleasant about this. She heard that he was interested in Africa, finally heard that he was going to Africa to do some letters for the *Public Square*.

He didn't consult her about it. She wondered if he would rush off without saying good-by. No; Dicky didn't rush about anything.

It came about that Miss Claes invited her and Dicky Cobden for dinner at Tara Subramini's Punjabi Fireplace down on Sixth Avenue near Fourth Street the night before he was to sail for the Mediterranean. This was also the night Pidge smelled spring in New York for the first time.

Mid-April; there had been rain. Pidge hadn't caught the spring magic coming home from the factory, but now, as they walked down Sixth Avenue under the momentary crashes of the elevated, it stole

up out of the pavements as if she were in a meadow—that untellable sweetness which seems the breath of Mother Nature herself, a breath made of all the perfumes of all the flowers without accentuating one, and a sublimation of all the passions of the human heart as well. Her left hand burrowed under the hanging sleeve of Miss Claes's wrap. The bare elbow there closed upon it. They both laughed, and Mr. Richard, walking sedately, was altogether out of the question.

TARA SUBRAMINI served her Punjabi dinners on great individual plates which were none too hot. She discussed modern dancing with Miss Claes at easy length, when Pidge was served and Richard Cobden was not. The rice cooled; the lamb cooled; even if the peppery curry held its fire. The vast plate had curious little crevices on the side for conserves and glutinous vegetables and various watery leaves. Pidge became prejudiced at once against the Punjab.

Something within her to-night made outer actions and words seem absurd. She positively yearned for Dicky to wake up. If this were poise—this moveless calm of his, this unvarying quiet and courtesy, this inability to be stretched even in laughter—Pidge felt she was ready to drop the hunt; also she was tempted to test out Dicky's poise to see how much it could really stand. Finally she burst into absurd and nervous laughter.

"It is because we're such idiots!" she said brokenly. "Oh, I don't mean you, Miss Claes; I mean myself and—*Mr.* Cobden. It is the way things are done in the world—so utterly silly! Why should we be strange and embarrassed, avoiding each other for days and weeks—when we should be more than ever friends, and——"

Richard Cobden bent forward attentively. Pidge was turned from him.

"You don't mean, Pidge, that you fail to see a meaning in this strangeness?" Miss Claes asked. "You——"

Pidge stared at her a second in surprise.

"There can't be any sense to it, can there?" she said slowly.

A look of care was in Miss Claes's face, but still she didn't speak. The laugh went out of Pidge's heart, but the sick misery of revolt that had prompted it remained.

"You are always merciless to yourself, Pidge," Miss Claes said; "but this means more than you. It draws Mr. Cobden in. It draws me in if I talk about it."

Cobden's face turned from one to the other, like a face on an operating-table before complete anesthesia.

"I'd like to hear, Miss Claes," he said. "I seem to have followed a sort of social usage, following Pidge's refusal to marry me. It looks silly to me now, as she says, but I didn't know better."

"You'll save yourself pain by continuing in that social usage. For us to go now, and to say no more—is far the easier way."

"But one doesn't run off like that, Miss Claes."

Pidge was white and quiet.

"Let's go," she said.

Miss Claes turned to catch Tara Subramini's eye. Dicky laughed very coolly; a new force altogether roused in him.

"If it's man's part to be stupid—at least, my kind of man—surely it doesn't improve his condition by running away from a chance to learn."

Pidge flushed a little as she watched him. Elbows on the table, chin in her hands, she appeared now ready for anything. Tara Subramini, still far off, was engaged in words.

"My house in Harrow Street is just a symbol," Miss Claes was saying. "To come into one's house, really, should mean to come into one's heart. You both have keys. What was in my mind to say was that people in your trouble act as strangers for good reasons. If they cannot have each other, they sometimes rush to the other extreme to save themselves the pain of watching another come between."

Dicky Cobden essayed to light a cigarette. The match broke in his fingers. He did not try again. Miss Claes amplified, without any apparent feeling.

"Sometimes one who cannot have what he wants gives way to hatred for a time to ease his wounds. Pidge dear, what have you to give for the friendship and association of one who wants more?"

"I don't know that I have anything. I see how selfish I was. It came to me that we, of all people, should be friends, but I didn't look at the other side."

"You can be friends if you are brave enough. You can be if you dare to come and go and set each other free utterly, but that means long and bitter work."

The harrowing thing to Pidge was that Miss Claes talked as if they were one in condition and purpose and dilemma, when, in reality, all the hard part seemed to go to Dicky Cobden.

"I see why it's easier to act as strangers, even if the strangeness is an affectation, but I prefer not to go on that way," he said. "What does the other way lead to?"

"To a new heaven and a new earth," Miss Claes said; "but to get there one has to have blasted out of him all his present hopes and ideas of what love means. A man and woman trying this game have to sunder their tight little kingdon of two and let the cold world rush in between them."

Pidge's look was not impertinent, but it was hard-headed at least as she slowly inquired,

"And how do you know?"

"Because I am working at it, Pidge——"

Tara Subramini's slippered feet crept in. She stood behind Miss Claes's shoulders and began to speak of the outlawry of the nude. The paying of the bill seemed an interminable process. Cobden looked dazed.

"If Pidge thinks it's silly to act as strangers—and I can see that it is—I'm for trying the other way," he repeated, when they reached the street.

The whole talk had been subject to most stubborn and perverse distractions. On Sixth Avenue the racket of traffic had become incessant. Apparently, Miss Claes had decided to say no more. Callers waited for her in the basement room at Harrow Street, so Pidge followed Dicky to his "parlor," which she had not entered since the night of Somebody's Shoulder.

He seemed possessed to talk of what he had heard. He spoke of a man being big enough to stand by and set a woman free, of a man big enough to wait and watch and be a friend, a comrade. And Pidge, who had brought it all about, listened in a sort of terror which only a woman could understand. This thing which she had roused in him, this answer of deep, vague powers to her thoughtless challenge, frightened her now that it had come.

"Don't—oh, don't let's talk any more!" she said at last. "It's talk, Dicky—just talk. The doing is different; the doing is harder. What do we know of what life will fix for us to do day by day through the years? This thing is so hard that Miss Claes herself hated to let it out. It belongs to you differently than it belongs to me. I haven't anything to give for your friendship and association. I mean—you'll always want more than I can give."

He looked at her steadily for an instant.

"I don't want to be strangers again, Pidge. I want to stand by and wait."

"You won't know better than to build pictures while you wait. No one would. You will wait—while you're away, making pictures about me that I am not. I don't know why I'm chosen to hurt you. If I hadn't been so utterly lost in myself, I never could have brought this on. I feel that I have started a new set of conditions to bring you to another moment—another gash—like in this room the last time we were together. And oh, Dicky Cobden, I don't want to! It's better to be strangers; to be common and hateful and avoid each other is so much more simple and easy."

"I'll stop talking, Pidge," he said quietly. "It may be easier to be strangers, but it doesn't look rosy to me. Don't you worry about it. It is my job, and I'll take a chance."

"You don't know what you're saying!"

"Perhaps not. We won't talk about that any more. Now, Pidge, I'm keeping these rooms while I'm away. Wouldn't you—wouldn't you for me—look after them—look in on them and keep them alive while I'm gone? It would make me feel like—great, you know."

THREE nights later, when she reached Harrow Street from the factory, Pidge found two letters. One was from the office of the *Public Square*, in John Higgins' writing.

> At the suggestion of Mr. Cobden, just before he left for South Africa, I am offering you a position here as reader of the unsolicited manuscripts. Mr. Cobden hints that you know enough about the *Public Square* to realize we cannot be lavish in salaries, but I think we can at least pay you what you are getting now, to begin with—and the work will be different.

"Oh, Dicky Cobden!" she exclaimed.

For many minutes she sat in the center of her own cot, breathing the sweetness of the release from the factory. Friendliness like this art of Dicky's had a steady, powerful pull.

It made her eyes smart now—the new

work. It was easier to take it from him—away. It was a soft cloak that she could nestle in because he wouldn't see——

Miss Claes knocked. Pidge read in her eyes that she already knew.

"No one can ever tell you anything!"

"I'm so glad you want it, Pidge. I couldn't tell him for sure that you'd take it."

"They really need somebody, don't they?"

"Mr. Cobden said you wouldn't be in doubt about that after you got there."

"I'm going to take it," Pidge said soberly. "I know it means something more than it looks—but I'm going to take it! Also, I'm going down after supper—and sit there—in his parlor. I haven't entered since——"

Miss Claes was called from below. Pidge felt the second letter in her hand. It was from Los Angeles, in her father's writing. A check dropped out on the cot. By powerful effort of will, Pidge left it there until she had read the note.

> At this time it seems well for me to send you money. Hard as it has been for me to refrain, I felt before this that it was best for you to face New York alone, unaided. As there is a new generation, my child, there is a new fatherhood which dares—dares even to allow a heart's darling to struggle alone, dares to say "hands off" to all the untransmuted emotions which rush forth to shield his fledgling from the world——

Fifty dollars! Pidge sank back and softly batted her pillow with one loose arm. She laughed in a smothery, uncertain way that was not of joy. It was as if she heard his voice in the room—the new parenthood, the new generation, the adjustment of motive to moment. He had been forced to restrain himself from sending money before! He was so ignorant of others in his grandness of self that he despised their perspicacity and remained in utter ignorance of how he was looked at or how his antics and whims appeared from outside. But he did mainly get them across—that was the ghastly part.

IT WAS true that her father had taught her some of the deepest things in books. In his study she had caught certain inner meanings of inaccessible literatures before she had learned to spell simple words of English. Because his eyes hurt, she had read aloud for hours, day after day, tomes out of Asia which she had no care or thought to understand, but from which volatile, fairylike impressions came to rest in the depths of her heart. She had loved the few central springs of books in a house of books until she realized that her father read but lived them not, that he expounded, exhorted upon them—but his life was his own twisted rag. That was when her heavens cracked—when, half as old as now, in the great pain, she had set out to be honest and erect, if only as tall as a gnome.

The thought that came now, had come before. It was the passion to be what *he was not* which had made her rush forth to be straight in her own head—to refuse to lie to herself—to go to the other extreme of fierceness and bleakness and ill temper, rather than lie to herself—to be plain and true, if she had to be a self-hater, a man-hater, a poison-face!

Pidge sat up straight. This position on the *Public Square* also came because of his training—no matter how she hated the old life.

'But where did he get the money?" she muttered at last.

She went to the open window. April, and not garbage, breathed up to her from the stone floor of the area to-night—magic April, breathing up through the trampled earth and the degraded pavements. Suddenly a soft love stole over her. It was love of the April dark.

She heard the sounds of the city over the buildings, over into the stillness of Harrow Street, like the far tread and clatter of a pageant. Mother Nature was actually perceptible in this soft air, and something that Pidge answered to as never before in New York. Her hands stretched out to touch the casings of the window; the old wood gave her an additional warmth. It belonged to this house of Miss Claes, this house of the mystery of kindness. This was a house with a heart. It was her house. She could breathe in it now, at least for a little. The numbness and dumbness of the factory had fallen away. The softness stole over her toward Fanny Gallup and the other girls who must still stay at the bench. She would never forget. She had earned an understanding of them, and had been released—"released" was the word. But something would carry her back to them one day, something born in that slow madness of monotony.

She crossed the room and opened the door

into the hall. Supper-smells came up to her, the murmur of voices behind the shut doors. The warmth stole into her from the halls. Everybody was hungry to-night—the spring hunger—and everybody celebrated, as a festival. April was breathing in herself; that was why she was awake to this outer delight. If she could only keep it! It would always be in externals if she could only keep it alive within. She laughed a little bitterly. Of course she was elated, because the factory had dropped away, because the new position had opened, because the check had come—though she felt something queer about that—because Cobden and Miss Claes were fashioned of unswerving kindnesses which she suddenly realized as never before.

"It's money and place, and I'm 'falling for' it, venturing to be pleased with myself—" She laughed again. "But, oh, it is so cheerful, so restful to feel New York like this, just for to-night!"

PIDGE read manuscripts in the office of the *Public Square*. She saw them first. The large part of them were seen by no one else. It was like being a telephone-girl in a way, dipping into the secrets of a thousand houses. But it was much more subtle than that—the secrets more soulful and revelatory. She saw the hopelessness of life. She saw love, hopelessly uninviting love—puppy-love, nasty love, and much of the "kidding," clever love that is being made in America, and is proud of itself for that. But over all there seemed an anguish on the part of male and female, old and young, *to express*. Before her were secrets of those dying for expression, in her hands the progeny. She loathed the desire everywhere, because she had the same desire herself.

Hundreds of times, as she read, she saw herself—like a bandit who has held up a train, rushing to the caves of the big town to sort out his treasure—packing her bag in Los Angeles and flying to New York to deliver a book that had waited overlong for birth in her brain. Her book had been handled by men and rejected, even as these.

She had fatigued her body in the mill. She tired her heart in the office of the *Public Square*, reaching Harrow Street with something in her breast all sore and shamed. This was the queer, strenuous part—the shame of it all. She, too, had fallen into expressing herself, and they had been kind. Miss Claes had been kind, and she knew. But Dicky Cobden and John Higgins had been kind, though they hadn't known the author of the "Lance." They would never know. And this was New York, the market-place; and John Higgins sat near, and always he held his face nearer the manuscripts toward the end of the days, the eyes more tired and dim in the late hours.

"Miss Musser," he called one afternoon at the end of the first month, "I wish you would go out and see what this"—he picked up a card from his desk and lifted it close to his spectacles—"this Rufus Melton really has to say. We took a story of his a year ago, called 'Dr. Filter,' and now he's sent in a raft of junk. Dicky liked that 'Filter' story, and it proved out. Dicky hunted up Melton, but I haven't met him personally. These things aren't his best work. Kid stuff, I take it, and he figures on using the *Public Square*."

"Is it all to go back?"

"Oh, I don't mean to have you carry the bad news—just prepare him for it. Tell him I can't come out. Tell him what you like—anything to take the light out of him. I'm a hound, or I'd go myself—but this isn't one of my good days."

In the reception-room a young man rose to meet her as she spoke the name: "Mr. Melton?" It was the handsome type of face you would expect to see on one of the cars of Hollywood Boulevard, among the movie-plants. There was a catch in Pidge's throat, as she said:

"Mr. Higgins asked me to tell you he was occupied, Mr. Melton. His report will go to you in a day or two."

He was looking down at her—the young man who had written the little twisted fury of a tale, called "Dr. Filter," which Dicky had brought to her from the files of the *Public Square*. She sensed that he regarded her as an office-girl, not as a reader. He couldn't have been more than twenty-three or -four. He knew that her words portended an evil fate for his submittals. It was not hurt alone in his eyes, but rage, too—eyes of an actor.

Now his gaze was lost in her hair, as if he found hope there. Story-failures and New York, fear and its tough core of hunger—for Pidge fancied he looked hungry—these amounted to one thing; but red hair

was another. He seemed to be wondering if he had better go any further with that red hair—if he had time to play. He didn't seem to consider whether she wanted to play or not, only whether the game were worth the while of one whose law was not to let any real chance slip. Pidge had forgotten the hurt of her editorial message. She had a pronounced feeling that she wanted to hurt him some way herself.

"So I can't see Mr. Higgins?"

"He's been unusually rushed to-day."

He laughed a little bitterly, as if he understood all that.

"Are you—are you his secretary?"

"No. An under reader."

"I see. Have you been through any of my stuff?" Pidge glanced at him resentfully; she felt he wouldn't have asked such a question of a man. "It's a sort of showdown with me," he went on. "I'm leaving New York. I hoped to see Mr. Higgins."

His dilemma seemed real. It pulled her out from herself—the pathos of it.

"I'm sorry——"

"Perhaps you— I'd have to know before to-morrow—there's a story on my machine, just finishing—seems to have its glads on. If—if you would read it, there is just a chance that you might really want to get it to Mr. Higgins before to-morrow afternoon."

"Perhaps——"

"I was hoping for a good word from one of the other stories first," he added, entirely involved in his thoughts for the moment. "This new one is my last wallop. Might I bring it to you, anywhere you say, this evening?"

"You may leave it with Miss Claes at Fifty-four Harrow Street."

"Are you Miss Claes?"

"No; but she will give it to me."

"Could I call later in the evening, also, for your answer? It is only four or five thousand words."

"You know my reading is merely—I mean, Mr. Higgins would have to decide."

"But it would help—if the story pleased you."

"You may leave it with Miss Claes at the basement entrance and call a little later."

Pidge found herself walking on tiptoe back to her desk, the catch still in her throat.

The manuscript was delivered while Pidge was out at supper. She took it up-stairs to Cobden's "parlor" and read with a nervous interest and an uncomfortable feeling that Rufus Melton was looking down at her all the time. She didn't lose herself in the story, but had a feeling that she might have done so another time—especially if the manuscript had come to her in the usual way at the office. Certainly it was different and distinctive compared to the run of the unsolicited. It was artful, if not art.

This was a story of the Tunisian sands, written, she decided, by one who hadn't been there—one who saw the desert as the average American reader would expect, but with additional flat-footed bits of color tramped down with audacity. Moonlight was different in Tunisia, and morals were different—freer than here. For Pidge, there was the glitter of the snake's eye through the pages. It made her think of a sick man in a gorgeous robe.

She had inferred from Melton's talk that this story was new—in fact, that it was still hot from the machine. Yet the manuscript didn't feel new; the front and back pages showed wear. Could she have misunderstood? It had freedom—not the freedom of ignorance but the freedom of a drifting ship. Its anchor dragged; its compass was uncentered. It cried out, "My God, I am free!" and it was—as a derelict is free.

AT A quarter to ten she heard the bell in the basement hall, heard Miss Claes directing Melton to the next floor. Pidge would not have had it this way, but people of the house were in the basement. He came out of the dim stairway, walking wide, his soft cap crumpled in his hand, elbows out. He must have learned her name from Miss Claes.

"Please don't think, Miss Musser, that I fail to realize how much I am asking—this favor of you to-night."

There was a sort of lift and draw to the way he took her hand; at the same time his shoulders and head bent down upon her. This thing he was playing to-night was college-boy—clumsy subtlety of a big boy coming home and greeting his sister—seeing in her, at the moment of greeting, something of the charm other boys might see. He walked round her under the light, laughing, apologizing, making a humorous picture

of his own tension at the *Public Square* that afternoon.

"I went there like an anarchist." He laughed. "I was prepared to get my answer or blow up the place. I had to laugh afterward—the way I seized upon you."

"I have read the Tunis story," she said. 'Of course, you know it is really unimportant what I think. I liked it well enough, but was not carried away. I might have been another time. That's how treacherous a reading is. I felt the color vivid enough—in fact, color is the main asset of the story, but it seemed a bit thick——"

He laughed aloud. He was bending to her again and, most benignly, college big brother still in his manner and voice.

"I could tone that down, of course. The trouble is to get a thing like that straight when you know the country as I do. I ought to have kept off Tunisia——"

"You have been there?"

"That's the worst of it, Miss Musser. I went through hell for that story. Too much feeling to write with, you understand." Pidge was confused at her own error. "I've already asked too much of you. I'm sorry," he said ingenuously. "One can't force his things through this way. Why, I'd have given the whole six stories to the *Public Square* for a hundred dollars, and taken the cheapening that comes to an author from a trick like that. That's how I needed an answer."

HE HAD glanced up at the light as he spoke—a white, haggard smile, that bloodless look round the mouth. Pity caught and controlled her. She had done him an injustice already. She had committed a breach in her own sense of values in counting his color faked.

"You spoke of leaving New York for the West," she said. He laughed and shrugged, palms held upward. "How far? I mean—where is your home?"

He pointed to his cap lying on the arm of a chair as if to say that was all the home he had.

"I've got an aunt in Cleveland who wants me," he added. "A little quiet house away out on one of the cross-streets from Euclid, where there's a room and eats and a place to write. I'll start to walk, I guess."

"Where are you staying in New York?"

He was laughing at her.

"A little den up in Union Square—just a skylight. It's a cell, Miss Musser, and even there I have to stay out until midnight to sneak in without meeting the landlady. Did you ever sleep in a room that had no window?"

"Mine has a window," Pidge said.

"Then this isn't yours?" He pointed to the closed folding doors of the inner room.

"Oh, no! Mine is up higher, but it has a window. This is just a sitting-room we sometimes use—Miss Claes and I—the lodger being away."

"Oh," he said queerly, then added, with his haggard smile. "So the color was put on too thick—that's too bad."

"Does Mr. Higgins know that you have been over there in the desert?" Pidge asked.

"I figured he would, but maybe he will decide as you did—that I sat here in New York and stabbed at that setting."

"I'll place the story before him to-morrow. I could say to him that you've been to the desert——"

"Oh, I wouldn't! Don't tell him that. I was hoping, though, that you could tell him you liked it." Pidge now looked up into a smile almost childlike in its eager purpose. "Couldn't you tell him that? Couldn't you tell him that—just for what others may find in the story?"

The catch was in her throat again. His hand rested lightly upon her shoulder; his smile was altogether disarming in its wistfulness. She thought he couldn't mean what he said. She thought of this boy of whims and imaginations in a room with no window and the pallor round his mouth. She didn't like any of it, but did not feel exactly separate from it. She thought of a little box up-stairs in her own room, of the uncashed check her father had sent. She was in a blur, but not really frightened—the sense of belonging to his dilemma over all.

"You can't mean for me to tell Mr. Higgins what I don't believe. I'll ask him to read the story to-morrow. If he's against it, I could—I could help you to pay for the room in Union Square, or—enough to get to Cleveland."

Then the thing happened which she would have apprehended except for her pity and personal involvement in his trouble. She was drawn in between the open flaps of his coat, and held there against the soft shirt

which he wore. And all through her were his whispers and soft, delighted laughter from lips that pressed into her hair and cheeks, searching for her own.

She finally pushed him from her, and they stood apart under the lamp. For a moment they stared. Then it seemed as if he studied her, as one who suddenly revalues, doubles the value of an object. It was the queerest, intensest scrutiny, his head cocked to one side, the light and laughter returning to his eyes and lips.

"I knew I wasn't safe to come here," he said. "I knew if you did like the story, I wasn't safe to hear it. It was the idea of getting enough money to escape from that room, to get back to Cleveland and find myself—" Still she stared at him. "I don't suppose you can ever forgive me, but it broke me wide open—to find what a ripping sport you are, Miss Musser."

"That's about enough words," she said. He looked down. "To-morrow," she went on in a dreary tone, "you may come here—I mean to the basement entrance—at seven in the evening, and I will tell you Mr. Higgins' decision. If it's against the story, I will do as I said about your room-rent and the fare to Cleveland."

His hands went out to her.

"After what I did—you still want to do that?"

"Yes; and now please go."

Pidge was up in her own room minutes afterward before she realized that it had happened under that white lamp of Cobden's "parlor."

LATE the next afternoon, in the editorial rooms of the *Public Square*, John Higgins leaned back from Melton's manuscript to remark:

"It isn't straight stuff, Miss Musser. You can see him *making* a story in every line. He has the formula for a story—color, adventure, love-interest, just as they tell you how to do it in the correspondence-schools. A man's a fool before he learns technic," he added. "He's a cripple while he's learning it. When he's learned it, and forgotten he's learned it, he begins to be a workman. That's the freedom of knowledge."

Rufus Melton came to the basement entrance at seven. Miss Claes had gone upstairs, or out to dinner, and Pidge let him in. Melton looked older; his back had a curious droop. He glanced at her ruefully and round the room. Pidge stood beside the table.

"Mr. Higgins didn't care for your story," she said. "It has happened unluckily all round."

His head had bowed before she began to speak. It did not lift now.

"I expected it," he said slowly. "I think the hardest thing I ever did was to come here to-night. Only one thing made it possible. I'd have started West—only, New York is a curious old dump."

"How is that?"

"You have to go north to go west. I mean the only way out is north for a pedestrian."

"You haven't enough for the ferry or the tunnel?" Their eyes met. "What I said last night holds good, you know."

He turned slowly to the door as if in indecision, and Pidge watched. She knew she could make him take the money, but she wanted him to be ready to die first. All her little doubts would be washed clean if he could refuse the money.

"There was nothing in the other stories, either?" he asked.

Pidge was white. She felt like an executioner.

"The package was mailed back to you to-day."

For just an instant his head was bowed again, half turned to the door. Then he veered round and his hand came out to hers.

"Good-night," he said.

"Good-night. But you—that quiet room in Cleveland——"

He shook his head, with a slow, dawning smile.

"It's great to know you. I've heard about such people being here in the Village, but it's—'it's fourteen miles from Schenectady to Troy.'"

"It's a long way to Albany before that."

"It's a long way to One Hundred and Tenth Street, Miss Musser, but it is easier than taking money from a girl."

She breathed relief.

"I came to fight it out here in New York on the same terms you did," she said. "You can return the money."

Now his back was toward her, his face uplifted. She saw his hand grope for the knob of the door and his shoulders rock

weakly. She caught his arm and pulled him back to a chair.

"You see, you really couldn't get away."

He had suffered her to lead him to a dining-room chair, and sat very still, his head tilted back, eyes closed. She took the little package of bills from her dress and tucked it into his hand. There were voices in the hall; a vague frown crossed his white temples.

"What is it?" he said queerly.

"You are faint. I'll go with you to a near place for something to eat. That's all you need. Come—if you can walk a little ways."

He stood in a sort of confusion, holding the folded bills in his hand.

"Put that in your pocket," she said, but he did not seem to comprehend.

They were in the street, her hand steadying him. They found a dim restaurant with a counter and a few tables. He did not speak until the waiter came; then he asked for coffee. Pidge had taken the money and thrust it into his coat pocket. Now she was tormented with the fear that he would lose the small roll, not knowing that he had it. She had not brought her own purse. He would be forced to pay; then he would have to see what he had.

He drank the coffee first, and then ate sparingly.

"I learned that in the desert," he said at last.

"Learned what, please?"

"Not to go mad over the taste of food when one has been without."

There was charm in his table-manners. The girl who waited on the table looked devotedly into his profile as she served. Twice, as he started to speak, the Sixth Avenue elevated crashed by outside and he seemed to forget what he meant to say. It was more true here in the restaurant than it had been in the house in Harrow Street—that he was wonderfully good to look upon. The realization held a small tumult for her. She was altogether different with him than with any one else. They had finished, and still he lingered.

"I'm sorry. I hadn't intended to come out. I left my bag up-stairs. Will you please pay?" To his illness a look of embarrassment was now added. "It's in your pocket. Right there."

She pointed to his coat, and he drew out the bills wonderingly.

"Oh, I remember," he said dully.

While the waitress was away bringing the change, he shoved the rest of the money across the table to Pidge, but she pushed it back, saying quietly:

"I want you to fix up the room-rent and get a night train West. We'll say no more."

His lips whitened.

"Let's get out in the dark," he said roughly.

They walked back to Eighth Street and over to Fifth Avenue, entering the square that way. The sooty grass was soft and damp, the faintest trace of fog among the trees.

"You've got something on me," he was saying strangely. "You're not like a girl, but like a woman, and a pal, too. You had something on me last night, or I wouldn't have fallen for you that way."

"When you get back to that room—perhaps a real story will come of all this."

"A real story?"

"Not just a story, not just a good story, but one of the stories that are always just ahead, that we so rarely catch up to."

"A real story," he repeated.

His eyes were bright and the pallor of his face intense enough to be visible. She was conscious of his appealing charm as his head inclined to her, and she heard his words in the lowest possible tone:

"Meeting you—that is the real story."

She pushed away his hand that had lifted to hers.

"You're all right now. I'm going back. Good-night and good luck!"

He made no attempt to detain her.

THAT night, Pidge lay for a long time without sleep. She was forlorn, troubled and restless, but underneath it all there was a queer little throb of happiness, like the April night of the two letters. It would not be stifled. Every time she could get still enough, she was conscious of it, like the song of a bird that kept on and on but was only audible in the lulls of almost unbroken traffic. She woke in the night with the thought of him speeding westward on his train.

The next night, when she came home, there was another letter from Los Angeles; another check dropped out, and a clipping, which she read first—the wedding announcement of "Adolph Musser, the noted

metaphysician, and Mrs. Harris Hastings, wealthy widow of the late Rab Gaunt Hastings, firearms manufacturer of New England, at the Byzantine," and so forth.

Pidge didn't have her guard up. The choke and the shame were too swift for her self-control. For the first time in many days the tears broke—the extra-scaldy sort. If she had only been permitted to keep that first check uncashed for a few days longer!

The next was a day of dulness and misery, a May day of rain. Crossing Broadway, as she hurried to luncheon, she passed Rufe Melton in the crowd. Her lips parted to call, but she checked in time. He hadn't seen her.

She found herself standing loosely in the traffic, her hand to her mouth, until a taxi-driver roared at her, and she swung into the stream of people again and reached the curb.

PIDGE was leveled with personal shame. Try as she would, she lacked the ability to detach herself from Rufus Melton as from the influence of her father. She had felt the boy's power over her, and knew innately that she would feel it again—that this sort of thing wasn't a mere touch and go, that meetings like this have twined roots underneath.

Late in June a letter came to her from Cobden, who was at Coquilhatville on the equator:

> Oh, yes; you and Miss Claes knew a lot more than I did that night at Tara Subramini's. I shot off a lot of words afterward. Never again! But I'm going to stay with it, Pidge.
>
> I think so much about you. Of course, this isn't news to you, but I say it, because it is so different from what I thought it would be. Something snapped when I got to Kong. I can remember you, but I can't *feel* you any more. It all comes out bluntly. Don't mind. All fat and decoration are sweated off down here. I reach out to you just the same. Only, in New York I thought that we were both wrapped in the same sort of film—a tinted, filmy sort of glamour that stretched out as we went different ways. That film was stretched too hard. When I reached the river, it snapped. I think I'll never get over feeling this awful isolation of being a separate creature from everybody, worst of all from you.

Next morning, in the office, John Higgins called her in to his desk.

"Dicky has sent in some stuff. We begin to publish in August."

He took off his spectacles and wiped them on the flap of his necktie. His eyes looked watery, as if the light had run out in tears.

"I've always heard that the Cobdens were honest. Tradesmen to the core, but honest—three generations of honest men. They have built something, Miss Musser. Not a business; that's well enough, but they've built a man. Listen——"

He opened the manuscript and read paragraphs at random.

"It is so for pages and pages," John Higgins went on. "Every word standing out if you get the hang of it—no tint, no art; just words, pain-born, separate, like boulders in a field. He has no hopes, yet he writes what he sees. Something seems to have happened to our Dicky besides Africa."

Summer days in New York, sleepy, stewy days. The low clouds made the nights hot. Pidge was used to the "high sky" of southern California, where every inch of shadow meant coolness, where cool night fell quickly, no matter how hot it had been in the sun, where there were no afterglows or afterheats, and you wanted a wrap the instant the sun went down. The meaning of summer in New York became a cruel meaning in the little room off the area.

Pidge went through Dicky's articles from the Kong, and spoke of them afterward to Miss Claes.

"He sees everything different from the way I would see it," she was saying. "He sees what he sees the same at ten in the morning and at ten at night. His coming to Harrow Street didn't mean a whim. His part that night of the Punjabi dinner, didn't mean a whim. Oh, but I'm so glad he hasn't started out to save the world!"

"Richard Cobden is not without good taste," said Miss Claes.

"I feel so ungrateful for not missing him more," Pidge went on, "for not being more interested in what you and John Higgins seem to see is happening to him. But, oh, Miss Claes, I don't belong! I'll always be Dicky Cobden's hangman, always hurting myself more."

They were standing close together under the light in Cobden's "parlor."

"Nothing matters to me but myself," Pidge moaned. "I'm hopelessly lost in myself—that's what's the matter! What room have I for Africa or Downing Street or Dicky Cobden's world-service? There's more to me in the struggle of John Higgins

not to get drunk—in the body-hunger and body-love of Fanny Gallup and the lies of Rufus Melton. I can understand *worlds*—oh, I can see the nations like chessmen on the table! But I can't fix Fanny Gallup. I can't fix Rufus Melton. I can't fix myself!"

PIDGE heard about the assassinations in Bosnia as wearily as of a murder in little Sicily. She heard rumors of war in Europe with *ennui*—how could there be energy enough left in the human race to make war? She met Nagar in the lower hall at Harrow Street on the evening that war became a fact. He looked like a dead man walking in the twilight. She didn't see Miss Claes at all that night. The next day, in the office, war began to show its personal aspects to Pidge Musser, of Los Angeles. John Higgins was hours late in returning from lunch. She saw that he wouldn't be down at all to-morrow. He looked old. He had on a black frock coat, as if dressed for pall-bearing, though his face looked as if he were about to be borne himself. The little office was funny, sweetish.

"Our blessed Savior moves in mysterious ways," he remarked.

She started out, but was called back.

"I need an audience, Miss Musser. I need a female ear. I need a lot of ladylike sympathy. It isn't sweet of you to run off."

"What's the matter?"

"Dicky Cobden hasn't written a line for the world. That's what's the matter."

"But the copy is all there—there under your hand."

"Not a line fit for use now. We have cabled Dicky to come in, though he's probably started."

"I wish you would explain."

John Higgins breathed a minute before words.

"With Belgium killing herself to keep the Germans out of France, doesn't it occur to you that even a new angle on Belgium's sins on the Congo is about as much in time and place right now as Paul Revere's ride?"

Pidge was presently permitted to escape.

Back at her own desk, she could only recall the one point—that Richard Cobden was coming back, that he was doubtless on the way.

Three weeks later she heard he was in town, that John Higgins had seen him the night before. All that day at the office she kept listening for his step and voice, but he didn't come. His car was in front of the Harrow Street house, however, when she reached there, and a light showed between the doors from his "parlor." She lost some of the sense of suffocation when she saw that—a curious gladness for a moment. She tapped the door with her finger-tip, pulled the curtain aside ever so little and said,

"Hello!"

A quick step in the inner room; then he was before her in the doorway, drawing her in under the light.

"Pidge! Pidge!" he repeated.

The boyish look was gone from him. He might have been taken for ten years older. The thing had happened that takes place abruptly in many Americans, more among business men than artists. Youth had been put away, its trace of divine humor exchanged for adult seriousness.

"So sorry about your *Public Square* letters. Why didn't you come to the office, Dicky?"

"I wanted to see you here—like this."

They were standing under the light.

"You are different," she said.

"John Higgins said that. They told me so at home up-town. I feel different, but it isn't an improvement. And you, Pidge—you're taller. When I was away, I never could think of you as a child, still growing."

"How did I seem to you?"

"A woman, finished—one I couldn't catch up with."

"Finished, I—" Pidge laughed. "I feel about as finished—as Europe. But everything *is* different, isn't it?"

She kept thinking about the change in him. If this were selflessness, she liked him better before. He was quite unselfish enough, she thought. She could appreciate the honest limitations of people in bondage to their faults and passions. She didn't see the fight in him because it was so subtly identified with herself. She only knew that he seemed without fight.

"Get on your things, Pidge. We'll go out somewhere——"

That was the beginning of strange days and evenings. She was with him a great deal. Often they lunched together, having impressively agreed to be friends—great friends and desireless—a friendship based on

liberty, not "brother and sister," but "comrade" was the word they used.

A WEEK after his return she was taken to the Cobden home, a new and terrifically complicated modern apartment in East Fiftieth Street, but the furnishings, the household ceremonials, the people themselves suggested prints of New York interiors in 1870—respectable, established, grim. The gradual speeding-up of the world for a half-century to the madness of Nineteen fifteen ended with the click of the key in this hall door, and you were in the world of another day, with a spinster aunt, a widowed mother, an unmarried sister, a slowly disintegrating grandfather and Dicky himself, not in a different guise at all —the same courteous, dignified, sincere Dicky, but now, to Pidge Musser's Western eyes, utterly, revealingly comprehensible. This was the place that had made him. This was his reason for being.

Here life was life. Here was the family unit, the family a globe, all human society moving outside like the water round a bubble—a closed globe reflecting all else in curious unreality. Here threescore and ten was life and a very long time. Life wasn't a spiritual experiment in matter, not an extension in matter of a soul that had made innumerable such experiments, but straight workaday threescore and ten, with oblivion at the birth-end and heaven or hell at the other.

Pidge Musser wanted to scream, not at the limitations but at the kindness which was showered upon her. She felt that her next word would ruin everything.

"Oh, Dicky," she said, when they were in the car again, "I see! I understand! How did you dare open those doors to me?"

"What is it that troubles you so?"

"Myself—always and forever myself! Oh, don't you see I have nothing to do with *them?* Why, you are comfortable—your people are comfortable! *This* is life to you—this, here and now! It isn't to me. Life's an exile to me, a banishment and coldness and pain. In all New York there are not two such opposites. My God is far away. Yours is here—a Person."

"It's queer," he said in a dull and hopeless way. "I stand to you as the most staid and changeless person, but to my family I am dangerous, a fulminant. They love and trust me, but watch me with fierce concern. Already I have broken more Cobden convictions in twenty-five years than all my relatives in all their years."

"You've let me understand too much for one Sunday afternoon," she said in an awed voice, "and it's colder and lonelier than ever before." His face turned wearily toward her from the lights of the street. "I see that it means fate to you, Dicky, when you say, 'Yes' or 'No.' I see that you turn to a girl to stay. I see you don't cheat." She sank back, laughing. "I wonder if it will stay as deadly clear as this."

"You are not making it quite clear to me," he said.

"I must. Oh, I must! Dicky, please open your soul and listen to me—hard, hard! While it's clear, I must talk. You have chosen to be my friend. You have chosen not to take the easier course of hating me. I understand all that better now than on the night of the Punjabi dinner."

"I do, too," said Cobden. And bitterness of the African rivers was in his words.

"Do I have to begin by saying how dear you are—how kind, how utterly good it is to know you, what it means to have faith and trust in one man?"

"Please not, Pidge!"

"But never forget it, Dicky. It's the pedestal upon which everything's builded. Always remember that I know you underneath, that I turn to you in trouble—not like a brother or father or lover, but what our word 'comrade' means—what it will mean in ages to come! That's you. But, Dicky, because I know you—I can look away. Don't you see? You're like something done. Having found you, I can turn to other things."

"I'll try to see that, but most people find each other differently, to stay——"

"It's because they don't find what I've found. I don't know what I want; only, I know there are terrible undone things in me that other people stir to life. Fanny Gallup means more to me than Europe. I'm lost in persons. Miss Claes and Nagar lose themselves in nations. You're getting to be like that, but I see it all in the personal."

Their car had come to a stand in the stillness of Harrow Street, but still they sat.

"What you mean is—you haven't any place for me as a lover or a husband."

"That's like you, but that's it. Dicky, you mean to me something done, something found. I don't dare turn to you and rest. The savage, undone things in me *won't* rest. They demand experiences, life—and no one knows better that they mean pain—and, oh—under your lamp— It's horrible to tell it, but you'll forgive me later, when you see that it had to be told——"

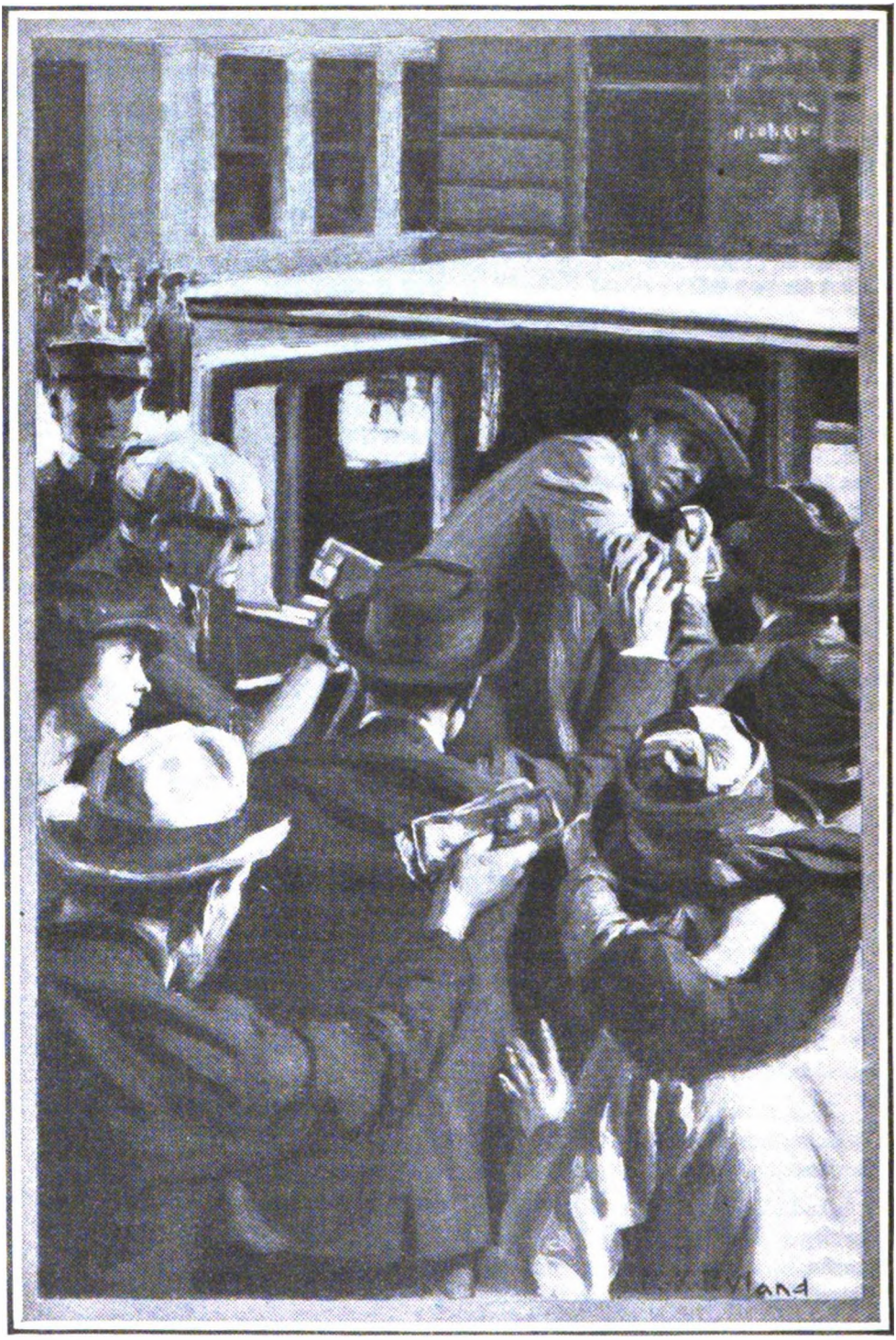
"What are you talking about, Pidge?"

"Under your lamp—in there. He came about a manuscript. He was broke and needed help—all his stories refused. He asked to see me that night. Miss Claes's basement was full. She sent him up. We talked. He wanted something, money, everything. Under your light—he took me to him, his coat open——" Cobden startled her as he cleared his throat. The silence between them had been so deep. "It meant nothing to him. He was used to it. It was only his way to get something—money most—he wanted. It was just as he might take a waitress or hall-maid—used to having girls fall for him. This is what I mean, though I understand him—a theatrical mind, a liar— Life meant something to me that instant that it never meant before. Something I must do, something calling—pain, but something I haven't done!"

"You mean—you mean—it isn't over?"

"Just that, Dicky, and oh, forgive me! I may not see *him* ever again, but something in me isn't 'over.' I had to tell you—to be honest, to learn to be honest! You'll be glad some day!"

"Something calling." Well, Pidge sets out in response to this call. And what happens to her is begun to be told in the next instalment of this remarkable story See March EVERYBODY'S—out February 15th.



Men and women together struggled to arrest him in his dash for the waiting taxi-cab, some with money in their hands.

Once Chance Nodded

This Writer, a Well-Known Student of Wall Street, Is to Be Congratulated as the Author of a Story in Which Fiction and Truth Are Successfully Blended

By Garet Garrett

Illustration by R. K. Ryland

ONLY the day before we had been talking about it, but whimsically, and not as anything that could ever happen.

Nothing of the slightest interest to any of us was taking place in the stock-market; yet we stood there at the ticker, as Wall Street people do, a silent, preoccupied group, idly watching prices move up and down—*up* and *down*.

"Isn't it funny?" said Riggs.

His imagination had accidentally perceived the accessories of our trade in a detached, unexpected way, as a mechanic might of a sudden, for the first time in his life, see a monkey-wrench not as a tool familiar to his hand but as a thing, a form in itself, and think it very strange.

"You mean the stock-market?" said Terry.

"Suppose you popped in from Mars or somewhere," said Riggs, "and never had heard of Wall Street. What could you make of it? A thousand or more of these queer machines, all uttering identical figures on a paper ribbon; at every machine a group of intelligent men gazing anxiously into the glass dome from ten to three as a day's work. The figures are continually changing. If the figures are repetitious, the gazers are bored. But if, say, the figures for Union Pacific change suddenly from seventy to sixty, men begin to behave madly. They shriek and rush about like ants, with no place to go but over the hill and back again. In a few minutes, newsboys are crying, 'Panic on the Stock Exchange!' And what has happened? The Union Pacific Railroad, which is the thing represented by the figure 'sixty' on the tape—it goes on operating placidly, loading, transporting and discharging freight. The next day the figure may be seventy again, and we are quieted."

While Riggs was speaking in this lightsome fashion, J. W. Atchison joined us and began to listen distantly. It was his ticker. The place we made free of on personal sufferance was his private office. And the stock-market itself was sometimes his. This you take on the testimony of the financial writers. When J. W. was in one of his dynamic eruptions as a speculator, they called it an "Atchison market," and futilely criticized his manipulation of stocks.

So you might think we would have to be careful of what we said on the subject of speculation in his hearing. But he was not that way at all. In the right spirit we could say anything we liked; and J. W. was often more interested or amused than he would let us see.

"And what are we all doing?" Riggs asked, nobody having answered him on his first premises. "Guessing with each other for money whether the next figure will be higher or lower. It looks as easy as heads or tails. Prices have to move vertically, either up or down. Therefore, you might think it was an even chance. That's the illusion. It isn't so. It's much harder to be right than wrong in the stock-market."

"How do you account for it?" J. W.

asked. He had been running the tape through his fingers, crimping it every few inches through nervous habit.

"I can't account for it," said Riggs. "Can you?"

"Two professional speculators in bad luck once came to me for help," said J. W.. "They wished me to let them trade in this office on credit until they could get started again. I gave them the credit. On the same day, at the same price, one sold and the other bought the same stock. Both of them lost."

"How?" asked Terry.

"First the stock went up," said J. W. "The one who had sold it for a fall concluded he was wrong and went out with a loss. The other, who had bought it, wouldn't take his profit. That was greed. He waited too long, and the stock went down again."

"Everybody knows how much easier it is to guess wrong than right," said Riggs. "It's no trouble at all to be wrong the odd time in three—twice wrong and once right. If one could only be right the odd time in three, one could get all the money there is."

Anse Holder spoke. He was J. W.'s partner—a huge, wordless man, whose few necessities of expression were normally satisfied by snorts, yawns, beginnings of gestures and symptoms of coma. You never know what will set a taciturn man off.

"I remember once," he said, "when faro gambling ran wide open in New York, there was a place in Ann Street where the deuce card got to winning. Every deal it won. Word went out, and players came from all over town to put their money on the lucky deuce. It won all that night and all the next day and all the next night, and the street outside was a riot. The house sent out of town for new dealers. Whoever dealt the deuce kept winning. There was no way to stop it, and the place shut up."

For a while we were silent. Wall Street people learn to treat the perversities of chance with deep respect. This is not superstition. It is a foreboding that whatever it is we call by that name is not chance but a law so far outside any law we know that we cannot imagine its terms.

"Suppose a man were to have a time of unerring in the stock-market," said Riggs, stimulated by Holder's tale. "It's imaginable, isn't it? You know of people who are infallibly wrong by a kind of strange fatality. Why shouldn't one happen to be infallibly right? How long would it take to break the game? Would the Stock Exchange shut up?"

"There's no analogy between chance and guessing," said J. W., with unwonted conviction. "The free play of chance requires an absence of thought. In guessing, there is thought, and thought bothers chance. In any game of so-called chance, the one who guesses or makes the choice is at a disadvantage. Chance against chance is even. Choice against choice may be even. But choice against chance is handicapped, and chance will win."

With this oracular saying, he left us. Holder yawned, and we called it a day.

Then it happened.

FOR several weeks floor-traders on the Stock Exchange had been quietly putting skids under the market. Now suddenly, all pushing together, they got it started, and it went for a merry fall. There was nothing serious the matter. It was a professional episode, all over in an hour—all save for a crazy commotion continuing in the customers' room up front.

J. W. Atchison & Company's front office, called the "customers' room," was always a noisy, populous place. We avoided it. J. W. never appeared there. Although it was a profitable part of the business, yielding enormous commissions in brokerage, he left the conduct of it to his manager.

The private office was meant to be soundproof, and it almost was. Never had the voice of the public been so penetrating. J. W. showed irritation as the noise went on and sent for the manager.

"What's going on outside there?" he asked.

"I can't stop them," said the manager. "They're running the life out of Archie Pine."

"For what reason?" J. W. asked.

"Being right on the stock-market this morning," said the manager.

"How—being right on the stock-market?"

"He called the stock-market this morning," said the manager. "Came in telling everybody to sell. Rang up all of his customers and got them out. Didn't give any reason at all. Just a hunch he had."

"That's what they're running him for?"

"Yes."

"Well, take him out to lunch," said J. W., "and stop that row."

"I can't," said the manager. "They've formed a syndicate to take him out to lunch."

"A syndicate?"

"It's a joke, of course," said the manager. "Ten of his customers calling themselves the 'Pine Syndicate' have all put in to give him a champagne lunch."

J. W. lowered, and the manager went back. We understood it perfectly. Probably J. W. understood it, too—only, he wouldn't have said so.

Archie Pine was a customers' man. The nature of that calling is not self-evident in the name. The man does not belong to the customers. They belong to him.

A customers' man is one with a clientele of lay persons who buy and sell stocks on his solicitation. He is not a broker, because his supporters are not numerous enough. He is a kind of subbroker who takes an office with a regular broker and brings his customers in. He is paid according to the amount of business his customers do in the stock-market. Therefore, it behooves him to keep them active—to get them in and out again as often as possible. Each time they get in and out, two commissions are made. He is full of tips and inside information. At a quarter past ten he excitedly calls his customers on the telephone and tells them to buy stocks; he has just learned that the Standard Oil crowd is buying everything in sight—surreptitiously. Maybe at a quarter to three he calls them all up again and says it is time to sell; the Standard Oil crowd has changed its mind. The reason the customers last so long, or at all, is that they make their money outside of Wall Street. When what they lose with the customers' man is more than they can afford, they work harder and make more. Thus production, in the economic sense, is increased for reasons you would never have thought of.

The advice of a customers' man to his clients is notoriously bad. The advice of Archie Pine to his followers was awful. It was so bad that when professional traders on the floor of the Stock Exchange were hard up for inspiration, or, as they say, for a "hunch," they would come over and ask Archie what he thought of the market, just in order to go and do the opposite. If he said, "Buy," they would go straightway back and sell; if he said, "Sell," they would buy. In this way, his lucklessness became a saying in Wall Street. Everybody knew his voodoo record—everybody save Pine himself. He probably had never given it one thought. His customers knew, for it was they who paid; yet they stuck to him.

Archie was one not easy to part with. Nobody could help liking him at sight. He had contagious youth, a good deal of artless manner and a cheerful, vacuous mind. He wept with his customers until they begged him not to take their losses so hard; whereat he laughed and said they would make it all back on the next good tip. One of his clients, a wealthy contractor, had been heard to say it was worth ten thousand a year to hear Archie's voice on the telephone each morning—he was so undiscouraged. He never touched the market on his own account.

What strange thing had happened to him that morning, he either could not or would not tell. All alone he had been right on the market. There had been no sign or rumor of the spectacular decline that took place in the first hour. But he no sooner reached the office than he began telephoning furiously to all his customers, telling them to sell out, and he had just got them out when prices began to fall. This experience so startled his customers that those who could left off with their work and came to Wall Street to congratulate him. They rode him hard, asking if it was a dream, or, perhaps, they said, he had learned at last to copper himself—to say "Sell" when he meant "Buy," and so on. He took their banter grinning. Then they pooled a portion of their profits and carried him off gleefully to lunch.

WE STOPPED in the customers' room to witness the return of the silly orgiasts. They had almost made a day of it. At half-past two they reappeared, all in high feather except Archie, who wore a plagued, ironic look. It was clear he had reached the point of not caring for it. Possibly the implications had begun to seep in.

On his desk he found a large, unusual package, which he opened suspiciously.

When Wall Street people unbend for fun, they do it hard. News of Archie's

feat having reached the floor of the Stock Exchange, the professional traders who knew him were at first incredulous and then ecstatic. They had sent him a trophy. The parcel contained a bull's tail wrapped in tissue-paper.

At sight of the weird object, his customers shrieked with joy. They insisted that he should wear it honorably round his neck and struggled to put it on him.

The meaning that lay in the tail was open to interpretation. A bull is one of the two great Wall Street symbols. The other is the bear. You might take it to mean that Archie had slaughtered the bull that morning and the tail was a token of the heroic deed. But the more probable meaning was that, having lost the hide of his customers aforetime by being always wrong on the market, he had succeded at last in saving the tail.

This latter was obviously the construction Archie himself put upon the matter, for he turned very mad and hurled the tail and all its wrappings at the waste-basket, which overturned under so large an order; and for the rest of the day the unsightly thing lay sprawled upon the floor, partially covered with scraps of paper, torn envelopes and office litter.

His customers continued to rally him, saying, "Well, now, Archie, what shall we do to be rich?" or, "Give us a sure tip for the close."

It was then twenty minutes to three and the stock-market was doggedly passive. Archie glanced once at the tape in an aimless manner, took several turns across the room, sat down at his desk and got up again, and suddenly cried:

"Sell them! They will break again before the close. Sell them!"

Any speculator in his right senses would have said, "Buy" instead of, "Sell." After such a break as that of the first hour under professional traders' hammering, the market ever since having been dull and solid, you would expect a recovery in prices at the close. Everybody did expect it. That was the normal thing to happen. However, Archie said, "Sell," giving no reason at all, and his customers, all as one, reached for the selling-blank pads, which had to be split up to go round. They were more boisterous than serious. Nobody sold much, because they all thought Archie was wrong; yet every one sold something—a hundred of this and a hundred of that. They did it as part of the day's lark.

Five minutes later they repented of not having been earnest. They wished they had sold thousands instead of hundreds. Against all probability, the market went suddenly very weak, almost panicky, and prices fell heavily. While the decline was taking place, nobody had eyes but for the ticker, and when it was over, the market having closed and we looked to see how Pine had been bearing up, he was gone.

"A perfect record ruined," said Riggs sarcastically, as we were leaving. "Until today, Pine was always wrong. Now he's like everybody else. He's been sometime right." And so we dismissed it, not knowing what we had seen the beginning of.

THE next morning Pine received a lot of messages from people not his customers and from professional traders on the Stock Exchange, now for the first time serious with him, all desiring to know what he thought of the market. The messages he tore into fine bits and scattered about the floor. He declined to give an opinion on the market—whereas normally he was voluble in that way—and called up none of his customers. Presently they began to call him up. He put them off. There was nothing to tell them, he said; better that they did nothing for a while.

At two o'clock the stock-market gasped and began to sink. When it acts like that, after two bad tumbles, with no rally intervening, you are in for something bad in the way of a fall, as any experienced speculator knows. All the shrewd traders rushed in and began selling again. Suddenly Pine went into action. He called on his customers to *buy!* They went to it strong this time, fairly deluged him with buying-orders. And they made a neat little killing of it, for prices, instead of falling, as they naturally should have done, went up very fast.

During the next day he was quiescent. But on the day after that he made another extravagant and unexpected guess, which turned out to be the luckiest one yet.

"What do you make of it?" Riggs asked.

"A freak," said Terry.

"Would you say a freak of that kind was a spree of chance?" asked Riggs, founding an argument.

"All right," said Terry. "What then?"

"Only this," said Riggs: "If chance is on a spree, there's no knowing what she may not do. Suppose Pine were to go on guessing right in this absurd manner."

"Don't bet on it," said Terry.

As the editor of a Wall Street paper, with a mind for the theory and philosophy of finance, Terry was like to be contemptuous of fanciful suppositions. He settled them out of hand.

"I'm thinking of something J. W. said," Riggs continued. "He said thought interfered with chance; hence the fact that in guessing it is harder to be right than wrong. The guesser usually thinks. I'm sure Pine never thinks. He may be the perfect instrument of chance."

"Pooh!" said Terry. "He'll come a nice spill, with all his customers plunging up to their necks."

He didn't. Terry was wrong. The thing was utterly preposterous; it couldn't happen. Yet it went on happening. Six, seven, eight, nine, ten times running Pine was right and never one time wrong.

If you can imagine people making a path through the desert—was it that or a wilderness?—to the hut of a man who contrived a better mouse-trap than any one else, compelled to their pilgrimage by an appreciation of excellence, fancy how they will be moved by the passion of cupidity toward a man who makes money for them by wizardry, without labor or effort of mind on their part!

THERE was no longer standing-room in the public office of J. W. Atchison & Company. The number of Pine's customers increased in geometric ratio. Word of him went everywhere. Nothing advertises itself so mysteriously as success in speculation. If he said, "Buy," the message: "Pine says buy them," was instantly flashed over all that interlocking private-wire system which radiates from Wall Street to every large city in the country. Then the buying-orders came pouring in, each time more than the time before. Professional traders now began, as the word is, to "copper" him, buying when he said, "Sell," and selling when he said, "Buy," doubling their play each time, certain that the spell would break, just as you have an irresistible impulse to bet heads and double after a coin has come ten or twelve times tail up. And they lost heavily, for the spell continued.

There were rumors, founded on suspicion and incredulity. One was that J. W. Atchison, as an adroit manipulator, always up to some new game, was himself the invisible author of this commotion, that he furnished Pine with his lucky opinions and made them good by manipulation of the stock-market, intending, when people were quite crazy, to give them one last wrong tip and scoop in their money.

This would have been intrinsically impossible. It is the kind of thing people who know nothing of the technical difficulties so easily imagine from the outside—imagine themselves doing, in fact, if they were only in the position of the one they suspect. On other grounds, we knew it was not so. We were inside. Our point of view was the private office, where we saw J. W. continually. He spent his time standing gloomily at the ticker, or walking about, or glowering from his ten-foot lair with the door open. The situation in the front office on account of Pine had become serious, and there was no obvious way to deal with it.

First was the fact that the house of J. W. Atchison & Company was exposed to a kind of notoriety which J. W. disliked extremely. The financial paragraphers now were writing about Pine in the newspapers. The matter couldn't be ignored as news. Stranger phenomenon had never occurred in Wall Street. Everybody, without distinctions of place or dignity, was beginning to talk about it. Great bankers such as pretend to be scornful of the kind of speculation which consists in guessing prices up and down were surprised in the act of reading some of those private-wire messages: "Pine says buy them," or "Pine says sell them."

There were those who preferred occult explanations, as that Pine possessed the faculty of prevision. Psychic researchers came to investigate, tarried and stopped to speculate.

The physical strain was intolerable. The customers' room having been swamped, the clamorous mob filled the hallway, jammed the building-entrance and began to obstruct traffic in the street. Police were detailed to keep it in order. Complaints were lodged by the tenants, who were hardly able to go to and fro.

And more serious still were the financial

lia'.ilities. Transactions in the stock-market for Pine's followers had reached enormous proportions. The clerical force was overwhelmed, working far into the night to catch up with the bookkeeping. If anything should happen—that is, when Pine's faculty or whatever it was should suddenly fail, as of course it would, there was sure to be trouble. And the consequences would fall upon J. W.'s house.

Meanwhile, Pine, as we got glimpses of him, appeared to be living in a daze. At the end of the day he had to be smuggled out the back way to escape a mobbing. Soon the crowd discovered his exit and besieged him there. Men and women together struggled to arrest him in his dash for the waiting taxi-cab, some with money in their hands, begging him to take it and multiply it. They discovered also where he lived in suburban New Jersey and cluttered his threshold.

At the beginning of the third week, the spell of rightness upon Pine enduring and the excitement dangerously increasing, J.W. came in one morning much disheveled from thrusting himself through the mass of people, saying to himself out loud:

"It's got to stop. I thought it would."

He sent for Pine. For half an hour they were shut up together in J. W.'s little room. When Pine emerged, he was serene and relaxed, quite like himself again, and, instead of returning to the front office, he went home.

In the customers' room it was announced that Mr. Pine would not be in again for some time. The crowd was mystified, disagreeable and vocal. Pine had become a popular hero. He was one who plucked money out of the stock-market and scattered it among the people. He had discovered a secret hitherto known only to a predatory few who employed it to get other people's money and make themselves rich. Therefore, he would be suppressed. No one would be permitted to turn the tables in that way. With such sultry mutterings, Pine's disappointed followers unwillingly melted away.

WE WERE curious to know what J. W. had done. It wasn't permissible to ask. We expected to find out later from Holder, who would be told; but he and J. W. went off together early, and for the rest of the day, as those who thought we should know kept asking us what had happened to Pine, we nodded our heads wisely and concealed our ignorance.

The next day we knew. It was revealed in an unexpected manner. Mrs. Archie Pine appeared in the private office, asking for J. W. She had got past Jim, the porter, without giving her name or telling her business. How this might have occurred with no reflection upon Jim, one knew by looking at her. She was a well-furnished little person, alert and bridling, with quick dark eyes, black hair and tiny ears.

In the pursuit of his trade as stock-market manipulator, J. W. received all manner of strange people, but very seldom a woman; and when for any reason he had to see one, he met her openly in the private office, with all of us round, never in the privacy of his own room. He seemed on those occasions to court space and light.

Mrs. Pine went at it directly, declining the seat he offered her.

"Mr. Atchison," she began, "why are you sending my husband away?"

"For a vacation only," said J. W. "He needs a rest. I've asked him to stay away three months on full pay, and when he returns, he will become assistant manager."

"On one condition," she retorted.

"Has he told you that?" J. W. asked.

"On condition," she continued, "that he shall have no more opinions on the stock-market."

"That's right," said J. W.

"Which means, of course, that he will have to give up his customers," said Mrs. Pine.

"He will be much better off," said J. W. "The position of assistant manager is well paid."

"But why do you make that stipulation?" asked Mrs. Pine. "Are assistant managers as a rule forbidden to have opinions on the stock-market?"

"This one will be," said J. W. dryly.

"I don't understand it at all," she said.

"I could hardly expect you to understand it," said J. W.

"My husband has recently been very successful," said Mrs. Pine. "He has made a great deal of money for his customers. They have increased by hundreds. And they are so grateful! They come to our house—" She paused, then added: "He

has made too much money for them perhaps. Is that the reason?"

"It is difficult to argue the matter with you, Mrs. Pine," said J. W.

"If that is not the reason, then on what ground *is* Mr. Pine objectionable in his present capacity?" she demanded to know.

J. W. cast furtive looks about him and fixed a baleful glare upon Holder, lest that indwelling person should sink to the normal male animal's wicked delight at the sight of another in for a scratching. He had no way with the woman. She alarmed him. Her tone and manner were offensive, yet he had not the strength to bristle at her.

And she had him in a tight place. Why, in fact, was Pine to be sent away? Precisely for the reason that his absurd run of luck threatened to upset the works. To admit this would entail hopelessly involved explanations to which she would probably not listen. She couldn't be made to realize how important the works were in themselves. Nor could she be told that her husband's success was a mad and dangerous freak of chance. Besides, how could any one prove that? She believed, of course, that he had become a wizard of finance.

"Mr. Pine is not objectionable on any ground," J. W. said. "Not that at all. The fact is—well, the circumstances, you see, are very unusual. I'm not sure we understand them ourselves. No, indeed! We want Mr. Pine back. What I have asked him to do is altogether best for every one."

"Very well," she said. "My husband has not decided yet whether to go away or not. I think he won't—not if I have anything to say about it. If you think he can be taken just like *that*"—snapping her fingers sharply—"and done away with merely because the powers that be are jealous of him or for fear he will ruin your game by letting the people for once make money, you may be surprised. That's all I have to say."

"Madam," said J. W., "some one must have been talking great nonsense to you. I beg you to believe that I know best in this matter."

"Thank you," she said, and went.

The retinal image of her faded slowly from J. W.'s eyes. For long he stood staring at the space she relinquished. Then he whistled, "Whe-e-e-e-u-u-u-u!" And we thought he added, "Poor Pine!"

Two days later, the announcement appeared that Mr. Archibald Pine had severed his relations with J. W. Atchison & Company to become the head of a new firm styled "Pine & Company," organized to do a general-investment business in stocks. In the new firm, besides Archie, were two men whom nobody knew.

J. W. was hurt. The personnel of his establishment was like a family; he was the patriarch. It was seldom that anybody left him. Though he was strict, sarcastic and often hard, nobody was ever dismissed. He kept men at full pay who were no longer useful and others who had offended him grossly. Whatever they did or ceased to do, they were of the same family still. When they died, he supported their families. Although he was very angry with Archie for leaving, he blamed him perhaps even less than he deserved, then and afterward. Archie, he thought, would have behaved properly but for his wife—his wife and some one else.

"Some one has got hold of Pine," he said.

FROM our window we could see people fighting for places in the line that formed to put money with Pine & Company. They were of every degree and kind—some with savings-bank books in their hands, men bearing the marks of hard toil, clerical and pedagogical persons, scrub-women, smartly dressed women, overrouged women, delicatessen-shop keepers, school-teachers, foreigners and the run of the street, all nervous about their pockets, talking very little, distrustful of themselves as individuals, yet curiously dependent upon each other in a gregarious sense. Only as a group, having refuge in itself, could they have been so indifferent to the impertinence with which passers-by regarded them.

Out of curiosity, Riggs, Terry and I went over to call on Pine.

When, with much difficulty, we had got in at the head of the line, we were told that we couldn't see him. He was not to be disturbed. But we had a look at the place and saw how the business was conducted.

The two unknown members of the firm met the clients as they came in and said over and over by rote:

"Remember, we guarantee nothing. We take your money for investment and give you a certificate of deposit redeemable in one week. As the certificates mature from

week to week, we declare a dividend upon them out of the profits. The dividend will be determined by the success of Mr. Pine's operations for your account in the stock-market. It will probably never be less than ten per cent. a week. That is five hundred and twenty per cent. a year, or more than five times your money back. It may be a great deal more. You have heard, of course, how successful Mr. Pine is. He takes nothing for himself beyond a small commission."

Some listened attentively—these had come on hearsay. Others could hardly wait to reach the cashier's window and exchange their money for certificates—these had been among Pine's old customers and were willing to waive formalities.

The room in which this scene enacted itself continuously was large and bare, having been hastily furnished. Across one end was a gilded wire fence with two windows in it—one for receiving and the other for paying money. Off to the right was a door marked "Private." There were some chairs, a table with financial papers on it, a clock, a map on the wall and no ticker. None but regular Stock Exchange houses and persons approved by the exchange authorities are permitted to have tickers. The absence of one is a suspicious indication. On the left side of the room was a large blackboard on which a boy was chalking up stock-market quotations, and in front of the board, at a pine table, sat a telegraph operator receiving them. This kind of layout invariably means that the quotations are obtained surreptitiously, or by wire-tapping, which is theft.

We departed, wagging our heads forebodingly. The place had been improvised with a cynical assumption of people's ignorance about appearances. To us, it looked as shaky as the tripod of a shell-and-pill gambler at a county fair.

In proportion as the expectations of Pine & Company's depositors were realized, our own misgivings grew. At the end of a week the first series of certificates were redeemed in cash with a profit of twelve per cent. Few depositors took their money out; generally they invested both principal and profit in a second series of certificates. A week later these were redeemed at a profit of eighteen per cent. Again people left their money and took a third series, on which the profit was twenty per cent. All the time the number of depositors was increasing. Old ones brought new ones. The fourth series of certificates paid a profit of only eighteen per cent., but on the fifth it jumped to thirty-five per cent., so that those who began with the first had more than doubled their money in five weeks. A few withdrew their profits and left only the amount they started with, saying now whatever happened they could not lose. These were the gun-shy birds. The rest greedily reinvested each week both principal and profits in the next series, so that, in fact, very little money was ever withdrawn. On the other hand, the amount of new money coming in was startling. Savings-banks were beginning to feel the drain, so many of their depositors taking money out to put it with Pine & Company.

Archie was rarely seen. The barriers interposed between him and his clients, on the plea that his mysterious cerebrations must not be disturbed, were insurmountable. But he was continually heard from. He issued frequent bulletins—at least, his name was signed to them—repeating with variations the one idea that the people at last were getting their own. An honest wizard had been found. He made nothing for himself; it was all for the people. Presently the bulletins began to hint vaguely at greater things, magnificent undertakings in the profits of which the people would partake unsparingly. People had never known what profits were. There was no limit to profits—only, hitherto this fact had been concealed by wicked financiers who kept everything for themselves.

THEN came a week in which the certificates were redeemed at a profit of forty per cent., and the excitement was terrific.

Swindles prosper in proportion to their barefacedness. People easier believe much than little. It has been so always. These believed simply that Pine's gift of divination endured, hence the fantastic profits. But there was evidence to the contrary—negative evidence of a damning character. The profits declared by Pine & Company to be gained in lucky speculation would necessarily entail heavy transactions in the stock-market; whereas, in fact, there were no such transactions. J. W. knew the stock-market as one knows one's own things. Besides

a canny sixth perception in these matters, he had subtle ways of finding out who bought and sold stocks and why. He told Holder, who told us, that Pine & Company had never bought or sold a share of anything in the stock-market since they opened for business. He was not likely to be mistaken.

What our eyes beheld was a bubble; what our senses perceived was an outrageous fraud. We admitted our conclusions reluctantly, for we had been very fond of Archie.

THE profits declared weekly on the Pine certificates of deposit were paid not out of stock-market winnings but out of the depositors' own money. There was no other way. This could go on for a good while, for obvious reasons. People, as has been said, continually reinvested their profits in new certificates, so that actually very little money was taken away. Secondly, new depositors were coming in so fast that the older ones who might wish to quit could be very well paid off out of their successors' money.

Archie's rôle was easily imagined. He was not the swindler. We couldn't believe he was. He was the lodestone. Seeing that people were crazy to fling money into his hands, some one, as J. W. kept saying, had got hold of him—had got possession of the lodestone. The rest would be easy.

Our guess was that Pine's two partners were jackals. Somewhere back of them moved a master wolf invisible. That might be one Amos Leeper, dean of the wolves' fraternity, one who for years had flouted the criminal code, knowing it by heart. From under every Wall Street scandal kicked into the light, he was one of the lewd, unsightly things to scamper away. He never was caught. His cunning was so well known that the police often employed him as a ferret in matters with which he happened himself not to be criminally concerned; and it was said that respectable men of finance sometimes hired him to do things which they were ashamed to do for themselves. He was an institution of Sin Immune.

Only, how could Archie have been induced to play his part?

That point was under discussion among us in the private office of J. W. Atchison & Company, J. W. himself listening, though not participating, when suddenly the door opened and Archie walked in.

We should hardly have known him anywhere else. The pain-muscles of his forehead were contracted. His face had a waxy look. All the youth and spontaneity had gone out of him.

We stared at him, speechless. He came over to the ticker, leaned heavily upon it, breaking the tape, and overturned the basket and gazed at us appealingly. J. W.'s regard he avoided.

"Listen!" he said. "For God's sake listen—or speak to me—or something! You remember me, don't you?"

"What's the matter?" we asked.

"I'm ruined!" he said. "I want to give myself up. I was just going to do it when I thought of stopping in here. I must talk or I can't stand it."

"Sit down," said J. W. "Nothing is as bad as all that. What is it?"

"Those people out there," he said, making a gesture toward the window; "don't look at them! Poor people, rich people, silly people, dirty people, waiting in line to lose their money. It's lost—all lost! I can't help it. I can go to jail for it, but I can't help it."

"How lost?" J. W. asked. "You didn't lose it in the stock-market."

"Do you know that?" Pine asked quickly. "Of course you would. I don't know what's become of it—only, it's gone. Listen! How could a man be so stupid? I haven't been right on the market once—not one time since we started. The first time I was wrong they said it didn't matter. The second time they said it didn't matter. The third time they said we'd keep on doubling and make it back all at once, and so it went from the beginning."

"Who are *they?*" J. W. asked.

"My two partners," said Pine.

"Yes; but who are they?"

"I don't know," said Pine miserably.

We were silent with astonishment.

"One I knew at school," Pine continued. "I hadn't seen him since. I thought he was all right. He introduced the other one. I ought to have investigated them. They were to put up the capital to begin business with, and I was to conduct the stock-market operations on behalf of the clients. The difficulty of having no Stock Exchange

membership was solved by one of them knowing, he said, a Stock Exchange house that would execute our orders on split commissions. It is sometimes done—you know—and it's a matter you don't inquire into."

"You must have known that no orders were executed in the stock-market," said J. W.

"I didn't," said Pine. "Please don't think I'm crazy. It's too stupid for belief, I know. When we came to start, the arrangement was that I should not bother at all about the business. I was merely to say when to buy and when to sell, and they were to do the buying and selling through that Stock Exchange house, on a scale to be determined each day by the amount of money our clients had on deposit with us." He stopped and looked at us severally. "I must have been a silly ass," he said. "I had lost my head over here."

"Go on," said J. W., not unkindly.

"When they declared the first dividend at the end of a week, I was surprised, knowing how wrong I had been and that no money could have been made. They said they paid it out of the firm's capital, because it was essential to keep up confidence in me. So I let it pass. They gave me the same explanation the second week, and I let that pass. I was too much worried over my end of the business to worry much about theirs. My luck turned belly up. I just couldn't be right. I tried every way. I even tried acting against my own hunches. If my impulse was to buy, I said, "Sell." And that was wrong. I was nearly mad. You understand, I thought they were actually buying and selling stocks on my say-so and losing money all the time. If I had a suspicion otherwise, I put it out of my head. And so it went until to-day I sort of woke up and faced what I had been hiding from myself. There was something wrong. I asked to see the books, and there was a row about it; but I saw them. Oh, what a fool! Nobody will believe me."

"What do the books show?" J. W. asked.

"I don't know much about books," Pine said, "but if that is not the strangest set of books in Wall Street, I am wrong again. Merely a daily record of money received and money paid out. No record at all of where the money is, and—what amazed me most—no record of any stock-market transactions. When I asked how that was, they laughed at me. Then, seeing the whole thing as a swindle, I denounced them. They asked me what I was going to do about it. Wasn't I in it, too? Wasn't I the head of it, in fact? Nobody would believe I hadn't known all the time."

"You have no idea what became of the money?" J. W. asked.

"It isn't in the office, of course," said Pine. "It isn't in any bank. The only bank-account is one that was used to convert checks into cash. The balance there is very small. It's gone!"

"Who wrote those bulletins you issued?" J. W. asked. "You didn't."

"They wrote them," said Pine. "I suppose they did—my two partners. That started without my knowing it. I seem to have spent my time like a lunatic in a padded cell trying to guess the stock-market."

"What kind of organization did you have?" J. W. asked.

"Two clerks, a bookkeeper, a boy, a telegraph-operator and a telephone-girl."

"How old was the telephone-girl?"

"You call any telephone-operator a 'girl,'" said Pine. "She was older than that."

"A competent person, was she?"

"Too competent," said Pine. "We all disliked her." With a start he now got up and held out his hand to J. W. "I'm going," he said, with a smile that pulled down the corners of his mouth.

"Going where?" J. W. asked.

"To give myself up."

"Let's fry some fish first," said J. W. "It may not be necessary. Come in here."

HE LED Pine off to his little room and shut the door.

"His story is full of blow-holes," said Riggs, after long reflection. "He embraced temptation with his eyes shut."

"Moral giddiness," said Terry charitably. "He thought he could pull it through by getting right again on the market. Not until he had despaired of doing that did he face the facts. In telling the story, remember, he has some one to save. He is saving his wife, for one. She probably pushed him into it. In the sequel, he must try a little to save himself. That's human."

"Too late," said Riggs. "He cannot save himself. Maybe J. W. can."

J. W. could save him only by getting the

wolf behind the jackals. But there was no evidence. Archie hadn't any, and if the wolf were Leeper, the existence of evidence at all would be extremely doubtful. Well, if J. W. couldn't, nobody could. And there were signs of his being in action.

The cashier went into his room with a handful of currency and came out at once.

"Sending Archie to Canada," said Riggs.

"Not J. W.," said Terry.

Then strangers began to come and go. One we recognized as chief of the Pinkertons. Presently the district attorney appeared. He remained an hour, and as he was leaving, he stopped on the threshold of J. W.'s room to say:

"My theory in these matters, Mr. Atchison, is to follow the money. If you follow the money, you find the man."

"I understand you," we heard J. W. say from inside, with a shade of sarcasm. "Be sure you follow it."

Holder, who all this time had been sitting motionless, watched the district attorney make his exit, then heaved, yawned and joined us at the ticker.

"Well?" said Riggs.

"Oh, why," said Holder, uplifting his one great chantey, "why are the good so stupid and why are the wicked so wise?"

Just then J. W. and Pine emerged, spoke to no one and went stalking off.

ALL of these incoherent incidents pulled themselves together in due time. After dinner, Riggs, who had been with Holder, called us round to the Windsor Hotel, where J. W. lived, and met us on the way.

"We're asked to spend the evening with J. W. in his rooms," said Riggs. "He's got Archie on his hands. It appears he engaged to keep him in custody pending developments. Archie is a swamp of misery. Holder has to go out on some mysterious errand. He asked me to bring you two in and save J. W. from a fit of bow-wows. What developments are imminent I don't know, except they're expecting a visit from the district attorney. I know this: J. W. distrusts the district attorney. Maybe he wishes the interview to be heavily witnessed."

We found J. W. playing solitaire. Archie had been pacing the floor. J. W. was almost demonstrative at seeing us and proposed a game of bridge. Archie begged to be left out. Two hours passed. Then the district attorney was announced. Gathering up the cards, J. W. began to deal himself a game of solitaire and asked us to wait in the next room, adding:

"If you don't mind, leave the door ajar. I wish you to hear what is said."

The district attorney and two assistants came in.

"Well, sir," said J. W., "did you follow the money?"

"We have arrested both of Mr. Pine's partners," said the district attorney.

"Oh," said J. W. absently, not looking up from his game.

"We didn't arrest them at once," said the district attorney. "They were followed. One went directly home and remained there. The other left the office with a traveling-bag."

"Hah!" said J. W. "The last of the loot—what?"

"He was followed to the Grand Central Station," said the district attorney. "There he checked the bag and mailed away the check in a special-delivery envelope."

"Are you waiting for some one to come and call for the bag?" J. W. asked.

"That might be supposed," said the district attorney. "But we immediately opened the bag——"

"And found it full of trinkets," said J. W.

"A woman's trinkets," said the district attorney. "Then we arrested them, searched their apartments, and found nothing—nothing whatever. They swear that Mr. Pine got the money."

"Would you expect them to say they got it?" J. W. asked.

"In the same tune," said the district attorney, growing hot, "would you expect Mr. Pine to say he got it? He says he didn't get it. They say he did get it. Our understanding was that Mr. Pine should be treated leniently——"

"Should be let off," said J. W., interrupting.

"Provided," continued the district attorney, "that we found——"

"Let off," said J. W., interrupting again.

"All right," said the district attorney. "It no longer matters. Should be let off provided his story was true and we were able to catch a mythical Machiavellian person who got the money. There is no evidence of any such person. Nor is there

any evidence that Mr. Pine did not get it."

"The telephone-girl may have got it," said J. W., very serious.

It was a pity; but at that moment the outer door opened and Holder entered, leading a strange group. First was a hairy, bow-legged man in bone spectacles, walking ape-fashion on the sides of his feet. Next was a woman of about forty, wide-eyed and insolent. Behind these came the Pinkerton chief and four other men.

"The telephone-girl," said J. W., bowing to her. "And Mr. Leeper. The district attorney here"—bowing in that direction—"will be pleased to meet you."

Light ensued. The first thing J. W. had done that morning, on hearing Archie's story, was to send two men with marked bills to break in at the head of the line and become depositors with Pine & Company.

Time was precious. Archie's moral awakening would probably alarm the thieves. At any moment they might kick the tripod over and vanish. Then, acting on the theory that a wolf does not trust his jackals to fetch the money if there is any better way, J. W. had put detectives to follow the only woman in the case—namely, the telephone-girl. While the district-attorney's men were trailing the partners, J. W.'s men were following her to an obscure little apartment in Flatbush, which was a blind. As none of the detectives knew the wolf by sight, Holder was sent to join them and make the identification in case Leeper should appear, as he did after dark, coming in a cab.

On Leeper's person they found a wallet containing a comfortable sum of money and two steamer-tickets for Europe by a vessel to sail the next morning; and in various pockets they found several large tied envelopes containing thirty-six thousand dollars in cash. That was the last day's loot, and J. W.'s marked bills were there.

Leeper danced about the room, swearing horribly, hurling imprecations at J. W. and threatening the district attorney. The woman looked on coldly. She was his wife.

On the door of Pine & Company the next morning, there was not even that bit of financial crape in the form of a small white typewritten paper which commonly announces a firm's demise. It wasn't necessary. News of Leeper's arrest was in the morning papers. An hysterical mob sacked the place, and found some pennies in the cash-drawer.

All the money ever recovered was the thirty-six thousand dollars found on Leeper's person. He admitted nothing, was ably defended and received a sentence of ten years at hard labor. One of Pine's partners got five years; the other was let off under suspended sentence for giving evidence.

Archie Pine spent nearly a year at a sanatorium and a year more doing nothing, all at J. W.'s expense. Then he got a job as an automobile salesman, and when last we heard of him he seemed to be doing well. He was never more seen in Wall Street.

The Mother of Judas

By Amelia Josephine Burr

MARY, in the house of John,
Spent with sorrow, fell asleep;
But in the lonely potter's field
I heard a woman weep.
"Leading your baby feet, my son,
What turning did I take amiss?
What did I do or leave undone
That you should come to this?"
All night she made above her dead
That comfortless and bitter cry:
"What did I say or leave unsaid
That thus my child should die?"

The Digger

A Piece of Virile Writing, in Every Way Worthy of the Author of "Where the Pavement Ends," a Volume of Short Stories That Won for Him International Fame

By John Russell

THE last time "Digger" Stanwick was seen in Levuka, as Levuka then knew him, he came slouching along the water-front about the hour for whisky and milk of a fine, bright tropical morning. He had almost reached the side entrance of the Polynesian Hotel when little Nonnie Burke—aged seven—came pelting round the corner like an aureoled cherub in full flight. Unaware, she nearly fell over his clumsy feet. She just managed to hold herself safe, and clung to him—rather tremulously, but still, now she was so close and so helpless, trustfully—looking up. And Digger Stanwick looked down at her.

That was the moment when "Ma" Burke chanced to glance out the bar window.

"Nonnie!" she screamed. "Come back here! Come away, you naughty girl!"

Her voice had the sharp edge and her eye the white flicker of panic. Obedient as a well-drilled chick, Nonnie scuttled from under the hulking figure. She ran indoors. The window shut with a bang. And Stanwick stood alone in the sunshine, outside the Poly's walls.

He stayed, blinking, checked in his tracks, swaying back a little as if a strong, indignant hand had buffeted him. The thing had occurred so quickly, with such direct message, that it penetrated even Stanwick's abstraction. For presently he jammed his big fists in his pockets and lurched away from the door he had been about to enter; and, as he went, his sullen face was darker and more sullen than ever—gridironed, like the faces of the damned.

Inside the bar, Ma Burke disposed of Nonnie with a slap and of Stanwick with a crisp comment in passing.

"That barmy, bone-idle beggar! I wish't you'd rule him out of the house, pa. I tell you he's a bad 'un; he'll go off his chump for good one of these days."

"Pa" Burke, on duty, merely smiled the smile of professional tolerance and set out glasses for his three early customers. But Subinspector Hill took up the matter. He was a conscientious young officer—always ready to take up matters, always trim and earnest.

"If Mrs. Burke wants to lay a complaint, I'm bound to consider it," he observed. "I must say I've had an eye on this Stanwick chap for some months."

A little clerk from the Native Office sniffed in protest.

"Don't be so confounded energetic, Hill. The fellow isn't worth making a case of. He's just a loafer and a liar. Crapulous. Rather amusing at times."

"Perhaps. But the sun and the drink do get these queer characters, you know, and Stanwick—he's worse. He ought to be shipped out of the Islands as a police precaution. I've warned him. Matter of fact, only the other day I tried to make him take passage home to Australia by the next *Navua*. Surly dog! He wanted to fight me."

"All noise and bluff."

"Maybe. But he is an ugly, great brute, you know. And he does make people uneasy with his mysterious prowlings and his wild talk of treasure and such. I don't blame Mrs. Burke myself. The man's wrong. He's dangerous. He's—he's not human, somehow."

At this point, the third customer gave signs of curiosity. He was only a tourist, but he had learned the proper signal. Whereat Pa Burke was quick to oblige.

"What, sir? The big bloke as just went by? Yes, sir—that's the one we're talkin' about. A real study, if you ain't met 'im yet. 'E's our Fiji minin' expert. Fact! Been layin' up for a wet lately, before 'e starts out after another fortun', all amongst them dead volcanoes."

And as the tourist's curiosity proved solvent, the genial publican continued to expand the humor of it—serving a head of local gossip with his cheer.

"Minin' for what? Why, minin' for gold—to be sure! That's right, sir—gold in Fiji. Eh? Well, of course. But you want to 'ear 'im tell it hisself. And you want to see 'im when he comes back from one of his prospects. My Colonial oath, but he does take a rare rough spree of it back in the hills! And the yarns 'e'll spin. And the maps 'e'll show. Most interestin'."

"All fakery," sniffed the clerk.

"Well now, there's this about Digger Stanwick: once 'e raises a grub-stake 'e do drag it. Eh? You can't say as much for many loafers, can you? Suppose some flat loans him a few quid to-day, to-morrow he'll be off on another picnic with 'is billy-can and 'is shovel. And he's been doin' that for years. Over the 'ole bloomin' Fijis. Why, just yonder, in Viti Levu, he must 'a' seen places where no other white man ever stepped—'way up inside to them mountains of the moon, where the old Fiji gods and devils live—a 'ell of a country!

"And can't 'e talk Fijian, though. Mister, you get him nicely ginned, and he'll sling you the chat like a born native. Oh, 'e's worth listenin' at!"

"As any crazy man might be," put in the subinspector. "That's the meaning."

"As any natural liar might be," corrected the clerk. "Stanwick means nothing."

"Well, maybe you're both right," said Pa diplomatically. "But I dunno. This is the Islands, where anything can happen as you'd ever believe, and much as you never would. A queer place is the Islands. There's sense even to this bloomin' beachcomber. 'E mostly gets all 'e needs, and 'e does no work. What more could you arsk?"

And having so far held his audience, he proceeded to bind it over for possible profit.

"Eh? You'd like to meet him? O' course you can meet him, sir. Just make yourself comfortable in the back room. 'E's sure to be around for his usuals sometime this mornin'."

BUT the promised entertainment failed to materialize, for Stanwick was not around for his usuals that morning, or the next morning, or for many mornings thereafter. He had vanished from Levuka. Returning to his obscure lodgings, he had packed his billy-can and his shovel and the rest of his meager outfit, had crossed in a native canoe to the mainland of Viti Levu and had laid a course once more for the back country—that "'ell of a country" to which his steps had tended so often.

When he made his big strike at last, he was somewhere in the barren mountains above the source of the Rewa River—the eighteenth day out on his prospecting-trip—the sixth year since beginning his search.

He knew that much by the habit of grim calculation which persisted in him through all sufferings, through reckless debauchery and fierce sobriety alike. He knew very little else except that the drifted glitter in his pan was no mere wash of color but the solid stuff—the prize for which he had run such a long, long bill of sweated agonies and hopes deferred.

As he crouched there by the bed of the brook, the tourist who had seen him that day at Levuka would never have recognized the beach-comber. Few could have identified this gaunt, bramble-torn, half-starved and half-naked creature as that same flabby, whisky-soaked idler. Even Burke and other old-timers who had witnessed results of his "picnics" before must have marveled at him. "The Digger," they called him. But they meant it as an obvious sort of jibe. In the lazy island world, everybody yarns. But who really would dream of digging for anything more tangible than the price of a drink?

It was Stanwick's great secret, which nobody had ever guessed and nobody was ever to be allowed to guess, that betweenwhiles he did dig most desperately and that his yarns were perfectly true.

He always had been right about gold in Fiji. There is gold in Fiji. To find it in paying quantities at the source—this had

become the game of his life—arduous, hidden, relentless and absolutely selfish.

And behold—he had won!

Wandering in a daze of sickness and weariness beyond all landmarks, beyond the showing of his maps, beyond dripping jungle and hard-wood forest and the bare breasts of the lower range, he had climbed into a gully between two cliffs. And here, by a thread of water on a cuplike ledge, he had found it.

A pocket—a compact, small treasure-house in the gravel. Doubtless the age-old deposit from some vein decomposed in the rains; probably the only remaining catch of some fortuitous riffle, for all the way up he had followed no clearer clue than occasional stray flakes familiar to him on many a useless prospect——

These were the sane, mechanical details of his discovery. An effect of the sunset decreed just then that the moment should be visibly clothed for him with its own crude and violent significance. Already he had washed out a measure of wealth—already he had collected a double handful of lumps and sediment, incredibly pure—when a dying beam shot a bank of mist below to westward and flooded the ravine with color.

On either side, the glistening gray-red and gray-blue crags took streaks of citrine and of saffron. An incandescence poured about him. The brook itself ran yellow-molten, and the bits of gold in his grasp gave off darting rays with the stab of lighthouse lenses. To one in Stanwick's condition, it seemed as if air and land and sky had kindled together to expose him.

With a cry of fear and greed he flung himself into the stream. The iron resolution which had carried him to the limit of endurance gave way. He grubbed, he scrabbled, tearing at the precious soil, whimpering with eager noises in his throat. He was still groveling in the muck, he was still all asprawl and defenseless at the instant, at the precise event to which his overwrought nerves had strained—a click of pebbles and a padded footfall. And he started back from the apparition of the Native.

Somehow, then or later, Stanwick never saw him very clearly. Twilight had faded like the fall of a gauze drop. Gliding so quietly from the dusk, he appeared, and he remained, a presence more or less impersonal to the gold-seeker's gold-blinded vision.

But he was a Fijian—magnificently tall and muscled, the tint of bronzed mahogany. He wore only a strip of ancient tappa cloth of zigzag figure, very rare in these days—the kilted *sulu* which is the garb of his people, the carefully tended high mop of hair which serves as their only ornament. Otherwise, there was nothing about him to set him apart—no mark of rank or distinction. He was just a native—a specimen of a folk long since missioned, policed and subdued to be the wards of a British Crown Colony. There he stayed and gave greeting.

"*Sa yadra, na turaga.*"

Like a wild animal cornered upon its prey, Stanwick squatted and glared at him. A gust of helpless rage took the gold-digger. For here was disaster—the one mishap he most had dreaded.

Every Islander knew the meaning of gold. Every Islander must have heard fabulous tales of yellow sand and Stanwick's own repeated quest of it season by season. And if he had had any doubt——

"*Savinaka, saka,*" the intruder went on in his tinkling Island speech. "Well done, sir. Very well done indeed, *saka.* I see you have found the right spot."

HERE was disaster. Had he been a white man, he might have been silenced, he might have been bribed or cajoled. But a native, by his nature, by his very simplicity, was bound to give the show away—was bound to start his village chattering and to set in motion the whole hated machinery of Native Office and police and mining law which exists for the protection of sovereign right and the ruin of poor pioneers.

"Who are you?" demanded Stanwick.

"Talęya is my name, *saka.*"

"Whence do you come?"

"I stay in these hills."

Night swept up the cañon on the wings of the mist. It covered Stanwick's tigerish crouch and evil stare as he waited. He had a sense of ambush. But he had a sense of impotence, too. There was a traitor in his veins——

Years before, at the outset of his rambling on the gold-trail, he had nearly died one season among the reeking heats of Woodlark Island from a terrible siege of jungle-fever. The poison had never left him;

whenever his strength was sapped, it threatened to cut him down. Right through his recent stress he had been sickening for it. By crowning ill luck, if vertigo and hammer-pulse meant anything, he was due for another attack now!

Meanwhile, he controlled his trembling limbs and dissembled his voice to gruff friendliness.

"Come closer. Where have I met you?"

The native approached until he stood in the shallow runlet.

"You never have met me, *saka*. Few men have met me—to remember afterward."

A curious phrase, spoken with quaint and compelling sweetness, like the music of a wind-harp. The hollow hill rang with it. But Stanwick was only intent on the distance that separated them.

"Are you a *buli*, perhaps?"

"*Eo*, *saka*. Even so—I am a *buli*. Beyond every other *buli* in these parts."

He lied. Stanwick was sure he was lying.

Up and down the Fijis, Stanwick had visited the village headmen and could name their names. Taleya? It sounded someway familiar. Still, he failed to place it. Certainly it belonged to no chief. Certainly the fellow could be nobody of importance.

"Nearer!" He drew himself up. "Nearer yet! Now, what do you know about this spot—this stream? Speak—what is it I have found? Can you say?"

"*Eo;* I can say," returned the native in the same soft cadence. "*Saka*, this stream called 'Wai-ni-ndula'—the Water of Solace. And here you came to find the thing that all men seek—the end of all their strivings."

Then Stanwick sprang. At least, he willed to spring. But his legs gave like pipe-stems. He stumbled, groped, and, with a curse of defeat and exasperation, the digger collapsed above his digging into the strong brown arms, on the broad brown breast which received him as gently as a rock receives a shadow.

IT WAS a singular fact that he never wholly lost track of time. Though night and day passed as a blur and he must often have been unconscious, he still retained that odd faculty of his. He had intervals when the fever fell away and left him like a swimmer between waves. One such interval he could always picture.

He lay in a sheltered nook of the cliff, apparently warm and safe, stripped of his wet rags, wrapped in his own blanket. A tiny fire sparkled near by. His few camp-articles had been neatly ranged, and just beyond—making himself quite at home—there sat the Native. When Stanwick opened his eyes, they encountered the regard of those other eyes, luminous and inscrutable. He would have struggled up to renew the argument. But he was too weak.

Again he returned to a different wakening—a period of detachment when the mind seemed to brood like an eagle, seeing all things sharp and clear, with the clarity of a view through the wrong end of a telescope. It appeared entirely natural that he and the native should collogue together on this suspended plane. It appeared entirely natural that the Native should question him with the naïve inquisitiveness of a native, and that he should answer in this lofty truce, calmly and exactly.

"Tell me, *saka*, the way of your life—what manner of man you have been."

Stanwick told. Actually, he gave account of himself, as such accounts are given at such moments—the tale of his gold-hunt, the travail, the sacrifice, the mockery and at length the great and critical achievement.

"Tell me now, *saka*, the loves you have known. How have you fared in passion and devotion, how in those tender snares that wring the heart?"

Stanwick told. With the fluency of delirium, he recalled his dead past and his one romance—the story of the winsome, fair-haired Australian girl whom he had wooed and won and lost, all within a year, long ago. Taleya listened and nodded.

"Tell me once more, *saka*. Tell what remains to do you credit on earth. Something besides this treasure of yours."

And Stanwick told even that.

"I've a child—somewhere."

"A child?"

"There was one."

"*Ya luvena! Savinaka, saka*," said Taleya softly, in the tone of compliment. "You are fortunate. This is happiness. This is the pledge for a man that he be honorably considered when he is gone. This is the duty and the fulfilment of a man."

But Stanwick's brow knotted with his effort at thought.

"A girl. A baby girl," he muttered. "I left her in Sydney—d'y' see?—with her mother's folk. What would I do with her? Queer! She must be six or seven now. I've never seen her since—a little girl baby."

Whereupon the hollow in the hills filled with mournful echoes.

"*A woi! A woi—woi!* Your child—your own flesh to you! You left your daughter in the hut of a stranger! You have forgotten—you never cherished her—a little baby girl, *saka!* And you came here seeking Wai-ni-ndula? You think yourself fit for the Water of Solace! *O sobo! A woi—woi—woi!*"

His third respite was different still, and the strangest of all.

IT WAS a dawn amid storm. A mountain dawn—a Fiji dawn—the sort of fantastic scene-shifting which would have justified Pa Burke forever with regard to that "'ell of a country." The rainy season had broken in a hurricane. Thundersqualls charged up the ravines and crashed in sulphurous conflict. While just behind, from over the hilltop gap, there showed a first flame-tipped gleam of the sunrise.

As if the rout had upborne him, as if its fury had been imparted by some infernal induction, Stanwick came awake with a leap of tensed muscles. He woke this time to three ideas—three impulses: his old obsession of treasure of course, as always a consuming hatred, and an immediate and monstrous thirst.

At once he spied the Native, looming dimly through the rain.

"Get me a drink," he snarled. Taleya shook his head gravely. "Where's that gold o' mine?" babbled Stanwick. Taleya stood fast with folded arms. "Out o' my way——"

But Taleya denied him with a gesture that barred his path.

"Damn you!" His strength had returned to him on a tide of madness. Straddling out from the cliff, he took a slow step and another. He held his body as if packed behind the powerful shoulders, one great fist swinging loose. This business was come to a killing. What other answer could there be for a gold-digger discovered and betrayed? The fellow had tracked him, had surprised his weakness and stolen his secret. That he had also tended and nursed him was nothing. From the first, Stanwick had meant to kill. What other consummation could there be to such a gold-hunt? 'Damn you—you spy! You black swine! You'll quit your blasted, interferin'——"

He closed, and this time he did not fail. The two met like tusking boars of the forest. The Native gave no ground; he stayed to wrestle silently, defending as best he might. But Stanwick clipped him by waist and throat and roared exultant. All the ferocity of his lifetime's purpose concentrated here and now. All the bitterness and brutality. All the urge of an implacable will.

The mountains shook beneath their trampling feet. Boulders spun and rocked about them. Winds and waters howled, and overhead the cohorts of the storm clamored in vast applause. But Stanwick was only intent on dragging down, on ripping and smashing and destroying the last thing, the last single obstacle between himself and his desire.

That was the way he fought, bone and claw and fang. He fought ravening. Until he got the better of a double breaststroke. Until he plucked his paralyzed adversary off balance and caught him in the neck-lock. Deliberately he set one knee to him as a man does to a stubborn branch.

He was wrenching backward, he was bending every ounce of murderous force he could summon when a line of white fire struck out of darkness. Lightning looped over his head as a gigantic whip; the splitting crack of it sent him staggering—dazzled and half stunned—to the very verge of Wai-ni-ndula.

Taleya sagged from his grip. Taleya's fading eyes lingered on his in a gaze of profound and terrible reproach. He thrust the limp form away. While it fell, it appeared to dissolve; its hurtling limbs appeared to melt with the brook in magic evanishment. At the same instant, day came like the lifting of a screen; sunrise shot the bank of cloud and tempest to eastward and flushed the cañon with hell-hearted color. To one in Stanwick's condition, it was as if land and air and sky had flared up together to blazon the stain and the knowledge of his guilt.

With a cry of horror he shrank from that dispensation. Pausing only to snatch up his scanty bundle of equipment, to remove

the few traces of his presence thereabouts, he dropped down the ravine in frantic flight. Through clearing mists and lessening tumult above and about him through the hollow hill, he seemed to hear the echo of the echo of a wind-harp—sweet and compelling, haunting and pursuing. And as the wretched man fled, he gave no thought either to his hatred, or to his thirst, or to the precious treasure he left behind him.

THE next time Digger Stanwick was seen in the water-front town of Levuka, he made rather a notable occasion of it.

Again this happened to be a fine, bright tropical morning. Again this chanced upon the hour when daily routine is always formally launched and libated at the bar of the Polynesian Hotel. Subinspector Hill was there. The little clerk from the Native Office was there, and, by passing coincidence, the tourist—that same tourist whose curiosity, together with the genial ministrations of Pa Burke, had kept him lingering on the isle. Four words were spoken, four nods exchanged. Four elbows were just about lifting in solemn rite.

That was the moment when a figure drifted into the doorway, whereat all four gentlemen promptly choked with one accord and set their glasses down.

They had reason—in view of the phenomenon. They had better reason presently, for the phenomenon came lurching and shuffling into the room and planted himself squarely in front of Hill.

"I give up, Inspector!"

Surely the toughest specimen of a beachcomber ever seen in the Poly's respectable precincts! He wore a girdle of rags. For the rest, he looked as if he had been put through a mangle. His skin was scored and slashed and blistered; his ribs showed in a rack. But from the stubble on his sunken cheeks he glowered out defiantly. He still had the capacity for some potent, mastering emotion.

"I've come in," he announced.

"Stanwick!" the officer exclaimed.

"Aye," returned Stanwick grimly. "That's who. And I've come to give up. I'm giving myself up, d'y' hear? For God's sake, get the stringers on me!" With a movement of impatience—a movement, too, of curious eagerness and relief—he offered his naked wrists.

The subinspector considered him.

"You mean the handcuffs? I haven't them by me. What do you want 'em for?"

"For me, o' course. To land me in clink—what else? I can't stand no more. I want it over!"

"You mean—you're asking arrest?" A conscientious young officer was Subinspector Hill, always precise and careful. "I'm bound to warn you, my man. Whatever you choose to say might be used against you. Outside of that, what's all the fuss about?"

Stanwick drew a tortured breath. He may have balked a bit for the last stride; he may have measured the irretrievable result. But he plunged on:

"I done it. I killed that nigger! And I found my gold!" he added in the same gasp. "I found my gold mine!"

So he gave his confession. Once started, he poured it out hotly, swiftly, in a passionate flood. From his beginning as a gold-digger to his finish as a murderer—the whole sequence.

"I knew it could never be hid. And s' help me, once I understood what I'd done, I didn't want to hide it. I'm through!" he cried. "I give up. What sort of a ruddy trade is this I've spent my life for? Look here what comes of it! Look here what it's brought me to!" Shaken with his own eloquence, he held up two hideous and blackened paws, and the audience winced—enthralled. "Now, go ahead and hang me! Bring on your Native Office and your police and your laws. What do I care? What more can you do to me? Digger Stanwick—he's done! Only count this much to him: He killed this man; but he found his gold mine—he found his blasted gold mine!"

He rose to that hoarse roar of triumph. He made an end and stood with heaving chest—not without pride, not without a certain dignity. He made an end and waited—braced for what must befall.

And nothing befell.

He waited—and he waited. Over Levuka and the water-front had settled the drowsy heat of mid-morning. Away in the rear premises somewhere, Ma Burke was making cheerful clatter with a pail. Inside the barroom it was very quiet. Some one sighed. Some one coughed. After a while the subinspector cleared his throat.

"You killed a man—and you found your gold-mine," he repeated, politely. "Did you, indeed?" And picked up his abandoned drink and finished it.

WHEREUPON they all picked up their drinks and finished them. Whereupon Pa Burke, ready as ever to oblige, filled the glasses again. Whereupon all four leaned comfortably against the bar and regarded Stanwick in silence, with an air of spacious, sophisticated attention worse than contempt. And nothing befell.

That was the way it reached him; that was the way it was borne in on the gold-digger as the supreme impact of his ordeal—that nobody believed him——

Often enough he had been regarded so. Often enough his yarns had been greeted by just such spells of silence and just such qualified interest; and he had laughed at the fools. But he did not laugh now. With the grim truth pressing on him, with the terrific yarn he had to tell, he did not laugh this time. He turned from one to another, confused, with queer, jerky gestures, with queer, baffled attempts at speech.

It was the little clerk from the Native Office who finally took him in hand. He had rather a reputation as a quiz, and he fastened on Stanwick with the zest of a shrewd counsel. He conducted that remarkable examination.

"Tell me, Digger," he began; "tell me—whereabouts do you say this affair of yours was staged?"

Stanwick told him.

"Oh! Somewhere on the range above the Rewa River? I see. Couldn't place the exact spot? Hm. Couldn't be sure of ever finding it again? No; I suppose not. Well—tell me this: What do you say the nigger looked like?"

Stanwick told him.

"Hm. Some kind of a *buli*, you believe? Can't describe him very well? Can't state what village he hailed from? Well—one more question: What date did your massacre happen? How many days ago?"

Stanwick was able to answer that.

"It's now the twenty-third, ain't it? I been camping in the woods—lost and taking easy stages—since the fifteenth. Eight days——"

"Eight days?" repeated the clerk. "Good! Now, Digger, listen carefully. Inspector Hill and I are just back from the Rewa ourselves. We visited all that region officially. We were working on the annual census report. We left there three days ago." His thin smile held Stanwick impaled like a beetle on a pin. "So here's the verdict for you, Digger. There is no such place as you mention, so far as any knowledge goes. There is no such person as your alleged victim in any of those villages—never has been. And there's no single individual of any rank, size, sex or description missing or unaccounted for in that whole district. If there were, we'd have learned it to a positive dead certainty. D'you understand? We took the census three days ago!"

Stanwick grunted, as if some one had taken him under the midriff.

"But—but I got his name!" he stammered. " 'Taleya,' he called himself. And the place is called 'Wai-ni-ndula.' "

The clerk gave a sudden incredulous snort. "What's that? Taleya? *Taleya!* And Wai-ni-ndula! Oh, ho! Oh, ho! Why didn't you say so before?" He turned to the others with a grin that asked them to share the amazing jest. "Our friend becomes quite convincing now," he observed. "Quite convincing! He appeals — you heard him—to that old, old Fijian folk-tale about the Water of Solace. You must know it, all of you; it's the best of the native legends, handed down from days when they had a real religious system of their own. It relates how every soul on its last journey toward the Land of Shades comes at length to a certain fabled brook, Wai-ni-ndula. How there it must face the Angel of Death—the Dismisser. Taleya is his name, and to him it must give account of itself and its lifetime—whether all duties have been fulfilled on earth—whether it be worthy. And how, finally, it must wrestle with the angel in a trial of strength.

"If the soul be conquered, well and good; it is then permitted to partake of the Water of Solace—just like Water of Lethe, you know, in the Greek fable—which erases all memory and makes it fit for paradise. But if the soul should conquer Taleya—being strong in evil, you see—then—*then* the soul must come back to earth to take up its burden anew—back from Wai-ni-ndula. Like our friend, the Digger, here!"

He swung round on Stanwick.

"You've had jungle-fever," he said sharply. "It's a mighty good thing for you you had sense enough not to take a drink while it was on. Do you know that if you had tasted water you would have died?" He lapsed to a sniff of frank indignation. "But, good heavens, man alive, how did you ever have the nerve to try such a scheme? On us! What made you think you could cash in on us with such a yarn? It might do for a new chum. But nobody here is likely to loan you a quid or take any stock in your blasted gold mine, Digger."

He wound up in mere scorn. Stanwick stayed stupid and blinking, swaying in his tracks. One glimmer remained to the derelict—one impulse. Singling out the subinspector, he thrust his wrists at him as before, still offering himself with mechanical insistence.

"You mean—you mean you ain't going to believe it?" he babbled. "You mean you won't arrest me?"

"Of course not!" rapped that serious-minded young man, with a frown of distaste. "But I'll advise you, Stanwick," he added, "as I have before, to quit this prospecting game. It's doing you no good, and it's no sort of place for you at all—the back country."

"That 'ell of a country," murmured Pa Burke, "where the old Fiji gods and devils live!"

"You mean—I'm free?" gasped Stanwick.

"Of course you are!" returned the subinspector, shortly. "Free as air!"

THEN the others in the Poly barroom were privileged to see, if they could have understood, the collapse of a man's implacable will. The prop of a lifetime's greed dropped away from him—all his savagery, all his bitterness and brutality, all the secret pride and secret strength of selfishness which had sustained him through the years. He still bore a face gridironed like the faces of the damned—but this was the face of one who had been damned and brought back, to be blessed again, perhaps—perhaps. He turned on them all a great, round, unseeing stare, spun on his heels and went reeling out.

The others shared a comprehensive nod.

"Just plain crazy," was Hill's comment.

"Just plain liar," corrected the clerk.

Pa Burke groaned in a kind of ecstasy.

"I dunno. I dunno," he said. Maybe you're both right. But can't 'e sling them yarns, though? Can't 'e talk? Didn't I say so, mister?" He appealed to the tourist. "Didn't I tell you 'e'd be worth listenin' at?"

He was still exclaiming when the subinspector, who had hurried after Stanwick on a sudden thought, came tramping back to rejoin them.

"One good thing," announced Hill, with crisp satisfaction: "I got him to promise he'd leave to-morrow on the *Navua*. I offered him passage myself. I thought it was proper—as a police precaution. It seems the fellow's got a family in Sydney—a kid, anyway. He's going home."

"And passage paid!" chuckled Pa. "My Colonial oath—there's the Islands for you! Anything can happen in the Islands. Look at this bloomin' beach-comber! 'E gets what 'e wants when 'e wants it, and 'e don't 'ave to pay! Now, what more could you arsk?"

That was the moment when a sudden screaming smote upon their ears.

"Nonnie!" cried Ma Burke from the bar window. "Nonnie—Nonnie! Where are you?" Her voice had the shrill note of alarm. It startled them and drew them hastily behind her whisking skirts. But as they crowded out the side entrance, they met a sight that checked them and hushed them all at once in a wondering group.

At the far border of the Poly's courtyard, on a strip of lawn below the hedge, little Nonnie Burke—aged seven—lay fast asleep, with her head pillowed on her arm like a dreaming cherub. And beside her, with clasped hands and head bowed upon his chest, knelt Digger Stanwick. There he knelt, oblivious, and rocked and crooned to himself very gently. An old Fijian chant was the cradle-song he chose—a chant of grief, but of yearning, too, and of hope—very low and soft, very sweet and haunting, like the echo of a wind-harp.

"*A woi! A woi—woi!*" breathed Digger Stanwick. "A child! A little girl—a little baby girl! *O sobo! O sobo! A woi—woi—woi!*"

Sunlight played through a breadfruit tree overhead, and one ray touched the tumbled curls to a golden nimbus; and as the gold-digger looked down at it, his cheeks were wet with tears.

Only *the* High Spots

The Pathos of an Ambition Which Hasn't Behind it the Capabilities Necessary to Fulfilment Is Here Portrayed in This Story of the Stage

By Walter De Leon

Author of "Ecclesiastical Stuff" and other Billy Renton stories

Illustration by Harry Fisk

OLD Billy Renton, who knows more about more actors—inside stuff—than any of my friends, dropped in out of a snow-storm the other evening and found me dozing over a book on psychology.

"Reading a book like that sometime ago," said Billy, "give me a new slant on Rita Murray, who I see again this afternoon limousining down Broadway behind a chauff in a fur coat, looking so Ritzy nobody would ever guess she'd spent half her life making sleeper-jumps in day-coaches."

"Rita Murray?" I repeated. "I never heard of her."

"Few ever did. Rita never played the big towns. The only thing she had to make a success was what some folks would call 'hopeful ambition.' "

"What would *you* call it?"

Billy selected and lit a cigar.

"I'll tell you about it, and you can name it to suit yourself. Now, don't be taking your pencil from your pocket and drawing that paper toward you, because you'll get no story out of Rita's—what these here psychologists call it—complex. In the first place, it's cold from a dramatic view, because it's got no conflict in it, excepting the usual conflict of a woman with no ability fighting for the living some Lloyd George once said the world owed everybody.

"Second, there ain't no moral to be extracted from Rita's present superfluous prosperity, because she won it through pure luck—which is no proper moral precept for the striving youth of this industrious land.

"Third, there's no 'virtue rewarded' stuff in it, because the thing Rita worked for for twenty-three years she never got; and you can see what an unheroic heroine she was when I tell you she didn't care. Even the villain turned out to be a pretty good old scout with twenty-five million dollars."

"Of course, any story connected with twenty-five millions has possibilities," I suggested.

"That angle of it is all wrong from a fiction point of view, too, on account of it furnishing the one big laugh of the story—a laugh on the villain which nobody guffawed at except the villain himself. Add to that, there ain't no climax——"

"No climax?"

Billy sampled the toddy at his side and settled back in his chair.

"I'll give you the high spots, and see if you can find any climax," he said.

Remember, in the days before the Federal government become fussy about patent medicines, the half- and quarter-page advertisements the O. K. Tonic Company used to run in the newspapers all over the country—ads made up of testimonials affirming the miraculous rejuvenating, revitalizing effects of a tablespoonful of O. K. Tonic placed in a fatigued stomach before and after meals?

Miss Daisy Darling, the winsome ingénue of the Beefy Burlesquers, now touring Texas writes: "My dancing never was so eccentric until I began taking O. K. Tonic. It is positive inspiration."

It was—being a dash of iron and pepsin, ninety-eight per cent. alcohol and two per cent. fusel oil.

The Reach Brothers, famous Roman ring-and-trapeze daredevils with the Hope-We-Eat Carnival company, soon to visit Topeka, say, "We attritube our undisputed supremacy in artistic athletics to the invigorating tonic properties of your marvelous prescription."

And Tiny Tessie Tinkle, who as Little Eva, in "Uncle Tom's Cabin" is expected soon to electrify Philadelphia, writes: "Mamma puts a teaspoon of O. K. Tonic in a glass of nice fresh milk for me every night before the play, and I can cry real tears without getting exhausted. No child should do without it."

LOTS of people, especially in Maine and Kansas, used to read those ads and the folders that came with every bottle, but none of them ever guessed that actors who couldn't get their names in the papers any other way were paying for those testimonials.

Manly and Murray, the Dude and the Doll, were initiated into the Order of Tonic Come-ons one day in Peru, Indiana, where they were assisting to make movie fans of the yawning customers at the Bijou—Select Vaudeville, five, ten and fifteen cents. Barney Winston, an O. K. Tonic business-getter, happened to catch the act.

It was most rocky. Rita Murray was young, shapely and pretty, and when you said that, you said it all. The only things that kept Johnny Manly on the stage was hunger, misplaced confidence and a bull-dog nose that restrained unathletic managers from telling him how really rotten he was.

Barney Winston figured that the closest they'd ever get to Broadway would be the Twenty-third Street ferry coming back after flopping for three days in Passaic or Union Hill, N. J. Which made them—the house-manager told Barney they were married—ideal candidates for the Come-on Club.

"Listen, folks," he told them, after the show; "you've got a great act, classy and funny. Did you write it yourselves?"

"Mr. Manly did."

Rita beamed, not knowing that most of their jokes had been written for use in the Spanish Inquisition.

"I thought you must have," boomed Barney. "You're a funny comedian, Mr. Manly. I laughed till I cried, and when *I* laugh—well, I've walked out on Eddie Foy. That's what a hard audience *I* am. What are you doing out here in Peru? Just killing time?"

He knew darn well they were trying to make a living, but he was leading to his deep point gradual.

"Oh," Manly answered, trying to make it careless, "they offered us this date, and we believe in working steady, no matter where they send us."

"You've got the right idea. There's plenty can't get a job. Have you showed this act yet in New York?" Little Rita went pale at the very thought of playing New York. Barney saw and hurried on: "You're going to be a sensation, Mrs. Manly. I'll bet a year's commissions that within six months they'll be comparing you to Edna May and Billie Burke. New York's getting tired of all the old stars. They're just aching for a new comedienne of your type. When do you open in the big town?"

"We've got no New York time booked," Rita replied. "We're a new act. We don't want to go in till we're all set and ready."

"Wise girlie! You're young. There's no hurry. When you go in, you'll go in right. Especially if you'll let me advertise you ahead—so they'll be expecting you."

"What do you mean?"

"Look!"

Barney unfolded a copy of the New York *Star* and showed them a half-page Tonic advertisement.

"Other concerns print testimonials from Mrs. John T. Nobody, of Gray's Landing, Oregon—people that no one knows or cares about. Not for us, friends. We present recommendations from men and women in the public eye, folks everybody knows or has heard about. Actors principally, because actors have such a warm spot in the public's heart.

"When I tell you that at least once a week an advertisement comes out in the

leading newspapers of the entire country, when I tell you that with every bottle of O. K. Tonic there is a printed folder with similar testimonials, when I tell you that in New York alone our sales average one hundred thousand bottles—each with a printed folder—you can begin to realize the enormous number of people your ad, in the form of a testimonial, will reach. The greatest stars in the profession have availed themselves of this opportunity. Look!"

He pointed to a testimonial over the signature of a well-known actress to whom the tonic company had paid fifteen hundred dollars for the use of her name.

"We can't begin to accept all the applications we get for this sort of advertising. Why, there's an act on the bill you're playing on that offered me a hundred and fifty for three months advertising. I turned him down cold because he's got no future. We can't afford to advertise a lot of dead ones and has-beens. We won't do it. But a clever team like you folks——"

"I ain't going to spend no hundred and fifty," Manly interrupted, meaning he didn't have and didn't expect to have that much for a long time to come.

"The best plan for you two would be our weekly-instalment plan. Just send us ten dollars, or fifteen or twenty or more, all depending on how often you wanted your testimonial to appear. Acts tell me they never miss the money that way, and yet they get the advantage of our national advertising just the same. How much is it worth to you to get your names known to millions of theatre patrons and managers in every big city in the U. S.?"

"I'll tell you," Rita said slowly, seeing a vision of an electric sign reading:

MANLY AND MURRAY
ASSISTED BY
FRANCIS WILSON and MARGARET ANGLIN.

"Me and my husband'll talk it over and tell you in the morning."

"Can't find any fault with that." Barney smiled. "What do you say to some cakes and coffee—on me?"

BARNEY knew he would sign them up. He'd seen Rita was ambitious, and that both of them belonged to the big majority in vaudeville who believe that all performers are equally gifted at creation, and that it is only opportunity—pull, money, trickery, luck, anything but ability or genius—which makes one a head-liner and another a small-timer.

That testimonial stunt was such a cunning play to an actor's weaknesses that even if Barney had told them, when he brought them the contract stipulating that the O. K. Tonic Company, for benefits and publicity thereinafter designated, was to receive twelve dollars and fifty cents each and every week, that their instalment added to hundreds of similiar instalments was practically paying the advertising bills of his company, Manly and Murray would have gone through with it. Weren't they getting what they were paying for—their names in all the papers? The only ones knocking the scheme must be those the tonic company had refused testimonials from. Sure! And where could you get a press-agent for twelve and half a week?

Rita and her husband didn't find it always easy to meet their instalments. There was the time Johnny wrenched his ankle, laying them off for five weeks after they'd worked only two weeks in twelve. Rita wrote a letter asking for a little time. Which was granted so sympathetic she made over, patched and dyed an old dress to wear that summer and sent the money she'd been saving for a new one to the tonic company.

That weekly drain was the second thing Johnny thought of when, one day, Rita told him they'd have to begin saving every penny for the four or five months lay-off and the doctor's and nurse's bills she knew were ahead of them.

A month before the baby was born, he got a letter from the tonic company in answer to the one he'd sent—without saying anything about it to Rita.

DEAR FRIENDS:

Yours of the fifteenth, misaddressed, just received. Congratulations and best wishes on the coming event.

Now as to advertising, it seems to us that now, more than ever, you should continue to advertise regularly. The public is so quick to forget unless they are constantly reminded.

Because we take a personal interest in all our clients and especially the younger and more talented artists, we are prepared to continue your advertising until your return to the stage at the reduced rate of five dollars per week.

If this is not satisfactory, we will reluctantly remove your names from our books. Again best regards and hopes.

O. K. Tonic Company.
per B. W.

That blazing burst of generosity made Rita so happy and grateful that Johnny cut out lunches and cigarettes and walked down-town from Harlem every morning to the music publishers where he was making a few dollars plugging songs—and saved the Tonic five for them.

Which was partly why the first November storm he had to fight, walking home to Harlem in worn-out shoes, no overcoat, after four months of undernourishment and worry, found Johnny so easy.

The tonic company didn't know anything about it till Rita's letter reached them.

Gentlemen:

Please change the wording of the Manly and Murray testimonial so it will read: "Rita Murray, formerly of Manly and Murray, but now working alone, says," etc., etc.

Enclosed find five dollars for last week.

Truly yours,
Rita Murray (Manly).

By the time she'd received their condolences and a receipt, Rita had put the boy into a home and was making the rounds of the booking-offices looking for a job.

Naturally, she postponed electrifying Broadway temporarily. Working alone, she had a lot of trouble finding suitable material, songs and gags. Which is why one season found her in burlesque, another doing Chautauqua work, one summer in a stock company, the next taking tickets and doubling as an Island dancer in an amusement-park side-show. She kept her looks and she kept her figure, thus proving that woman does not live by bread alone.

But, most of all, she kept her testimonials running. In her superstitious little head, giving up advertising came to mean giving up Broadway—the Broadway she'd never played, but where, the longer she kept reminding them of her, the oftener they heard her name the easier she'd find it—when her big chance came.

AS THEY say in the movies, fade out on Rita, eating dinner in an automat, and fade in on her boy, Ward, standing, all eyes, watching "Dad" Marlow, the movie director, place his cameras to shoot a couple of orphan-home scenes for a feature he was making. Needing a kid or two to play bits, Dad's eye lit on Rita's son. About fourteen, he was a handsome little shaver with curly hair, big eyes and a certain kid grace that was attractive. He took direction instinctively.

The next day, when Dad looked at a developed strip of film in the projection-room, he saw that Ward not only filmed perfectly but also had an appealing screen personality.

When Rita had been convinced there was no future for her in pictures, she let Dad take the boy out to California to teach him what he had to know to be a star. But the first time Ward sent his mother a money-order out of his salary, she sent it back.

It's too much [she wrote]. Put it away while it's coming in, son. You never know when you'll need it. Even if you have signed up a nice contract, I won't take more than twenty dollars a week from you; so please don't send it. Any time I need more, I'll wire you.

Twenty dollars, she figured, would take care of the tonic company and the minimum of food she'd got used to eating.

Hitting nothing but the high spots brings us to the autumn Ward was twenty-one and playing the juvenile rôle in a try-out production at the Burbank Theatre during a temporary shut-down at the studio wherein everybody was daily expecting Ward to put the punch into his work that would take him out of the rut and land him up in the electric lights. The author and producer liked Ward so well in the part they induced him to go East with the drama. In New York it flopped completely. The producer put him into another show, even a little bit more unsuccessful. The boy took a job with the Shuberts, thinking a change of management might change his luck.

The idea was all right, but the show was anything but.

By the time Ward had appeared in five consecutive New York failures in one season, there wasn't a manager in town who would let him into their office. Even if they hadn't been superstitious, they couldn't have got anybody to join a show with Ward in it.

Rita couldn't hold back her tears any longer. "Father!" It was Lily, standing in the doorway. "Is what she says true?"

In the Lambs, one day, Ward was wondering who there was left to touch for a twenty to send his mother when Monk Glason called him over in a corner.

"Listen, Ward; old man Knudler just got into town. I saw him get into a taxi at the station. Go and see him before the mob-scene starts howling outside his door."

"Who is Knudler?"

"A millionaire afflicted with a daughter with a bug for acting. In order to keep disgrace from the family escutcheon, he's built her a theatre in Louisville. Last summer, three months of repertoire failed to cure her—the daughter—so entirely that she's going to give the natives another dose of the same thing this year. The old man pays all the bills and keeps the house filled up with free tickets. It's a good job if you can take it as a joke. The gal don't know anything about acting, but she likes refined playmates. You qualify there, and besides you've got an edge, because she'll probably remember you from pictures. Don't be afraid to ask for a decent salary. What's a couple of hundred dollars more or less on a total loss?"

LILY KNUDLER wasn't any prettier than a lot of girls whose daddies couldn't afford expensive masseurs, hairdressers, modistes, maids and physical-culture experts. But, out in Louisville, Ward found it pleasant playing love scenes with his eighteen-year-old, blue-eyed, blond leading lady. He almost forgot her ineffectual amateurishness in the nearness of her slender body, her warm lips close to his own and the sweet surrender in her eyes.

Within a month Ward was riding in Lily's car to the supper waiting for them in her home after the show every night. At the end of two months Ward admitted to himself that he wanted Lily more than any other thing in life. His instinct and Lily's ingenuousness told him she was his for the asking.

Her money, of course, made a proposal of marriage from him something to laugh at long and mirthlessly. The soft thing was to give in his two weeks' notice, go back to California and forget her—if possible. The day he decided on that, he got a letter from his mother.

The worst season of my entire career, son. I didn't save a nickel. The landlord has been looking at me without seeing me for two weeks now, and, while I hate to ask you, still, if you could send me a hundred and fifty——

Ward tore up the notice he had written and cleaned out his wallet. That night, and the next and the third, he made miserable excuses for not entering her house after seeing Lily home.

The fourth day, old man Knudler walked back on the stage after rehearsal and asked Ward to go up-stairs to his office with him. Facing him across the desk, the old man's eyes looked tired, his cheeks sagged, his voice was weak and dispirited.

"Young man, do you love my daughter?"

Ward hesitated.

"Forget everything, Manly, except that I have a daughter and you are a man. Do you love her?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you feel that she—er, she is reasonably fond of you, too?"

"I've never asked her, sir."

The old man's eyes flashed.

"You know damn well she loves you!" The fire died down quickly. "So—you love my daughter. Well, what of it?"

"You mean that there are plenty of others who love her, too?"

"Not exactly. I want to know why you think you shouldn't love her."

"Because I haven't a nickel in the world and she's worth millions."

"Not till I die."

"You don't need to threaten, Mr. Knudler. I——"

"I'm not making any threats. I'm trying to understand. Let me see, now; as I get it, the only reason you're not asking my consent to marry Lily is because you haven't any money."

"If I had enough to support a wife, I wouldn't wait for your consent, sir, I'm afraid."

"Hm. The problem appears, then, to furnish you with it in such a way as not to offend your—er, sensitiveness. How much salary are you drawing?"

Ward's jaw tightened.

"As much as I'm worth. As much as I'll probably ever get—and it wouldn't pay her hat bills."

"Have you many friends?"

"A few—rotten bad-weather friends, too.

They voluntarily paid my bills at the club and stuffed my wallet so I could take this job, sir."

"Good! Mixed up with any woman in or out of the profession?"

"No, sir."

"Mean that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Hm." Knudler leaned forward and asked, "Do you know anything about managing a theatre?"

"Quite a little; yes, sir."

"How would you like to manage this theatre, book all its attractions, gradually buy and supervise a chain of moving-picture houses through the South, on a renewable five-year contract that called for fifty thousand dollars a year?"

"Fifty thousand!"

"Isn't that enough to support a wife on?"

"A wife! You mean——"

Old Otto Knudler stood up. Slowly he paced the length of the room, coming to a stop near Ward's chair.

"Manly," he said softly, "Lily is all I have. I've dreamed big things for her. She's attractive, well bred, educated, good, sunny-hearted and loving—a prize for any man. There isn't a height of society here or abroad she might not attain to. There is nothing under heaven which money can buy that she can't have. I'm worth twenty-five million dollars, and the only dollars that give me pleasure are the ones she spends. With the world's gifts and its men to choose from, she selects a part upon the stage—and an actor." He shrugged his shoulders wearily. "Well, if that's her choice—" He walked back to his desk. "Only one more question, Manly: Who were your people?"

"My father and mother, both actors, sir. Manly and Murray. My mother is still in the profession. She's known as 'Rita Murray.'"

Otto Knudler's face went white. His fingers grasped the edge of his desk tightly.

"Rita Murray! Are you—the son—of Rita Murray?"

"Yes, sir."

Slowly the old man sat in his chair, propped his elbows on the desk and covered his face with his hands.

"How the Fates must be laughing," he said finally, "at Otto Knudler, giving his daughter and his O. K. Tonic millions to the son of the woman who for twenty years——"

THE telephone-bell in the office jangled merrily, as though horning in on the joke.

"Who?" asked the O. K. Tonic Company. "Yes. . . . Send her up. . . . Yes—at once."

"Lily?" Ward asked eagerly.

"No; though she'll be in presently. I told her to wait half an hour."

Down the hall an elevator door slammed. A moment later an office-boy opened the door.

"Step right in, please."

In walked Rita Murray.

"Mr. Knudler? I'm Rita Murray. You don't need an experienced character-woman, do you? I'm all but signed up for a big Broadway production in the fall, but in the mean time, seeing my son is in your troupe—" Then she saw Ward. "Ward, boy!" As she kissed him, she whispered, "He ain't giving you your notice, is he?"

"No, mother. He——"

"Miss Murray, please." Old man Knudler had taken a blank form from a drawer and was rapidly filling it in. "Will you please sign this?"

"What is it, sir?"

"A release from our contract to insert your testimonial in our O. K. Tonic advertisements."

"You—I get it—O. K.—Knudler—you're the boss!" Her hand flew to her heart, thickly pumping the color from her face. "You—you're refusing my ad—because you—you don't think there's a chance for me—any more—on Broadway?"

Old man Knudler looked at the twitching mask of tragedy her face had become. Bewilderment furrowed his forehead.

"What? Will you please repeat that?"

Rita couldn't hold her tears back any longer.

"When I first started paying for testimonials—twenty-three years ago—he—I forget his name—he told us—Johnny and me—you only took ads from—from clever performers. He said you couldn't afford to advertise—dead ones and—and has-beens.

"All these years, as long as you kep taking my instalments, I knew there was still a chance for me—or you wouldn't

keep running my ads. Now—after seeing me—you say you—you want to—to cancel ——"

"Father!" It was Lily, standing in the doorway, her slim young body tense, her big eyes flashing. "Is what she says true?"

"My dear, I discontinued running paid testimonials five years ago. Some thieving clerk has been pocketing her money." Humbly the millionaire walked over to Rita, sobbing in Ward's arms. "Mrs. Manly, if money—unlimited money—can buy you your chance, the sort of play and costumes, the sort of theatre and company which you have worked for all these years, that money is yours to command."

Rita absorbed that slowly.

"Well, she said, drying her eyes, "who'd have thought I'd find an angel waiting for me in Louisville?"

Late that night in the Knudler mansion, as the supper for four was breaking up, Knudler turned to Rita.

"As soon as the wedding is over and Ward and Lily out of the way, we'll begin looking for a play for you."

There it was—the materialization of the dream she dreamed twenty-three years before, the fulfilment of the prophecy she had read in the newspapers from Bangor, Maine, to Baton Rouge—"Miss Rita Murray, soon to appear on Broadway in a new play, says of O. K. Tonic." There it was, her apple, lying right in reach at last! Rita's trembling hand smoothed a wrinkle in the table-linen.

"I certainly appreciate that, Mr. Knudler, but—but what's the hurry? With the last five years' instalments you insist on returning with interest, I can take the good long rest I've been postponing for twenty years. It'll be time enough after that to think of plays. Of course, in the mean time, if any of the managers really *need* me for a production, I might help them out—but not at my old salary figure."

"You're right, mother," Ward said. "And speaking of resting, look at the time! Lily has a rehearsal and a matinée to-mor—to-day."

"I can easily call off the performance," suggested Knudler, remembering the gross advance-sale amounted to fourteen dollars and twenty-five cents.

"I'd advise you not to," Rita counseled. "Put on an understudy, but don't close up the shop. A play or an actor, you see, is like an engine; once it stops, it takes an awful lot of energy to get it running again. Come on, folks; it's getting late." She glanced round at the richly comfortable furnishings. "Home was never like this," she grinned. "I—I bet I'll sleep good tonight."

"Is your room quite comfortable?" Lily asked. "Is there anything we can get you?"

"Yes. One thing." Rita's lips curved in a shamefaced grin. "I'd like to know what O. K. Tonic tastes like."

Critically she sipped some from a glass. Judiciously she tested its flavor. An expression of incredulous mortification spread over her features.

"Is *that* what I've been recommending for twenty-three years?" she asked. "Mr. Knudler, we ought both of us to be arrested."

BILLY RENTON finished the toddy at his elbow.

"Why did Rita turn down the big chance when it came?" I asked.

"It was for money—not fame—that Rita worked. To her, Broadway was just another name for big money. Like a lot of others, she was deathly afraid of it—afraid of not making good there—never getting big money. As long as it was ahead of her, encouraged by the tonic company, she had something to hope for. When she realized she'd never have another money worry as long as she lived, when she saw there wasn't any *necessity* for her to face the New York critics—with that, now, inferiority complex she'd been hiding from the world all those years, what was more natural than her turning down Knudler's offer?"

"What about Lily's yearning to act?"

"Poor Lily played in tough luck. What with a boy the first time, twin girls the second time, helping Ward redistribute among professionals temporarily out of an engagement some of the interest on the ten million Knudler gave them for a wedding-present, Lily claims lack of time has stifled if not totally crushed her histrionic genius. But, shucks, buddy; every small-part actor has an alibi for not being a star."

THE BELOVED PAWN

A Big, Human Drama of the Great Lakes

Nemesis in Strange Guise Overtakes the King of Garden Island, and Eve Finds the Tragedies Which Battered at Her Heart Gone Like a Disturbing Dream

By Harold Titus

Author of "Foraker's Folly"

Illustrations by Stockton Mulford

Begin this serial with any instalment. The story is here up to this issue.

WHEN Eve Eldred fled in the dark night from High Island and—as she supposed—the brutality of David MacKinnon, the whole structure of faith she had reared in a few eventful days crumbled away. The coming of David to Garden Island, one of the Beaver group in Lake Michigan, where he sought shelter for his trading hooker from a storm, meant that the lonely girl had at last found a friend. Years she had lived there with her father, "King Norman" Eldred, surrounded only by rough men—"the scum of the lakes," who helped him in his fishing industry. For these men she had only fear, as her father had taught her.

But David had come to the very spot he had been warned to keep away from, where his father had been treacherously lured to his death by Eldred, who was jealous of the affection Eve showed the kindly man. And so with the son—Eldred would not tolerate his presence. So he set fire to his hooker—and under such circumstances that David believed Eve assisted him in the dastardly act. And then, when the girl continued to show her liking for the young fellow, Eldred in rage cast her out, and David took her over to neighboring High Island—away, as she had begged him to—where he kept her prisoner but treated her with all chivalry, in revenge upon Eldred.

The latter, repenting and wanting his daughter back, had gone to the island, but MacKinnon, instead of treating with him, drove him away. Also to the island had gone Jean Mosseau, a French-Canadian, who wanted to kidnap Eve, and it was he, not David, who had tried to seize her in the darkness.

Eve knew where to go. In an open boat she pulled for the light on Squaw Island, where dwelt Ned Borden, the keeper, and his wife and assistant, "Aunt Jen." For some reason which Eve could not fathom, the woman had evinced a strange interest in her, and with Aunt Jen the girl knew she would be safe.

Jen Borden's watch began at six that evening, and at five o'clock Ned had put fire under the boilers because the weather was thickening. True, it might lift, but Borden

had burned many a ton of government coal to make steam that was never used in his years of service—better that than to be even a few minutes late with his fog-whistle, when those minutes might mean the risk of ships and the lives in them. But by the time the watch changed, this preparation was justified, because rain and mist cloaked objects two hundred yards away.

Her hair drawn close over her head and tied in one large knot at her nape, wearing a denim jumper, an old gingham skirt and large, broken shoes, Jen shoveled coal into the fire, and the light from the open door showed her face set in a look of absorption not, it was evident, wholly concerned with her work.

The woman's mind was never far from her work, to be sure, because, when she slammed the door of the fire-box, she went outside and looked first at the light, its steady red beam accentuated every fifteen seconds by a flash of brilliant crimson, and then off to the northward, where ships, passing to or from the straits, would need that beacon. On the wall of the boiler-house a clock ticked and a small lever functioned to send the velvety bass voice of the fog-whistle in a five-second bellow down the wind to warn those mariners who could not see the light in this murk; silence for twenty seconds, except for wind and rain and the surf running on the gravel; another blast, then silence for twice the former period.

Nothing was in sight on the lake, though she strained her eyes to see. A light burned in the keeper's dwelling, where Ned lay sleeping. Jen watched this a moment, and then turned back to the boiler, closed the door and sat down in a wooden chair.

"Oh dear!" she murmured. "I'm glad it's thick. Sewing's a poor excuse for needful work when a body's head's as full as mine."

She sighed again and, though she sat still in the chair, her hands fidgeted slowly.

Monday night she had been at her sewing-machine until morning, and Tuesday, following her return from High Island, she had driven it steadily. Afterward she slept restlessly, but again last night it was very late when the hum of the speeding needle left off, and now, but for the necessity of firing the boiler, she would have been fashioning garments from her stock of plain cloth for the relief it gave her.

In these days, her manner with her husband had been changed. She did not bluster, and her usual volubility was missing. She was gentle, almost meek at times, and always she went about half abstracted, with her mind on some other matter than that which occupied her. She had given Ned a rather sketchy account of her visit to Eve, and after that seemed as eager to avoid the subject as she had been to make the trip to the girl.

When she was not with Ned, though, he was much in her mind—at her work about the light, when she performed her household duties and, especially, when she bent over her sewing-machine, she was occupied with thought of him.

"I'll tell him—I'll be blistered if I won't tell him!" she said again and again. The first time that she gave words to such a resolve was when she set the supply-boat on its course home from High Island. But her determination waned when she approached the landing, only to gain strength again when the first opporutnity for confiding the thing she dreaded to reveal had come and passed. "I'll tell him!" she promised the sewing-machine later—but she did not. "Oh, you cowardly heart!" she moaned, when still another opportunity had passed. "Oh, you white-livered old liar! One more chance—just one!" But no revelation was made when that desired chance did arrive.

And now as she sat with an eye on the steam-gage and an ear for any sounds that might come from the lake, she was living it all again—her failure to speak when she was so strongly impelled to unburden herself; her scene with the girl and, lastly, the words of Norman Eldred spoken that night in his house recurred again and again: "You have told him about our little transaction? He knows?"

She rose and paced nervously, finally slicing her fire with savage thrusts of the bar.

THE hands of the clock swung on toward that point where her husband would relieve her of duty. Ten o'clock passed, and eleven. At regular intervals she looked out at the light and at the lake, and once she timed the blasts of the whistle, to be certain that the mechanism functioned properly. Eleven-thirty now. A half-hour more, and then sleep—if she could find the peace of mind to close her eyes.

She stepped outside again. The light in her husband's room was brighter, and she could see him moving about as he dressed. She looked out across the lake, straining her eyes, and then stared at the near water. She started forward, with her lips shaping an unspoken exclamation of amazement.

A boat was approaching the landing—a small craft, an open boat. Shaken from her own distress by this suggestion of mishap and need, she hurried down the beach, heedless of the rain.

There was but one figure in the boat. She heard the oars thump and rattle as they were shipped, saw the occupant crawl out on the landing, and then she was close, breaking into a run, crying out:

"Dearie! Dearie!" Eve Eldred stood there, her face very white in the darkness. "What's the matter?" asked Jen in a strained voice, grasping the girl's wet hands.

Eve swayed a trifle, as though dizzy.

"For a little while," she said weakly, "I thought there was no place to come. And then I remembered——"

She crept then into the woman's eager arms, and Jen breathed,

"Something terrible's happened — and, dearie, you've come *home!*"

Before the boiler, where her clothing could dry and where the chill of wind and rain and fright could be driven from her bones, Eve told her story. Not all of it—not everything that had happened—but enough so that Jen could guess what had taken place on High Island that night and could be sure what had happened in the girl's heart.

Eve found herself to be peculiarly reticent. All the way up, through all those hours on the lake when she had had strength only to hold the skiff on its course and let wind and current bear her toward this safety, her breast had been bursting for the relief of pouring her story into this woman's ears. But now her throat was stiff and unwieldy, and the words she wanted most to say would not come. She stumbled through the story of what had happened, and it was not until she reached that part which had to do with her father, his offer to MacKinnon, the impending fact of her return to Garden Island, that she could talk clearly and evenly. That was terror, real and to be faced, not something which was gone, irretrievably lost, and though this sanctuary might endure for only a few hours, it was something to be valued beyond price.

"But I had to come—I *had* to come here first, even if it makes going back worse than ever!"

She had just spoken that sentence when the door opened and Ned Borden stepped in. He stopped in surprise, and Eve felt Aunt Jen, who stood close to her, shudder. The pause was long enough to indicate to the girl that her coming meant something to those two people of which she was not aware—the pause and the look on the man's face, and that shudder of the woman. But Jen was the first to speak.

"Ned, the Lord's sent this girl to us to escape the devil and a passel of his works."

The keeper looked at her searchingly for a moment, and Jen caught her breath. Then he smiled gravely and said:

"There's worse places, I guess. Glad you're here"—to Eve. "What's ours belongs to those who need it."

He repressed his curiosity about the reason and manner of this coming; but that was easy—he had become accustomed to holding back questions in these weeks.

When the women had gone, and after he had looked at the gage and water-glass, he stood a moment as though listening for an expected sound; then he shook his head and compressed his lips patiently.

REFRESHED by the sleep into which Jen Borden had coaxed her, Eve woke to the warm spring day and dressed and, knowing from the silence of the dwelling that the woman to whom she had come still slumbered, she went outside and stood a moment on the steps, watching a boat which was heading toward the landing.

She recognized it, of course, and after a moment turned sharply, as though she would slip back into the house and hide. The mood which would prompt hiding was on her well enough, evidenced by a drooping of the mouth, a frightened look in her eyes, but the impulse to run away passed, and a slow flush came into her cheeks and her eyes were not pleasant.

David saw her from a distance and did not wait for the *Islander* to be made fast before leaping ashore and striding up the path. She was waiting for him half-way between the light and the beach.

"Eve! You're here—all right—safe!"

He had one hand extended for hers, but checked his swift approach when she turned from him with something like a shudder, and the hand went slowly back to his side.

"Why, Eve, what is it?"

She looked at him squarely, and he had every opportunity to see the scorn in her eyes.

"What did you come *here* for?" she asked.

"For you, of course. Why else, Eve?"

"Then you'd better go," she said, with a half-laugh. "I might have known I should believe you when you told me about yourself over and over again." Her voice was hard as she steeled herself for this, but when she stopped she compressed her lips and breathed deeply, as though her voice was made even and firm only by great effort. "I didn't believe you when you said I was in danger. I was a fool——"

"Eve, look here!"

She backed a sharp step or two to keep distance between them as he advanced.

"Don't come near me!" she cried. "Don't ever come near me again! I don't ever want to hear your voice. I don't ever want to see your face. I don't even want to think about you, because, if I do—I'll be sorry I threw that knife away that night."

Her voice pitched up and thinned out on that, and with one scorching look at him—a look which, closely analyzed, carried as well a beseeching quality—she turned and fled for the house.

Until she gained the doorway, David stood dumfounded; then he called her name sharply, with something like desperation, and began pursuit, mounting to the porch with a bound and flinging himself against the door which Eve had slammed behind her. He called again and rapped savagely and started forward eagerly when the door was opened—and stopped abruptly, because Jen Borden stood facing him.

The woman had watched what happened through a window, had come down the stairs just as Eve burst into the house and now confronted MacKinnon—a ludicrous figure in her flowered kimono and lace boudoir-cap; yet there was nothing grotesque in her face, and the quality of its expression would have made even a disinterested observer forgetful of her morning get-up. It was very grave, with an undershading of sorry accusation; no anger was there, because her regret for this happening was too pronounced to leave room for anger at the moment. But it did not need anger to stop David, for he could read in the woman's face evidence of great distress, and that was enough. Jen was the first to speak.

"Oh, don't make it any worse, boy," she said; "don't make it worse." Her voice was low and tender and appealing.

"There's somethin' wrong here," David said tersely. "I've got to see Eve and get it straightened, so——"

"It's all straight," Jen answered, shaking her head slowly. "It's all straight enough so's her mind's made up. If there's any pity in your heart, boy, go away and leave her be. She's been through enough with you now; her heart's broke, and the only way to mend it is to help her forget. She can't do that if you're around."

That gentleness, her slow speech—such good evidence of assurance—stripped David of the ability to think, let alone retort. He stood there striving to rally his wits, and the woman went on:

"I thought when I first heard you had her there that it'd be all right, mebbe; I thought that after I went to see her, too, and that's why I blame myself for not bringing her back. Oh, son, I guess you don't know much about a girl's heart; I guess you don't understand that there's times and places for everything. I'm sorry. I liked you; and I can't do that any more. There ain't any time to argue now. I've got my hands full trying to make this girl's heart well after what you've done. You'll have to go, boy; you'll have to go."

He was hardly conscious that she had closed the door gently, shutting him out without a chance for reply. And yet, given the chance, what would he have said? What had he done to Eve? What was this terrible thing he had brought upon her? For it must be terrible—else that woman would never have looked like that.

He found himself walking slowly down the path to the dock, and when, once aboard his boat and under way again, he reached to drag a stool so he might sit as he wheeled, his movements were those of a man who is very weary, whose heart is gone.

ELDRED had watched David go into the darkness of the night before with anger in his eyes, but after a moment a sort of elation came to replace it. However, when

he was sure he was alone with Mosseau, he turned savagely on the man.

"You're a fool," he said heavily, "as great a fool as he is, Mosseau." The Frenchman shrugged. "You understand what's happened? She's gone—somewhere. He'd thought she was here for sure if you'd kept your head. Ah, you're a fool in a world of fools!"

He said that last after advancing and standing over the other, who was badly frightened by the outburst and cringed when Eldred flung out a hand in gesture, as though he would strike. But he did not strike—just retained his tense pose for a moment and then turned away.

"Not here; not with him—there's but one place," he said, as if to himself, and repeated, "one place. You'll go down with the crew," he went on, as if mentioning a minor matter, "and you won't leave this island. You're a fool, but maybe I'll have use even for a fool."

At sunrise, Eldred took the road that led down the island, walking briskly, and in an hour came out on the beach. He could see the *Islander* well over toward the light, and as he stood focusing his glass, he said in a whisper,

"But for the fool, he'd not have——"

He stood there while the distant boat landed, and held his glass steadily in the one position until she was clear again. He had seen one figure go up toward the tower, had seen it return alone; no other had boarded David's boat, he believed. For a moment he experienced relief, and this was followed by a new misgiving. Had he been wrong, after all? Had he been wrong? Was there another place to which Eve might have gone?

And thereafter, during many of the daylight hours, Norman Eldred patrolled that beach, glass in hand, and for long intervals he would stand motionless, with the instrument leveled on Squaw Island, watching for boats to arrive or depart. And Dimmock, from the pilot-house of his tug, watched, too, as he went back and forth on the business of fishing. But the red-haired ruffian had nothing to report and Eldred had nothing to show for his pains.

It was not until the afternoon of the third day that he was rewarded. Then he saw the lighthouse supply-boat go into the water, and strained his eyes to see figures aboard. Two only—just two; and both of them men, he could make out. He watched the boat until it was nearly abreast of him, and then took his way back to the head of the island, hastening through the woods.

"WELL, we're alone!" Aunt Jen spoke these words to Eve as though the condition were a relief. She had waved a farewell to her husband and Pete from the landing, and walked back to the dwelling, where Eve sat on the steps, chin in hands. The girl smiled ever so faintly as the woman stood looking down at her. Then Jen sat down.

"Why can't you let me help you, dearie?"

Eve shook her head slowly.

"I don't know."

"Don't know! You mean you don't want to talk? For three days you've been trying your best to keep it to yourself, but it ain't going to work, dearie. Bottling it up's the worst thing you can do. Is it your father that worries you so?"

A moment of deliberation. Then,

"Yes."

Jen eyed her skeptically and sniffed.

"He comes second, don't he?"

Eve lowered her head, and her assent was little more than a whisper.

"Looky here, dearie; the Lord didn't give women a tongue for nothing; he didn't give ears to folks who understand the trouble of others for nothing, either. You ain't got any cause to worry about your father now that you're here—safe with us. Just you forget him—or leave him to me." She took Eve's hand in hers and the girl turned a slow gaze to her face. "It's *him* that makes you this way, ain't it?" Jen urged.

Eve nodded.

"Yes"—lowly. "You see, I can't forget it. I've tried—for three days, but I can't. And I want to so!" She drew an unsteady breath. "I'd been hoping so much! I'd been watching and waiting and trying to see happiness through it all, just as you told me to. I almost thought I saw it; I was so sure of it that last day. And then——"

A shudder traveled her body and she sat erect, the hand that Jen held working nervously. The wall of reserve with which she had penned up the hurt in her heart was breaking; her breath became uneven before the surge that swept through her, up from her very soul to her lips, and words tumbled

out, relieving words, hurting while they came, perhaps, but draining the wound of the poison which silence and brooding had let accumulate.

"It had been a nightmare with my father; nothing could have been much worse except what I thought when David took me away that night. But he treated me as nobody had ever treated me; he was different.

"I couldn't blame him for wanting to sell me back to my father when he thought that I'd—helped burn his boat. But I hadn't expected it, and something seemed to break inside me. I'd been so almost happy there. I didn't want to go back to Garden Island; it seemed that I never could go back, and I said things that I felt, I guess—" Her voice was flat and dry and she paused a moment. "I don't remember just what I said, but I guess I told him that I—that I cared for him; and when I said that—" She broke off short and shook her head. "I can't explain it. A look came into his face that scared me, and I wanted to get away from him. It was—like fire in his eyes, and when he began to talk, it scared me worse. I didn't want him to talk that way—savage, as if he did want to hurt me.

"He said that doors and locks wouldn't stop him. And then that whistle blew and he went out, and—you see"—spreading a hand and frowning—"he must have been afraid of doors and locks after all; he must have wanted to get me out of that room that he told me once was a safe place. He must have waited, and when I ran out, he——"

She stopped abruptly again and laughed and disengaged the hand which Jen held and smoothed hair that did not need attention.

"It isn't so much David," she said in a voice that shook. "It's in here, in my heart! I was almost happy there. I'd fooled myself and dreamed and built up a lot of hopes—and now I haven't any, except that I won't have to go back to my father."

Jen's face worked.

"There, there, dearie! You won't have to—leave that to your Aunt Jen. Blast that trader's heart, anyhow! I'd like to have him here to listen to a piece of my mind. If he can know when I'm thinking of him, I'll bet his ears are frizzling up like bacon in a pan. You forget him—or leave him to me. You just chuck him out of your mind, dearie."

Eve shook her head. There was the rub. She could no more put MacKinnon out of her mind than she could control the functioning of her heart-muscles. He was in her consciousness every moment, an exalted being on the one side, tender and gentle and chivalrous, and close against that impression was the other—of the destroyer in whom she had placed her faith to have it shattered. She had had a glimpse of happiness, and for a brief period she had been able to look back on Garden Island as a disturbing dream only, had been able to put out of her mind the danger of being dragged there again by her father, but with the disruption of her dream of the future, the possibility of a return to her father's house loomed large—so large that she could see nothing else before her.

And this was in her mind when Jen led her into the house, dragged out a trunk and began tossing from it a great array of out-of-date clothing.

"Now, here's that blue taffeta. I wore it twice in Oswego and put it on once more, but never got out of the house. That's every blessed time it was on a body's back since I snatched the basting threads. You'd look fine in that shade of blue, dearie. I can cut down the neck and drape the skirt, and take the sleeves off at the elbow— You got lovely arms, dearie—and I got a real swell pearl buckle for a belt. These here linen suits, too, 'll make over into nice summer dresses for you, and that black satin. My! How that'll set off your eyes, and *Up-to-Date's* got a smart pattern that made me think of you when I seen it."

She rummaged again.

"Then, come fall, you might just's well use this broadcloth suit. There ain't a spot or a worn place on it"—hanging the skirt over her arm and taking it to the light. "Guess there ain't many girls on the Beavers who'll look any smarter 'n you when I get done with this!"

But to none of this did Eve respond. She had sunk back into the silence which had endured since her coming to the light except for that brief interval this afternoon when she had talked, and then she talked only to give voice to her hopelessness.

FOR three days the older woman had tried to distract the girl's attention and rouse her spirits, but her resources had been taxed without result. She knew the twin

tragedies which had battered at Eve's heart—the loss of her faith in MacKinnon, the fear of a return to Garden Island. But nothing that she could say or do would mitigate them or take the forlorn look from the girl's face. She accepted Eve's report of what had happened that last night on High Island without question and, viewing it so, of course there was nothing she could do but condemn David. And she knew the real menace of Norman Eldred to the girl, knew it, perhaps, better than Eve did, knew it from more angles, had known it longer, and it was that which made her assurances of prolonged sanctuary weak and unconvincing and which set trouble prominently in her keen gray eyes.

Now she settled herself to ripping up the blue taffeta while Eve stared across the steel-gray lake, splashed with silver here and there as lightly screened sunlight filtered through the soggy, broken clouds. Without design or intent, reminded by some small detail, Aunt Jen began telling a tale of the lighthouse service, o that terrible night when, blinded by snow, a big ore-vessel bashed her nose on the reef and hung there, wave-swept, breaking up, and of how Ned Borden had held her in his arms before he stepped into the tiny supply-boat and put out into the lather of surf to pick up a line among the rocks which the distressed craft had tried to get to shore. He achieved the impossible, brought in the line, established a breeches-buoy and got the crew to safety just as the texas began to crumble.

She grew animated as she relived these scenes, and, without knowing it, she had caught Eve's interest. The girl watched the woman as she talked, sketching in those tragic moments with such simple words, and was quite lifted above her own distress by the narrative. Jen went on to tell of that helpless day when they watched a tow of two barges break loose and go past them to certain destruction, helpless to do more than pray. She told of other times as thrilling, and always it was with modesty, accepting duty as a matter of course, without heroics, teaching in parables the gospel of service. That was the kernel of her narratives—service, without cant or pretense, and there was a sincerity in it that did for Eve what coaxing and more conscious attempts at diversion had failed to do.

The girl began to ask questions and Jen's heart glowed, and then she stopped talking as Eve rose with a light gasp.

"The *Elsa!*" she whispered.

Jen stood up and peered through a window which gave a view of the landing.

Eldred's steam-tug was checking down, and King Norman himself stood beside the pilot-house, a line in his hands.

"Well, he's come," said Eve dryly.

For a moment the older woman did not reply, and upon them both was the silence of impending tragedy. Jen Borden was crushed, confused, bewildered, but through this swirl of broken thought and changing emotion came her own words of the early afternoon: "You forget him—or leave him to me."

Was she merely a talker? Was the safety which she could offer reduced to mouthings? Was she— She heard herself saying,

"He's come sure enough, but scorch me if he ain't going to put about, too!" She flung aside the cloth, dropped her shears with a clatter. "Here, dearie—this way!"

HALF dragging, half shoving Eve, the woman opened the door that led into the tower, slammed and locked it and slipped the key into her apron pocket. She heard Eve's one stifled cry; she stepped to the window and looked out. Eldred was walking toward her, searching the house with intent eyes.

"O Lord, give me strength to meet this devil!" prayed Jen, as his feet sounded on the steps.

She did not wait for his rap but flung the door wide and stood squarely in his way, glowering. Eldred came to a halt with a faint suggestion of a derisive bow.

"Well?" she challenged.

"You know why I'm here," he said.

There was in the confidence of that statement something strained, a note that roused suspicion in the woman, who was now alive and alert, every faculty in acute accord with her purpose.

"Oh, I know, do I, Lasker? You give me credit for mind-reading. All I can tell you is that it's no good purpose that's brought you."

"But you've expected me."

"Huh! I'd as soon 'ave expected leprosy and been about as joyful over it."

He eyed her a moment, trying to probe through her bluster.

"I've come for the only thing that would bring me here—for Eve."

"For Eve?" Her amazement was well feigned, and she saw that it balked him. "What makes you come here, Lasker? I'd heard she was gone, and that the trader stole her. Lord knows what's happened since!"

"She's left High Island," he said evenly. "She left there and you gave her shelter. She's been here three days, and now I've come for her—when you're alone."

"Three days?"—sarcastically. "Lasker, if——"

"Eldred!" he broke in. "Eldred, or I'll——"

"You're in fine shape to threaten anybody, ain't you?" She bristled. "Here you come to me for help and start in by making threats. That ain't any way to get advice."

"No advice! I came for something real." He moved closer. Jen held her ground, giving him stare for stare. "Do you tell me she's not here?"

"If she was here, do you think I'd be facing you this way? Lasker, if she ever comes into these old arms again, they'll hold her this time—hold her tight. They won't let her go—not for hell itself!"

Her voice had risen, but it did not impress the man, because something like a tolerant smile crossed his face.

"You'd be amusing," he said, "amusing, Jenny, if you weren't standing in my way. I'm sort of starved for her, and a hungry man"—with a slight gesture—"is in no mood for talk."

"Then you'd better be making tracks out of here. Talk's all you'll get, King Norman, and blessed little more of that!"

This time, no smile crossed his face, but a whip of anger.

"Don't trifle! I give you that warning—the nearest to a friendly act you'll ever have from me." He put one hand against the casing and breathed heavily. "Things have happened lately to make—to drain a man's patience. It can't go on; you can't play with the fire as MacKinnon has done.

"He hit me hard. I'll admit that to you, Red Jenny, because any of my secrets would be safe with the wife of Ned Borden. I've been hungry for days—hungry as I never knew a man could hunger. There's been nothing in life—not even rest—nothing but haunting shadows and jeering voices and thought of Eve yonder—gone from me. Do you know how I can hate? Aye; you do"—nodding heavily. "You, of all people, should know. You don't know how I can love, but, take my word for it, I can love as deeply as I can hate."

HE WAS lashing himself into a fury with his own words, and a thrill of fright at the hideousness of his face went through the woman, but she did not betray it. Also, there was a sound behind the door she had locked as of some one drawing close to it as if to listen. Eldred went on:

"I drove her away, and it was like tearing the heart out of my body. For a minute that night I hated her because she had stung my pride, and, in the next, I'd have groveled to her if she'd have come back. Too late! Yes—I can admit being wrong. That's why I humbled myself—because I'd been wrong. I humbled myself for Eve and to that trader—that spittle! Does that indicate love to you, when I'd go crawling to him—when I could bargain with him so nothing wrong could happen to her?

"Why, I offered to buy her back, offered him the price of his hooker which burned in my harbor if he'd give her back." He laughed sharply. "He thought Eve had a hand in that little trick, thought she lured him away from his boat, and I let him go on thinking it. I boasted to him that Eve and I plotted to burn him out, and he threw my offer back in my face!" His rage choked off the words and he shook his head and cleared his throat. "That made a double humiliation piled on top of hate and love—see? And then I went further into humiliation—because of my love for her. Instead of wringing his neck and taking her, I went in the night to bring her back, so he wouldn't know and try to do her harm to spite me. I schemed and plotted and skulked—to keep her safe.

"I got MacKinnon out of his house and away from her by a trick; I had a man outside the door, and when Eve followed the trader out, the fool let her get away. Because he was afraid of Mackinnon, he did that. He smashed down the door of her room to get at her and then slunk off—because he was afraid of the trader." He waggled his head and gave a moaning laugh, and said no more for a long moment.

"I tell you these things"—leaning close to

the woman and speaking in low confidence—"so you'll know how badly I want her and how far I'll go to have her back. There's no violence I won't use now; there's no crawling that I'd scorn. She's not with him; she's not with me. *You're* going to help me find her, Red Jenny, and first you're going to prove that she's not here!"

He straightened and lifted his eyebrows, and his look was terrible.

"She ain't here, Eldred!" Jen cried in a sudden display of fright. "I couldn't give her to you if I would"—lying in her desperation.

"Not here, eh?" He looked narrowly at her. "And where, then?"

"How could I know?"

"You're lying!"

"No, Las—Eldred! Before God——"

"I'll have a look."

"You'll keep out! This is government property." The words came without thought, but they gave her assurance. "Set foot here, and I'll report you, and you can't stand looking into very much."

He stood back, but he laughed in a sort of careless triumph.

"*You* report me? And what if I told Ned Borden why I came here? What of that? What if I'd explain just why I should look *here* for Eve?"

She saw his teeth gleam. Panic, bewilderment, suffocation gripped her; the lake, the island, his boat were reeling senselessly. She felt his hand on her arm, as if he would thrust her out of the way. She cried aloud, inarticulately, and then, through a slit in a cloud that hung on the western horizon, the red rim of the disappearing sun showed, casting the water before them into crimson shot with blue.

The light fell on Eldred's face and the woman turned to see its source. It steadied her. That same sense of duty which had made the tales she had been telling Eve live roused her above fright. Sundown! And she the keeper of the light! Weakness slipped from her; fright drained away. A righteous rage came in the place of dismay, and with a powerful movement of her arm, she shook off his grasp with such a show of contempt that Eldred was staggered.

"Let go, you carrion! Get out of the way!" she cried. "It's sundown. You're interfering with the light."

And, backed by her sense of obligation, given assurance and strength and stability by the rigid call of duty when nothing else would have sufficed, she slammed the door and shot the bolt home.

Eldred beat upon it with both fists and cried out, but no response came. He listened and heard heavy feet on the tower stairs. He moved down the steps and looked upward. The red of the sunset was gone, having endured but that passing moment, but up above another red appeared, as if the crimson of the west had been caught and preserved and focused by the lens in the tower.

A section of the big cylinder up there opened. Jen Borden emerged, a keeper's cap askew on her graying hair, a shotgun in her hands. She stood on the platform with one hand on the railing, looking down at the amazed Eldred.

"I've got enough on you now to put you away for a long time, Eldred, and there's something besides cowardice in my heart to-night," she said grimly. "The government don't fool with men who fool with lights. See it? A red light, with a bright-red flash. It means shoal water for ships, Ed Lasker, and it means darned dangerous water for you! Your move—and good-night!"

She twitched the gun, and Eldred began to move slowly down the path. On his tug he turned to watch her, but she remained on the platform, gun resting across the rail, and she was still there when he rang for the speed ahead which checked the backward movement of his tug and swung him away toward his harbor and the house that was empty.

FOR a long time the woman stood there, gun loose in her hands now, her weight against the tower. She breathed through parted lips as though physically exhausted, and when she went inside, her movements were slow.

Eve was at the bottom of the tower stairs, cringed against the wall, face in her hands. She had not uncovered her eyes when Jen passed her on the way up, nor had she moved since then. The girl was not crying. She was numb only; she was cold, her mind centered on one fact:

MacKinnon had protected her even while he believed she had betrayed him. MacKinnon had defied her father's offer of

money while he believed she had conspired to destroy his boat. And it had not been MacKinnon's arms which gagged and hurt her in the darkness that night.

These things raced through and through her mind—and one other: David had come here, searching for her, harried and relieved at sight of her. And she had flung out at him these things: That she never wanted to look in his face again, that she never wanted the sound of his voice in her ears again, that she never wanted a vestige of his memory to remain with her!

It was when Aunt Jen sat down on the step beside her, silent, slow of movement, that a warmth ran through Eve's body—warmth which meant scalding tears and broken sobs and shudders and a yearning for the great arms which did embrace her.

Jen sat without a word, holding the girl close, making no attempt at first to check the outburst, murmuring from time to time her "There, there's!" patting the shuddering back. And that was all. She did not attempt to dam that flood of tears.

"He—he didn't— It wasn't David who grabbed me. You understood?"

"I heard, dearie"—very gently.

"And he wouldn't sell me back. And he never told me he would. I was so afraid—so afraid——"

"We've been wrong about him."

Silence, and Jen felt the girl tremble before she whispered:

"And I drove him away from here! I told him I never even wanted to think about him again!" All the misery which can be bred between regret and knowledge of injustice done was in that tone, and the woman held her closer, cold cheek against the fever-hot face of the girl.

"And now?" she urged.

"Oh, he was good to me! And I didn't believe him! And there's nothing I can do to make it right now!"

"If you're trying to tell yourself that you're all wrong, dearie, two wrongs never made a right yet; and, anyhow, it ain't in your power to say what you'll do now. There's only one thing to do when your heart talks. You'll go to him—that's what you'll do. It's all you *can* do, dearie. Nothing else would be right or fair. He had every reason under the sun to hate you and hurt you, and yet he protected you, and it was a dirty, low trick that made you think he wasn't honest to the core. And all this means just one thing, dearie: he loved you; he respected you, and he's down there on his island now, with his heart bleeding, I'll bet. We'll bring him back; I'll bring him back myself, 'cause it was me who sent him away when he came after you."

"Oh, I couldn't look at him!"

Those were the words she spoke, but the tone was a call, a broken cry of need, of longing, of love, and Jen, gathering her closer, half smiled as she cried:

"It's none of your business now! It's your Aunt Jen's, and before God I'll set this straight if I'm spared another day of fair weather!"

She helped Eve to her feet and led her out of the gloomy stairway. She replenished the fire and turned to see Eve watching her.

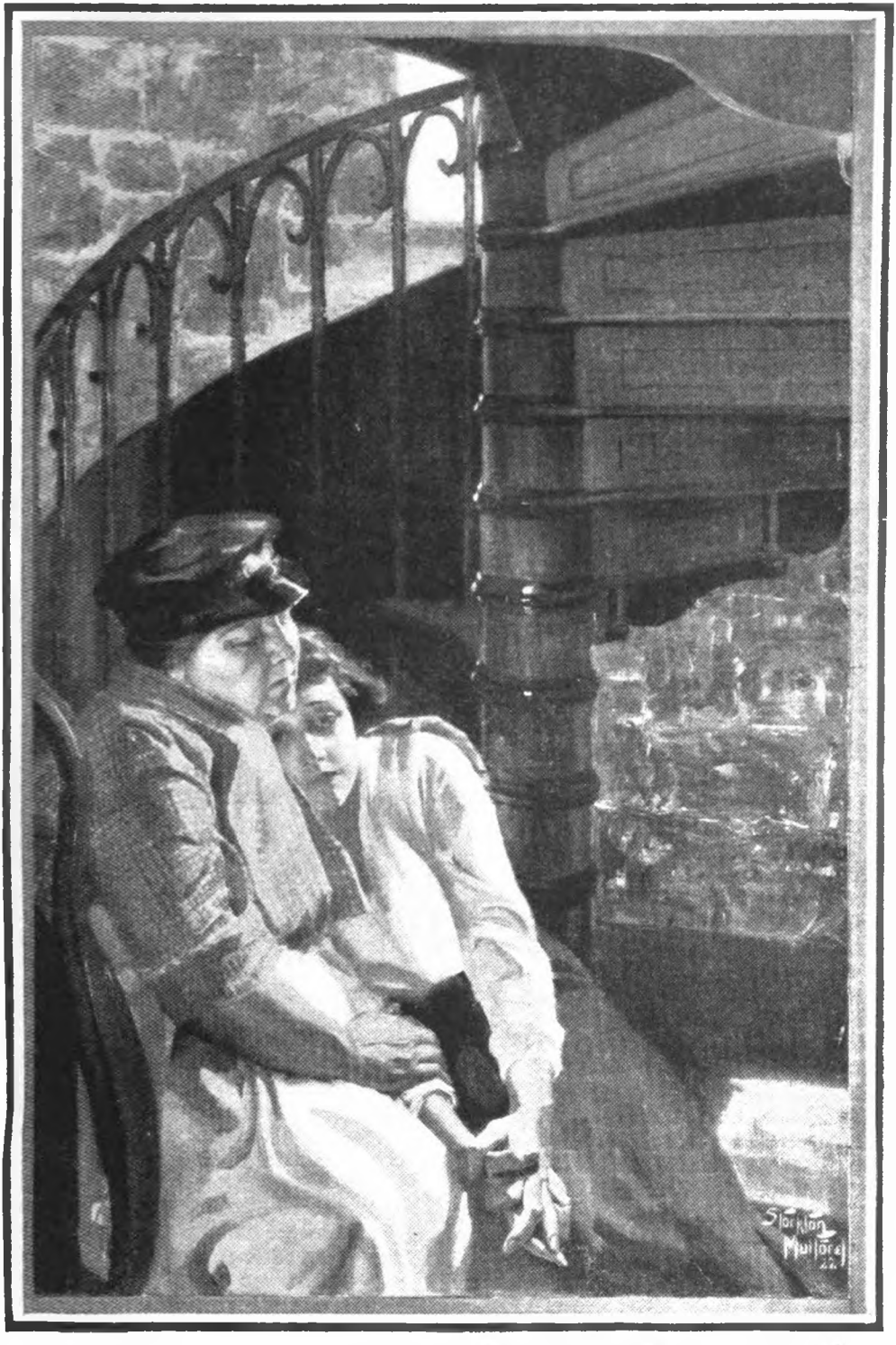
"Why," the girl asked slowly, "did you call my father 'Lasker?'"

IT WAS as if she had, in all calmness, cursed the woman, because Jen's relaxation was more than amazement or shock; she seemed to wilt and reached out a hand to a chair for support. Eve waited, struck by this change, and then walked slowly to the woman.

"You called him 'Lasker,' and said that he couldn't take me from you again. Did that mean—" Jen made a half-movement of her hand, but it was eloquent of a plea for reprieve, for silence. "And he threatened you, and you were afraid. I don't want you to be afraid on my account. That's why I asked you why you called him by another name. What is there about him, Aunt Jenny, that you know?"

"Before the good Lord, Eve, I wish I could tell!" she burst out chokingly. "I can't, though, dearie. It's your right to know, but it ain't my right to tell you—yet. It's somebody else's right to know first. O God, put some starch into my heart!" She lifted her one hand and struck the back of the chair feebly. "Strength is what I need, and faith, and a little Christian trust." She shook off Eve's reassuring clasp on her hand and moved across the room. "They'd ought to be back before long," she said huskily, "and mebbe to-night—and mebbe to-morrow——"

She began to cry silently, and Eve did not move or speak, but stood there until Jen made a light and began to prepare the meal.



"It's none of your business now! It's your Aunt Jen's, and before God I'll set this straight if I'm spared another day of fair weather!"

Very little, indeed, was said until the supply-boat chugged to its berth, and then Jen told of Eldred's coming, of driving him off, but she spoke no word of the factors which had so distressed her, and not once did she look at Eve.

THAT night, David MacKinnon sat beside Gam Gallagher's wood-stove in St. James and smoked his pipe and talked in short sentences that seemed to hurt.

"I don't like to leave you flat. You can get Patrick, and he'll do as well as I could; the heavy work's done there, anyhow, and —it's my move."

His smile was strained. The older man smoked a while in silence.

"It's none o' my business, o' course. I wouldn't have ye stay on. I was afraid from the first that somethin'——"

They let the matter rest there then, the one reticent, the other demonstrating that delicacy of feeling of which gruff men are sometimes capable. But he did say this:

"An' ye'll be goin'?"

David shifted with something like relief; this was fresh interest.

"I'll take the first tug over to Charlevoix. That'll likely be to-morrow afternoon, when the lift's in. I guess I'll go to salt water, Gam. It's a long way off, and the lakes—they're a little raw!"

The new day was crystal-clear, with a light breeze out of the northwest and the near horizons crisp as the lines of a steel etching. Off to the westward, where no land lay in sight, a false wall of cliffs, colored in changing lavenders and mauves, hung between the pale blue of sky and deep blue of water. Deep blue, indeed, as only these lakes can be blue, flecked by silver crests of bursting wavelets here and there and with fingers of vivid green stretching out into it, where shoals shelved toward great depths. The forest-clad Beavers, until now gray-brown and brash, stood in soft, pale verdure beneath the unclouded sun.

From the straits a trio of lean carriers progressed up Lake Michigan, stately in length and line, drawing their majestic plumes of smoke after them. Between these and the Squaw Island lighthouse, a tug lifted its gang of gill-nets, crawling under checked power as the miles of twine with their imprisoned fish came over the drum. A host of gulls wheeled above the craft, flashing silver against the sky as the foaming crests flashed silver against the lake.

Eve stood near the boat-landing, watching the supply-boat bear southward. Ned Borden and his wife were aboard and their destination was High Island, and their errand was to quiet the turmoil in her heart. She knew that, and Aunt Jen had been strong in her promises that their problem was simple, but, for all this, the girl was filled with misgiving. Yesterday she had said that she could not find the courage to call David back; this morning she had drawn back fearfully from Jen's suggestion that she go with them, but now she knew there was nothing she would not do, no begging, no humility she would not undergo to pick up the thread of her relationship with David where it had been broken.

Had she been less disturbed, it is likely that Eve would have marked the change that had taken place in Aunt Jen. Since Ned's return last evening, when he had been told of that ominous visit of the afternoon, the woman had gone about as though repressing some impulse that was clamoring for outlet. Eve had heard her voice late at night, talking earnestly to Ned, an unbroken, monotonous blur of sound, but there could have been no expression of what was in Jen's heart, because this morning she had been unchanged, absorbed, meeting even the girl's eyes with only fleeting glances and hardly looking at her husband.

But there was too much of her own self in Eve's mind to think about others that morning, and now, as she stood alone, she was engaged in trying not to let her hope rise too recklessly, and she began to walk up and down slowly. Pete Larsen had come off watch at six and was asleep now, and she knew that the Dane would slumber noisily for hours. Eve was glad to be alone.

She had only half-consciously remarked the tug lifting far away. It was the only indication of life she saw, besides the pair of loons with necks erect not far offshore. What was astir on the lake, now that the supply-boat was gone, did not interest her, and so she was not aware of that other craft, the gray of whose hull and sails made it inconspicuous. She did not see it at all until the boat was within a mile, and then she gave it no heed, for the mackinaw's

course was laid before the wind and it would pass Squaw Island by with a good margin.

She walked down the beach, and it might have been her movement, the flash of her white waist against the gold and green of the background that attracted the man in the sailboat. Anyhow, he altered his course and stood in, craft heeled slightly with the breeze.

Eve stopped when the change attracted her. She saw the boat approach, saw a figure huddled over the tiller, peering landward fixedly. Soon she made him out—a grimy, gray old man with vacant brown eyes, and when he was near, she could see the lips moving silently in the thin beard.

Until he was almost inshore the man retained that strained position over the tiller and then, with a start, put down his helm. The mackinaw came into the wind, came to rest against the landing, and the man stood up.

He remained there for an interval with the canvas whispering and the reef-points rattling in gentle staccato, staring at the girl as if transfixed, as if oblivious of any other thing on lake or land, and then he stepped out of the boat, clambering over the rail without once taking that set stare from Eve. A long white welt of scar ran over his right eye into the hair. One hand went up there to rub the scar, and something like dismay came into his gaze. His lips stopped moving for the moment, but they began again when he went slowly toward the girl.

On that, Eve became frightened. She drew back a step, as though to run away, for this strange old man and his unnatural interest filled her with apprehension. But he spoke.

"You!" he muttered shortly, and then spoke the word again, long-drawn and in something like a wail this time. "*You-u-u-u!*"

He began to breath sharply, as if the brief effort had drained his strength. The girl could see that he trembled, but he kept on toward her very slowly, one hand outstretched.

"You!" he cried again. "I came for him —and I find——"

It was not fear of violence which went through the girl wave after wave. There was no danger from that feeble old man, but fright was heavy on her—the fright of the weirdly strange—for his words chilled her as might an unexplained and eery sound.

"What do you want?" she heard herself asking. "Who are you looking for?"

He did not appear to notice, but came on until he was a half-dozen paces from her and frowning as he stared into her face.

"For him—for him! And I find you—you—Eve!"

ON HER name, a change appeared in his eyes, like a passing moment of clarity, fading into irresolution and perplexity, and then that unwavering stare returned.

Something in the girl stirred—some long-forgotten, feeble thing, like faint memory striving its best to rise to the surface. He had spoken her name—this man she had never seen, this crazy man, and she turned to be away from him.

But on that gesture he lurched forward, dropping to his knees, struggling to rise, snatching at her for help, and his clawlike hand caught hers; and though she would have drawn it away from him, he clung—not desperately, not with strength, but gently, with something of a childish touch, an appeal, and for the instant she remained passive. Then he began to laugh and cry out:

"For *him*—and I find you! Little Eve! Little Eve! *My* Eve!"

His cracked voice was terrible. The relief, the elation, the triumph in it put her in a panic. She tried to draw away, but he had her one hand in both of his, and she could feel the steady tremor of his body.

"For him! For him— I came, and it's you— Dear little Eve! My Eve! Ho! Ho! Ho!"

His voice died out, and something like bewilderment came over him. He let go her hand and made a brushing gesture before his eyes as though smoke were there. He looked away from her, out into the lake, and began to laugh—a terrible laugh. The misery, the heart-break, the disillusionment in it! It was weak at the beginning, and it died to a whisper in his throat, and the whisper ended in a sob.

He rose, panting; he looked into Eve's face, and a smile of great sadness twitched at his lips as he shook his head.

"No," whispered; "it can't—" He frowned, as though trying to remember.

"No—you're like her. No—it can't——"

He turned about, and his eyes rested on his sailboat. He threw out a hand then and his head rocked backward and he laughed once more—a bitter, beaten laugh—and walked to the landing. He put the force of his scrawny arms on the bow of the boat and shoved; the craft moved, and the wind set her in a slow drift from the land. He scrambled aboard and made his way aft to the tiller, fumbling with the sheet-lines.

He turned the boat before the breeze and her wings took it; she edged away from the lee of the island and the water began a contented purr about her bows. He settled himself beside the tiller, and once again his head rocked backward and the girl heard that empty, hopeless laugh.

He had spoken her name; he had touched something in her heart.

"Come back! Here—come back!"

She found herself calling out to him, but he did not turn to look. A puff of wind heeled the mackinaw, speeding it, and then died.

"Why, he's——"

She did not even know what had prompted that sentence which she could not finish. She turned about toward the buildings, as though to ask for help, but only Pete was there, sleeping soundly. She looked again at the sailboat, and running along the beach to where a skiff was resting, shoved it into the water. She looked over her shoulder for direction and began to row feverishly. The light skiff surged across the water, but the wind, which had dropped, freshened for the time and she could not gain. She realized this after she had gone a mile, and stood up and waved and called again, but if the man looked back, she could not see, he was that far away.

It was useless to keep on, so she sat down in the skiff and, drifting slowly, watched the sailboat move on toward Garden Island. The wind lifted, leaving the water about her undulating glass, but it dipped again yonder; she could see its black line, and the mackinaw kept on. She started to row back and found that she had little strength. She stopped and sat still. That old man! Eldred—his coming yesterday—her panic at thought of his power—her suffering when she knew that David had been— These, and others—the undefined distress that was on her now. She sat still for a long time, then rowed again and stopped. She did not want to go ashore. The light motion of the boat soothed her. Now and then she dipped the oars to overcome the drift and, when the sun grew hot, she dozed. The wall of mirage in the west gave way to a sharp horizon; the freighters were out of sight, their smoke a faint blur.

TWICE again the old man laughed. He paid little attention to the progress of his boat, and between those outbursts of crazy mirth he sat bent over the tiller, lips tight and no longer moving, but once he sat up sharply and made that brushing gesture before his eyes, as if he would clear his mind of the haze which fuddled it.

Land loomed before him. He was close in, and a man was standing on the beach, watching him through a glass. For long the glass held on the boat, and then it was lowered. The hand which held it went behind Eldred's back to be clasped lightly by its mate, and he stood, shoulders slightly drooped, head hung forward.

On that gesture, the man at the tiller straightened. It was not a start; he brought himself to an approximately erect position slowly, as a man will into whose understanding dawns some fact too important to cause a start. He fumbled in his shirt-front and then let his hand rest there, gripping, content.

He let go the tiller; the canvas swung over, going limp as the wind drained out. The boat bumped on the boulders and listed a bit and swung round and came to a stop. The old man stood up. The uncertainty which had been about his movements was gone. With a hand on the mizzen-shrouds, the other still thrust into his shirt-front, he stepped into the water. He slipped and floundered and fell, but no shock at the chill showed in his face and the one hand was not withdrawn from his breast. Water dripping from his scraggly beard, even, he stood up and waded toward Norman Eldred, who waited, watching curiously his approach.

And at the edge of the water, twenty feet from Eldred, the other halted. There was a stiffness to his back, an obvious effort to square his shoulders, and then he laughed. That laugh! It was wild, weird triumph—success, joy, incomparable rage were mingled in it.

"Lasker!" he shouted in his thin, cutting voice. "Lasker, you've——"

The glass had dropped from the other's hand and it had whipped to his side pocket, but even as the pistol came out, spurting its jet of flame, the old man drew his hand from his shirt; a rusted, aged revolver was clutched there, and he brandished it in an imperious gesture as its muzzle fell toward Eldred.

Just that—those two shots, the one following the other as quickly as a man can clap his hands. The bareheaded old man staggered a bit and spread his feet as if to resist a blow. Eldred's hand dropped to his side; the pistol fell into the sand, muzzle first, sticking up there as if it had been planted. Then the other hand moved slowly to spread itself over his belly. He swayed, and a sound came from him that a man might make who had been kicked in the stomach. His legs gave suddenly and he pitched forward, falling on hands and knees, hatless, head swaying like a bear in distress.

The other did not speak. He turned and waded stiffly toward his mackinaw. The wind was gone now. He clambered painfully aboard and hauled down on the foresail. He half fell into the cockpit and his revolver rattled in the bottom. A breath of breeze came and swung the boat about. She was free, making bare headway off the beach.

And Eldred, lifting his face as the first drop of crimson stained the yellow sand where his dark shadow lay, could see the lettering:

REVENGE
PORT BRUCE. ONT.

His lips formed one word: "Missed." And again, in a hateful whisper: "Missed."

Over at High Island the lighthouse supply-boat was docked, and Gam Gallagher, who had just brought his *Kittiwake* in behind her, stood on deck, talking to Borden and his wife.

"He was goin' to Charlevoix on the first tug," he said thoughtfully. "It's likely he's gone by now."

Jen turned abruptly to her husband as though she would speak, but she did not for a moment; then her words came in a whisper:

"He's running away. He's running away and he's got a darned big start, Ned. What'll we do?"

The keeper looked at her gravely.

"It seems," he said, "that this keeps slipping through our fingers."

"Oh, no! Don't say that!" she burst out, with a queer panic. "Don't say that, Ned! We've *got* to find him. I owe it— Come aboard here; come with me!" she cried almost frantically, grasping his arm, and led the way into the supply-boat's cabin. She slammed the companion-door and faced him. "This is for you alone," she said. "My cowardly heart, Ned, my cowardly heart—" After a moment she began to talk rapidly in a strained voice.

DIMMOCK, from the doorway of the ice-house, where he hounded two men who were packing fish, caught a glimpse of a strange object making through the trees behind the store. He turned and stared a moment and then began to run.

"Hi!" he called. "Hi, Eldred! What——"

At his shout, the laborious progress, half a crawl, half a dragging of the numbing legs, was checked, and Eldred sank, panting, to one hip. He looked up with a twisted grimace when Dimmock squatted beside him.

He said one word: "Shot," and moved his hand to his stomach, and the other, looking, saw the dark stain on the clothing.

"Shot! Who done it, Eldred? Who?" The barest suggestion of a dismissing gesture checked him.

"Get me in—and get Eve. Send every boat—to High, St. James—Squaw—everywhere!"

He closed his eyes then, and Dimmock heard his teeth grind against pain or weakness.

Dimmock roared for help, cursing as men ran up from the beach. They bore Eldred to his house and stretched him on the wide window-seat, and Dimmock began unfastening his clothes.

"Not that!" The eyes did not open, but the voice had some of its normal timbre. "I'll be gone—soon. Get Eve—or I'll follow you back from hell itself!"

There was scattering then. Three of the fleet were in the harbor, two steam-tugs and one of the gasoline-boats. One went to High Island, another to St. James, and to Squaw a third. To the man at the wheel

of the tug bound for Beaver Island, Dimmock talked earnestly.

"A doctor," he said, with an emphatic nod. "Stop at the coast-guard station an' telephone across. Tell 'em to come; it's life or death, with death gainin' fast—tell him!"

The boats were gone, stringing out across the reef, separating then with engines wide open, bright excitement dancing in the eyes of the crews.

And the one bound for St. James checked first, while a man ran into the coast-guard station and told the keeper his errand. The one for High Island passed the lighthouse supply-boat as it left the harbor, while the last bore down upon the skiff drifting off Squaw Island, and the man at the wheel saw the girl who had been dozing start and look up and grasp her oars and row frantically for the light. He opened the pilot-house door and hung out and rang for the motor to stop as he drew near.

"Your father's been shot!" he called. "He's sent for you!"

His words penetrated Eve's panic. The earnestness of his face could not be doubted, but for a moment she did not cease rowing. The boat was close beside her. She could have touched it with an oar. She saw the man at the motor peering out at her, and in his eyes was that same consternation which marked the expression of the other.

It was not until after she spoke that she stopped her mechanical effort to escape.

"Shot?" she asked explosively.

"Shot." The wheelsman nodded. "An hour ago. He sent for you. Dimmock said to come."

Shot! Dying! It did not occur to her that this might be a ruse; the expressions of those faces could not have been feigned.

Dying! The thought went through her with a thrill. Relief? Terror? She did not know.

She knew this, though: She was no longer afraid. Death had laid its hand on the power that had made her fear. She found herself standing tight-faced on the stern of the boat bound back for Indian Harbor, the skiff she had been in towing at its hundred feet of line.

IN CHARLEVOIX, a young physician was speaking into a telephone.

"Hello! . . . You, Sheriff? Say—I've just had a call from St. James. Eldred's been shot. . . . Yes. Sure enough! Bad, too, I guess. They want help, and I— . . . You bet!" He laughed rather nervously. "I didn't want to go alone."

His gaze went out the window while he listened to what the other said, and he saw a varnished speed-boat drop its bow in a long glide across the harbor. He spoke.

"Tim White's been tuning up that big speed-boat. . . . Sure! . . . S'pose he would. She'll do forty miles an hour."

He hung up the receiver and began packing instruments in a bag.

Dimmock was alone in the room with Eldred when Eve came through the door.

Eldred was lying where he had been put down, breathing slowly. Now and then his face had wrenched with pain, but he had not spoken since giving that imperious order. He had looked at Dimmock questioningly when he returned after despatching the messengers, and had closed his eyes when the man began to report. Dimmock's voice died out, and he sat down and waited, eyes very wide with excitement. A half-hour later he rose and brought water. Eldred drank without a word and sank back. The drink had been good, but his ironical smile seemed to ask: "What for? Why this moment of respite?"

Dimmock did not get up when Eve entered. She looked first at him, then at the figure on the window-seat, hands crossed over the wound. She made hardly a stir as she came in, but his eyes opened and looked at her, and after an interval one hand reached out appealingly.

The girl stood by the door a moment, drawing back, staring at that white, bloodless hand with the tufts of black hair; then her gaze went to his face and saw the hunger —the terrible, unearthly hunger—in his eyes.

"Eve," he said then in assurance. "Eve." It was like the ending of suspense.

She went forward and took the hand, kneeling beside him, speechless. He drew her hand close to his side and pressed it there, where she could feel the rise and fall of his ribs as he breathed.

"You're back!," he said weakly and smiled. "Back!" And a movement of his chest startled her—it was so strong an indication of the laugh which did not reach his throat.

He had looked away, and now he sighed and then moved his head so he could see her.

"There isn't much time," he began, and his face showed a flicker of pain. "It is something I hadn't planned on—this talk, I mean—something I'd intended to keep. Death hadn't entered my plan—" He released her hand and she sank down, sitting on one hip, listening. "Confession!" There was contempt in the word. "King Norman at the confessional!"—with much of his old jeering irony, and a breath of laughter followed. "Not to clear my conscience, though—whatever that may be—not to unburden myself. I'd rather go on—holding it, like I've held this—kingdom of mine; but it's all I can do for you now—take away the wonder."

He paused for a time and closed his eyes and did not open them when he went on:

"Once, years ago, I thought about dying—just casually. I made a will. Dimmock knows; somebody else witnessed it, too. It's in the box in the desk there. It leaves this—this kingdom to you. 'To the woman known as Eve Eldred,' it says. That, so there'd be no mistake. But you'd—have wondered."

His eyes opened and searched her face; their luster was dimmed so that they were almost gentle—a quality which she had never seen there. They were almost soft eyes now, nearly tender and loving. She stirred and caught her breath.

"No—not you! I don't want to hear you speak, daughter—want to remember your last words down there in the store, asking for my—protection. Besides, there's no time for two—to talk——"

His fingers dallied with the skirts of his coat and he looked into space.

"'To the woman who is known as Eve Eldred,'" he repeated in a whisper. "That means, of course, that you're not Eve Eldred. You're Eve—not Eldred."

A SHUDDER ran through the girl, and she looked about quickly. Dimmock sat gripping the arms of his chair. Eldred's eyes were on her with a slight show of irritation at her movement.

"We'll get back, somehow—to the beginning. It's hard"—frowning—"to know just where——"

That was a really long pause; his eyes held on the girl's face, but he seemed to be speculating about something else, not thinking of her. The room was absolutely silent. Eve could hear the pelt of her own heart.

Finally he whispered ever so faintly:

"You're so like her"—as though his strength was draining—"all but the hair. You know that, though; you saw her picture. It *was* hers—your mother's." His emphasis startled her—it came with such strength—and his voice seemed fuller after that.

"Her hair was light, as light as—yours is dark.

"She was as bewitching as you—perhaps more so—I can't tell. Years and this—this hole in me get between us." He stirred slightly and frowned. "She could drive men wild, but she wouldn't—try for that. She could have anything, any man she wanted—but she wasn't interested.

"That's the way sometimes—not contempt—indifference—worse than contempt. It's a rampart and can't be beaten down.

"That was in Port Bruce, Ontario. She was there when I came, young and a buyer. I was only to stay a few days. I stayed until——"

He tried to shake his head, for he seemed to be rambling from the course on which he had determined, and for many minutes he lay with closed eyes; but there was that about him which kept the girl quiet and motionless except for one appealing glance at Dimmock, who responded in no way, but sat there like a man carved from wood and hideously colored, with his blanched face and flaming beard and china-blue eyes.

"That was the end of me." He went on so unexpectedly that his voice was a shock. "I was all befuddled, all lost. I'd had situations before, with women, with men—and had handled them offhand—that way. She—was different.

"She'd listen—so gently—and smile. She was sorry, she said. I believe she was, in a manner. But she always—shrank. It was a gesture she always greeted me with—shrinking. Hard enough to break in men or dogs, but with women—" His movement, had he been erect, would have been a shrug. "It ruined me. I guess there is such a thing as heart-break. Looking back, I can explain it no other way—heart-break. But they mend—hearts. There was a man—Wetherby— William— Hah!" His voice

had risen on the name; his snort was disdain. "Gentle, meek, soft-handed and soft-voiced. I cracked his head with my open hand when I knew.

"She wouldn't take me, who became a king. She'd have Wetherby. Ah, she'd have Wetherby!" He tossed himself half over, with a surprising show of vitality, and lay with his face toward the window, staring at the harbor. "She'd have Wetherby." And then he lay still, lay there so long and so motionless that Dimmock rose cautiously, eyes even wider than before, but on the light creak of his chair, one of Eldred's arms lifted and he strained in an attempt to roll back and face Eve. She rose quickly. She did not speak; she could not have uttered a sound—her throat was that dry—but she turned him over and he sighed and smiled.

"Not Edward Lasker—that was me. She'd have Wetherby. No; a man can't forget.

"A man can't. I know! I tried all sorts of things—women and work, and crime, even; but a man can't—not things like that—in here, Eve, in your heart. A hurt in your heart makes this I've got in my body to-day seem like balm. No—a man can't.

"I had to go back, you see; I had to see her again. I hoped maybe she'd have tired of Wetherby. Oh, yes; I'd have been glad of that. I'd have waited. I'd have been second or—tenth—any place—just to have her; but she wasn't that kind.

"Three years I waited, fighting it, hoping she'd be tired and—relish a change—any change—even me—and afraid to see that my hope had no foundation. I should have known that—knowing her, your mother."

ANOTHER pause and, after working his lips, he gestured for the water again. Eve held it and he drank, his head trembling as she supported it. He sank back, whispering, "Rest—rest," and did not rouse for a time.

Eve turned to Dimmock and whispered: "How did it happen? Who——"

But she saw the change in his face and looked to see one of her father's hands upraised, commanding silence. Dimmock did not reply; she gave up trying.

"Eve?" He called her back, and she sat on the bench beside him, looking down into his face, restraining her impatience.

"I looked in," Eldred went on. "Looked in their window at night—three years afterward. She—your mother—was putting their child in bed—their child—his child, by her—his Eve. And she was happy! Ah, happy!" His voice had whined up to a snarl which sent a chill through the girl's limbs. "Happy, with his child—and with him— God Almighty, a fool could have told that! A fool could have seen that happiness—she with him—and his child——"

His eyes blazed a moment, and then he closed them.

"It's a short passage from loving to hating, Eve—little Eve—my Eve! I've been a good hater always; women and men both knew it. She—your mother—said that she knew it; that was the reason—one reason—And I, Edward Lasker, outside, peering in at that happiness. God, if I'd had a conscience, it wouldn't have stood before that—that night!" He swallowed and caressed his lips with his tongue. "So easy," he went on. "So very easy—and unique. That was why. You'd never suspect that—would you, Dimmock? You'd never suspect a man would steal the child of a woman who'd broken his heart, would you? No—that saved it for me. Unique, by God—different! Killed him? Killed her? Bah! Anybody could have done that; but to steal their happiness— *That* hurt!"

He was looking straight at Eve, but if he detected her horror and recoil, he gave no evidence of it.

"It wasn't easy—you squawked." He laughed grimly. "They had the town out, and it was a blow from the north. I tried the beach and knew I couldn't make it, carrying you. I came on a boat hauled up; I got in and afloat—blowing great guns, and I didn't have a plan and only one oar. But I didn't care—not much. There was nothing in life for me that night but the stealing of their happiness. You in your blankets didn't mean anything then, except that—their happiness, not mine—not that night."

He shook his head and sighed, and the girl, horror-struck, started to draw away. He felt the movement, and, without opening his eyes, caught her skirt to hold her there. She was so weak that that feeble impediment would have been enough. She was dizzy, taken with vertigo; she sat down after a long wait and he went on:

"God was with me—I mean that—if

there ever was a God. A schooner beating up for a lee picked me up and we made it all right—you and I, Eve. You didn't know—you were only two. Only two—years of happiness for them—with you.

A LONG pause. The wind rustled the young leaves and died, and that pregnant silence endured interminably before Eldred spoke again.

"Where was I? Ah, yes." A sigh. "That was the beginning. I'd figured on ditching you safe somewhere—not for your sake, but so they couldn't get you. I turned you over to a woman—and somehow she hung on, got to loving you. Me, Edward Lasker, becoming Norman Eldred, keeping low, still hot with revenge achieved.

"She—your mother—died that spring. Ah, it was blow for blow, an eye for an eye, a life for a heart! She went out—just faded—after her damned happiness with him—Come back, Eve!"

She had risen, whirling away and hiding her face.

"Eve?"—very gently. "Not that, please! Remember, I'm drunk with death. If I overstate—forgive. I want you to know—there'll be no mystery by night then."

After she came back, he repeated, "By night," and strained to look outdoors at the peaceful sunlight filtering through the greening boughs of trees and at the flat, ice-blue lake.

"That's all—except about you." His eyes on her began to smolder with a new light; it began with that tenderness again, and the tenderness gave to a passion—a hunger, joy of a fierce sort. "And then I began to know how sweet my revenge had been. You! They'd loved you—yes; and I—" He smiled, and one hand stirred as in a gesture of helplessness.

"Red Jenny—she was the woman who took you. She kept you a year in her house. And she learned, too, to love— A devil of a time—driving her off from sharing you. You'd got into her heart, too, by then—aye; into her heart! Like mine—deeply in. Sentiment? Bah! No; not sentiment—something else. I had something to live for—you—and I was sharing you with Red Jenny.

"Had to threaten her—had to threaten that she'd been a party to abduction. She didn't know where you came from until then. She thought— Devil knows what she thought! I didn't care—at first. I'd figured on ditching you with her—anywhere but sending you back to Wetherby and your mother. But I couldn't get you out of my arms—out of my mind, I mean" —smiling faintly. "And Red Jenny—a Tatar! She'd have loved you if I'd let her. You'd have been safe enough; but it would have meant—my sharing you.

"And there was danger from Wetherby." He stirred sharply, and one hand hovered over the wound. "It had put him off his head by then. He'd begun to hunt, and I—moved just in time. He came to her place—to Red Jenny's. He was that close, but he was off his head and couldn't make her understand then or she might have turned on me and helped him. Yes; she would have—surely.

"And I had you safe—in the Quebec convent." His fingers plucked at his coat again, and his voice had sunk to a mere whisper. "I shut her mouth—with threats. She was innocent, but she didn't know that. Abduction! It sounds ugly to a woman. And Wetherby was gone, and nobody knew where, and the story was fading out. You—I had you safe—for myself alone!"

He tried to laugh, but no sound came, and again there was silence. His breath was faster and lighter, and it seemed an effort for him to hold his eyelids open. A faltering hand moved to his abdomen, and on its light pressure he winced.

"I wouldn't share you"—in a bare whisper. "I wouldn't share you with anybody. Jode MacKinnon—I wrecked him because you liked him. The story got about that you'd helped, that you'd changed the lights. I let it go. It helped—to keep you safe for me. Then the woman to teach you—I wanted you to learn, but I sent her away because you liked her."

He lay still for a long time, and the girl watched him in dumb horror.

"They all loved you, Eve. I brought the men here—'scum of the lakes,' they're well called— I brought that kind so you'd need me more than ever. Red Jenny came and risked her happiness to be near you, and I sent her away. That was a scare—when she came. I had one chance—her love for her husband. It makes cowards of men—and women. Your dog, even, I shot, because you—liked him—him—a dog——"

Again the plucking of fingers a moment, and then the hand that had been moving slipped from his body to the cushion on which he lay upturned, fingers curled lifelessly. His eyes were half closed, and his breath through the pale and parted lips was very slight.

The girl rose, and he did not stir. She made a movement as though to fly from that room but stopped. Where to go? And there was no danger here now.

Dimmock rose and approached softly, looking down at the figure of his master. He rubbed his chin and then his wide eyes turned on Eve.

"I sent for a doctor," he whispered hoarsely. "You stay. I'll go look where it happened."

He was gone softly, as from a room where some one slept, closing the door without a sound. Eve watched him go through the trees beyond the store, head lowered as he scanned the ground and found the trail he sought.

Her heart was rapping smartly; there seemed no strength in her body. She tried to look at the figure of the man she had so long called "father" and could not. A sharp shiver ran through her. She moved along slowly toward that one nail in the wall, the place where the picture of her mother had hung. It was gone, and she searched Eldred's desk for it. It was not there. It was nowhere in the room. Back by where it had hung she stopped again, and the high sunlight, striking through the window, was caught by a glass particle on the floor. She stooped and saw it—fine glass stamped to powder. She guessed vaguely at what had become of the picture.

The things her father had told her came pelting back—her abduction, Jen Borden's place in it, the savagery with which Eldred had tried to hold her as his own. But one thing, she thought, had he left untouched in his narrative—David's part in this tragedy of a house of cards. David! She felt a wave of elation at thought of him, and a sickening swirl downward again.

IN THE stillness of the day, a faint droning, steady, regular, drew near. Eve looked out and saw, standing in through the buoys, the low hull of a speed-boat, bow high out of water, fan-shaped wake of foam spreading out across the calm lake, its spume of vapor thinning in the sunshine. The drone rose to a bellow, and the bellow ceased suddenly. The boat rode on even keel into the harbor, swinging for the dock.

And then they were in the room, confusing the bewildered girl—the doctor, another man who was the sheriff, and Dimmock, holding in his hand the pistol Eldred had dropped on the beach.

Her father did not stir when the physician bent over him and felt for a pulse, but he moved sharply when the practised hand drew apart his clothing and displayed the white flesh about the dark blotch with its small puncture. His eyes opened, and he looked into the face of the man.

"No—use," he said in a weak, throaty tone.

Again the hand on his pulse and his eyes closed, and the doctor looked at the others. When he spoke, it was to the sheriff.

"No chance," he said.

On that, Dimmock started and uttered a slight groan. Eve remained standing apart, watching all in silence.

Then it was the sheriff addressing her and Dimmock with an inclusive glance.

"What happened?"

Dimmock shook his head and held out the pistol.

"He come draggin' himself in three hours ago. I found this by his tracks on the beach. No other sign; no track but his." The sheriff took the pistol and threw out the magazine. "Here!" Dimmock handed him an empty cartridge-shell. "I found it by where he fell."

"He fired, eh?" The sheriff's gaze was challenging Dimmock. "That's all you know? This may be murder, and if you know anything——"

'That's every word."

The other considered, looking at the physician.

"Well, God knows he had enemies enough! Maybe somebody had cause enough; but it's a killing, and——"

His unfinished sentence indicated clearly that there could be but one path of duty for him. He turned to the girl.

"What do you know?" She tried to speak and could not; just shook her head. "Where were you?"

She gestured and said:

"Squaw Island. In a skiff this morning——"

The man looked at her sharply and would have spoken again, but a murmur from Eldred attracted him. The four looked at the dying man.

'Eve"—a mere breath of the word—"Eve." The fingers of the outstretched hand moved, a suggestion of a beckoning gesture. "Come close. Ah, Eve, don't hate me—don't hate me!" And in the feeble voice, an echo of the ironical strength it had once possessed, was tragedy—stark, utter tragedy, the cry of a broken heart.

The girl stood above him, shrinking, eyes filled with terror. The sheriff stepped close to her.

"Ask him what about it—who did it," he prompted.

At that, Eldred's eyes opened wider, and after a sustained effort he moved his head slightly, looking from one to the other—Dimmock, to the doctor, to the sheriff—and in their mournful depths lighted one more flare. It was diabolical; it was hatred; it was cunning—a last flash of the soul that was passing.

"Simple," he said, "Simple. MacKinnon—he thought I had you, Eve. He shot me down. He—MacKinnon—ah, he——"

The breath drained from his chest and the rigidity went from his figure. His neck settled and the beard was crushed against his chest. His lids sank slowly until only a slit of his eye showed, and that flare of triumphant bitterness faded slowly into expressionless extinction. The doctor touched the wrist again and unclasped his fingers and rose.

"The king is dead," he said grimly.

And in Eve's ears was penting one word: "MacKinnon—MacKinnon—MacKinnon." She was in terror this time. That was murder, and David, because of her, for revenge—for——

Then the word again:

"MacKinnon! MacKinnon, eh?" It was the sheriff's voice. "Hell! That's too bad." And from his tone it was certain that there was no way out.

He was shaking his head regretfully, but checked the gesture, for Eve was facing him, lips working, palms tight against her breasts.

"What's the matter?" he said, for her expression was startling.

"It wasn't MacKinnon," she answered evenly. "I killed him—I did! This morning. I rowed over from the light. Larsen was alone there and asleep. They caught up with me before I got back. I did it, and Dimmock can tell you why. He heard——"

The sheriff took the cigar from his mouth in amazement.

Eve walked across the room and stood, face to the cold fireplace, hands clasped tightly. They had accused David, and this would let him get away—get away——

"Well, that makes it simple," she heard the sheriff say. "But maybe you'd better get the bullet, Doc. We may need some evidence."

Then they were stirring about the room, and she put out a hand to the mantle for support.

"You watch her, Doc," the sheriff added. "I'll look around."

IT REQUIRED a long, long time for Jen Borden to tell her story. She spoke slowly, in a flat, strained voice, and there was so much to tell—the secrets of so many years to be bared. Her husband sat on the locker beside her, and his eyes did not leave her face for an instant, nor did he speak. There was no occasion for interruption, because the story she had to tell had been repressed for long, had been rehearsed so many times that it came clearly and with no lapses in narrative to confuse her listener.

"That's all," she said finally. "That's all, Ned. That's what I've carried for ten years. That's what I've been too big a coward to tell, because I've been so happy. You said once that the thing I could do to make you hate me would be to lie or to do something dishonorable. Well, I've lived a lie, I guess, and I've done as dishonorable a thing as any woman could do. It wasn't too late when I found out, mebbe. I might've set out then and found Wetherby and put him on Lasker's track. We'd found the baby, mebbe, but I was afraid. I'd been a party to it— I— Oh, Neddie!"

She turned from him then, rising and fumbling for her handkerchief, but he was beside her, drawing her back to the seat.

"I've known for a long time," he said, "that there was something between you and Eldred or the girl. It didn't matter much, but it used to hurt, except when I stopped to think that maybe I didn't have a right to know everything that you had to tell."

After a moment she looked at him curiously, with wet eyes.

"What are you driving at?"

"I guess I know what you've been through in keeping something back. Do you remember, Jenny, that day you paid your last rent on the Sailors' Rest and damned the man who'd take money from a business that couldn't pay without women and whisky? Those were your words: 'Women and whisky.'"

"Why, sure! That's where I seen you first. That's where this—this blessed happiness begun, wasn't it?"

"I owed it to you," he said, and, at her startled exclamation, went on: "You see, I realized your hopes had gone smash because you tried to be decent in a hell-hole. Jenny, I was the man who was taking the money from you. My savings had gone into that building."

"Oh, and I said them things about you!"

He nodded.

"And they're still on my heart like scars, and since then I've been trying to sort of make up by being as good to you as I knew."

Jen dropped her handkerchief and straightened.

"Why, you old skinflint!" she boomed. "You old bloodsucker! If I'd known that, do you think you'd had a minute's peace from then on? Do you think I'd worried about what was none of your business if I'd known that *you* was holding out on *me*? So that was it, eh? That's why you hounded me—because you wanted to wash out your sins? And that's how the Sailors' Rest got to be a sailors' mission, is it?" He nodded. "Well, of all the skulking, low-down——"

And then the emotion which her bluster had covered burst out, and he held her close while she clung to him and wept.

They were heading across toward Beaver Island shortly, standing side by side at the wheel of the boat, a new excitement about Jen, a new enthusiasm in Ned's face.

"It's our job, sure enough," he said. "We're the ones who know; we'll have to get that boy if we follow him to kingdom come. And Eve—Lord, Jenny, it's another part of our job trying to make up to her for what she's been through."

As they rounded the lower end of Beaver Island to swing southward, four boats were revealed moving toward them and in a close line. It was late in the day for fishers to be starting out, and Ned watched their approach curiously. As they came abreast of the leading boat, a man leaned over its rail and shouted. Ned put his head out and tucked a hand behind his ear; the man called again and pointed toward Garden Island, but still they could not make out what he said above the bang of exhausts.

"Strange!" he commented. And then, from his wife:

"Lookit! There's David now. See? In the pilot-house of the *Fisherboy!*"

The keeper saw David. Even at that distance, his face seemed to be drawn. They signaled, but he replied only with a brief gesture, mistaking their hails for greetings. They swung about at once to follow and overtake, and came abreast of the second boat—a steam-tug, this, making less noise—and the man who leaned out to give the news could make himself heard.

Jen was still trying to attract David by waving her handkerchief, but the man who called across the water took her mind from this.

"Hear about Eldred?"

"No. What?"

"Shot!"

"Shot?"

"Yup. Dyin'. Doctor an' sheriff are there. Come on!"

They fell into the procession of boats which made toward Indian Harbor.

AS THE first of them gained a view of the well-protected bay, they saw the sleek speed-boat just moving out from Eldred's dock, the sheriff standing in the cockpit and watching them. The bellowing of the motor was checked at a word from the sheriff, and when the first tug came close enough for him to see David MacKinnon on deck, he gave another order and the fleet craft pulled again to her moorings.

"You're MacKinnon," the sheriff said when David came to the rail. "Come on along here. Got somethin' to talk over with you."

The two men went up the dock to the beach while the other tugs came to rest and the word spread among the Beaver Islanders. Rumor and conjecture flew while Aunt Jen Borden stood listening and blurting impatient questions and watching David anxiously.

The sheriff stopped and looked closely at MacKinnon.

"Eldred said just before he died that you shot him."

David's brow wrinkled, but more in perplexity than surprise.

"*I* shot him?"

"That's it. His last words were that you shot him."

Then David laughed in explosive surprise, without a trace of dismay. The officer was looking closely at him, not as an accusing official but with a curious wonder.

"Where were you this morning?"

"St. James. Been there since last evenin'. Why, any of 'em can tell you"—gesturing toward the group on the dock. "I was round McCann's dock all mornin', waitin' for a tug to take me to Charlevoix."

The sheriff nodded grimly.

"Then I guess it's up to her," he said.

For a moment, David stared at him, and a strange creep went up his back.

"Her?"

"Yup. The girl. She's here, and she admits that she did it."

A low moan escaped MacKinnon, and his hands, which had been thrust into his waistband, went down, to hang limply.

"She said that the minute Eldred was through sayin' it was you. She was alone at Squaw Island. Larsen was there, but she said he was asleep. They went after her and caught her in a skiff, rowin' back to the light from here. Guess it's all day with her. Funny, though, the way he tried to hang it on you!"

David hardly heard these words. Eve had killed her father! Eve was somewhere in the hands of the law. She had shot him down, and she must answer for that! And he—what he had done had brought this about? He heard himself talking rapidly. He had the sheriff by one arm, ripping out questions, expostulating.

"I don't know myself," the man said, drawing away. "I've told you all I know. She wouldn't talk any more after she admitted it."

THEN David was alone, the sheriff stalking up toward the big white house, and Aunt Jen came heavily up the dock. They did not see one of Eldred's boats, returning from its lift, entering the harbor with a Mackinaw boat in tow.

David did not hear what the woman said to him and neither had thought for their last meeting; but his own voice sounded large in his ears:

"It's Eve. She killed him!"

Jen went white and made as if to lift a hand to her face, but there was no strength in her arm.

"Oh, boy! Boy, she done that? It can't be! There's something wrong here. Why, she——"

"But they found her going back to the light in a small boat and she admitted it to the sheriff. She killed him. Oh, don't *you know* something that'll clear her?"

He put that last desperately, but Jen shook her head in helplessness.

"We was after you to take you back to her. We thought it was all right. She's learned what happened that last night she was on High Island. She thought you tricked her. Oh, boy, it's all right, and we come after you because she was waiting at the light for you, with her heart breaking and all. And now this has come to her! Where is she?"

"In the house, and the sheriff won't let me see her," David replied, and rubbed his forehead with an unsteady hand.

Jen turned then and cried tremulously: "Ned! Ned!"

David turned also, and that brought them facing down the dock to where the tug, with its sailboat in tow, was making fast. The men out there were in a compact knot, peering down into the mackinaw, and Ned Borden did not heed his wife's call as he looked at the frail figure that seemed to be sleeping in the cockpit until one saw the telltale smear of crimson on the thwart beneath it.

The intentness of this group, the way each face turned when the wheelman of the tug stepped ashore and began to explain what had happened caught the interest of MacKinnon and the woman, and they walked hastily out to join the curious.

"He was driftin' out there, half a mile off the island," the man was saying. "Thought there wasn't anybody aboard until we run clost. Then we seen him, an' I thought he moved when I stepped in. But he didn't after that. Shot through here—see?"

He dropped into the mackinaw and drew the shirt from the scrawny chest of the old man so they could see the hole that had drilled his right lung.

"An' here's his gun"—holding up the ancient weapon. "Mebbe he shot hisself, 'cause one cartridge 'd been fired."

"That's two this morning," said somebody.

"Two!" The man looked up in amazement.

"Yeah. The feller you called king got his, too!"

But the surprise with which Eldred's men received this news was covered by the cry of Jen Borden, who had shouldered her way through the group and stood looking down at the body, its face now turned upward to the light, pitifully weak and old and drawn, with the white scar above the right eye whiter than the blanched, lifeless skin.

"It's Wetherby!" she cried tremulously, and reached out a hand to catch her husband's wrist and bring him closer. "Wetherby, Ned! Don't you see that scar? I've carried a picture of that face for years." She straightened suddenly and searched out David. "Boy, had Eldred been shooting?"

In the silence that followed her sharp question, men stared at her fixedly. David did not speak, but Dimmock, who had joined the group, nodded slowly and said, "He shot—once."

They looked from Aunt Jen to him, and a murmur of consternation ran through the group as the woman put a hand on her husband's shoulder for support.

"It was Wetherby's hand, Neddie," she said huskily, "guided by the hand of the Almighty!"

THE doctor was talking, holding the rusted revolver in one hand, the misshapen bullet which had taken Norman Eldred's life in the other.

"A forty-five, all right," he said. "And the bullet that took the old chap's life there"—nodding toward the tarpaulin-covered body on the beach—"was steel-jacketed. That's what Eldred shot." He turned to the sheriff. "How about it?"

The officer shook his head and said:

"That sure ought to satisfy anybody, but I can't figure out the girl. Here she comes. Clear out, you! If that's her father, as Mis' Borden says, she won't want you gawpin' here."

Beside Aunt Jen, Eve, white of face, as though walking in a dream, passed the men, who streamed away from the beach. She did not look at them, nor did she see David standing beside the covered figure.

For a half-hour the older woman had been telling the story over and over, trying to make Eve understand that the suspicion she had brought on herself was mistaken, but the girl had not seemed to realize what was said. She sat in her own bedroom, a crouched, silent, cowering figure of a child, not manifestly frightened, not saddened, just dumb—dumb and without the ability of comprehending what was said to her. She had not even spoken to Jen Borden; her hand had not responded to the woman's clasp. And now Jen was bringing her out to walk in the frantic hope that movement might do what her supplication had failed to accomplish.

When opposite David, the girl's eyes turned and she stopped. One hand fluttered to her breast and lay there. She moistened her lips and tried to speak, but at first no sound came. The dulness of her eyes gave way to alarm and she caught her breath.

"David!" she whispered. "David! You didn't—get away?"

He came forward, impelled by her manner.

"No; I'm here, Eve. I came when I heard. I thought—maybe you'd let me help you."

The girl stared at him and then looked at the woman, as though struggling to force her mind to function.

"But the sheriff! He thought—my father said——"

"I've talked to him. It's all right. He knows where I've been all day."

She withdrew her arm from Jen's clasp and went close to him.

"Then you didn't— It wasn't *you?*"

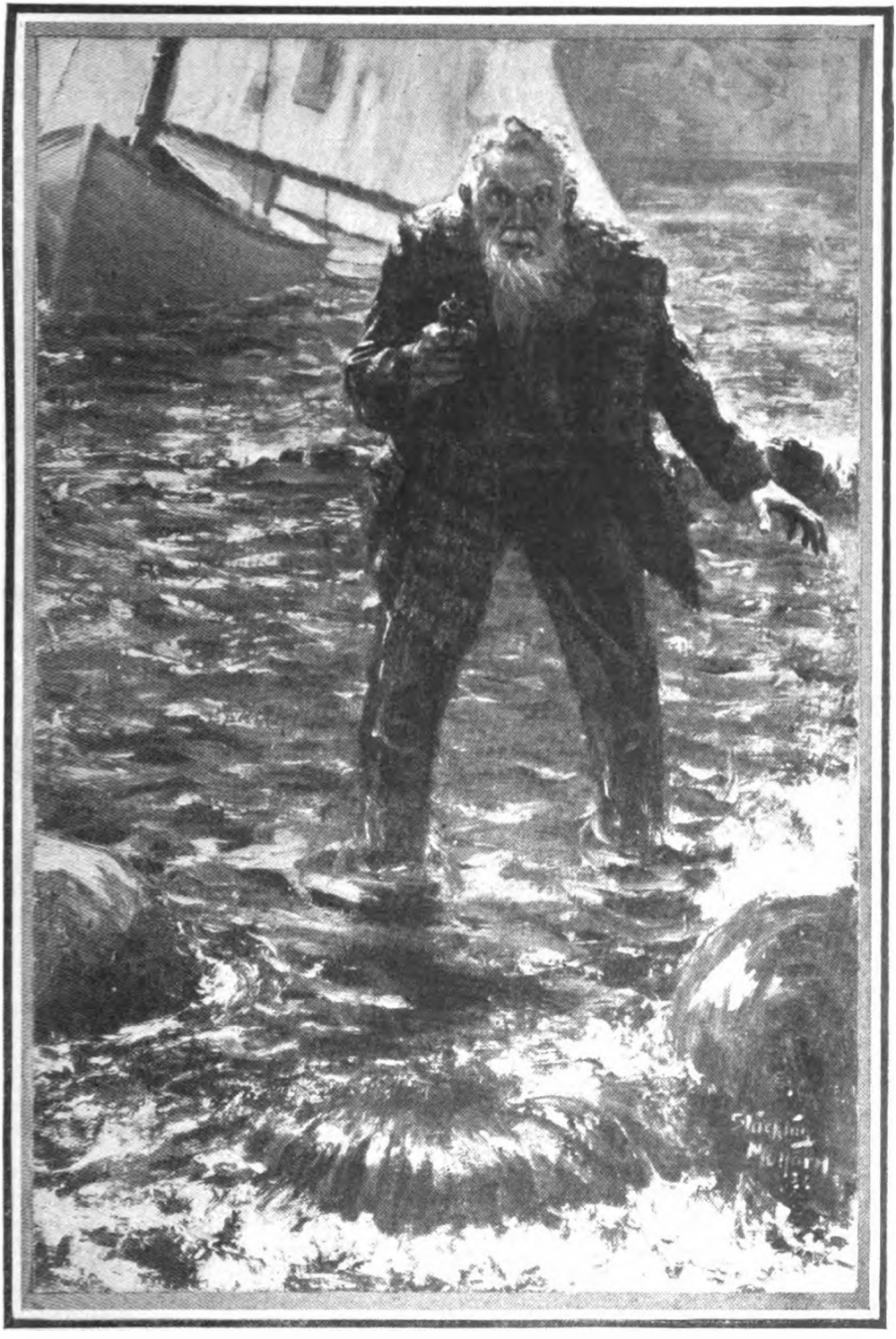
A great surge of understanding swept through him and he cried:

"*That's* why! That's why you took it on yourself—so I could get away! And if I'd been gone, Eve, maybe you would have paid. Oh, Eve, Eve!"

And she was in his arms, crying like a child, clinging to him, pressing her face against his breast, sobbing his name again and again, hanging to him desperately.

"They're looking," muttered Jen. "They're staring at you, boy. Take her away."

And as David led the girl toward the



The old man drew his hand from his shirt; a rusted, aged revolver was clutched there, and he brandished it toward Eldred.

fringe of friendly cedars where she could sob unseen and unheard, where she could hear from his considerate lips enough of the story to make it clear, Jen turned to Ned Borden, who was approaching her.

"Neddie, it's all over but the smiling, which'll come after the tears. I've got to stay here a while, and I've got to have something to do. S'pose you can get my sewing-machine before night?"

IT WAS evening of the next day. In the west the sun was touching the lake, which lay like a mighty chalice of pale-amber wine. Above the horizon, a fleet of stately clouds reared cumulus plumes to majestic heights.

Eve and David stood on the beach, watching silently, elbows touching. In the house Aunt Jen was busy, and they could hear the drone of her sewing-machine in the silence.

That morning, the body of Eve's father had been carried from St. James up the King's Highway to Watch Hill and put to rest beside the sturdy church of Holy Rosary parish. When those who had followed it returned to Garden Island, Dimmock and others had completed another task—leveling the sand under the trees so not so much as a mound should remain to keep green the memory of the man who had been called king.

It was at this spot that the good priest from Beaver Island now stood, head bowed, his fine face lined with sorrow. But there was peace in his eyes and patience about his mouth as he made the sign of the cross and lifted his face to the glory of the west.

David looked about. The horizontal rays of the sun were striking through the trees, throwing the forest into contrasted light and deep shade, and against the cool shadows the trilliums stood out like great flakes of snow, motionless on their long stems, placid faces toward the dropping sun. It was like a quiet garden. Garden Island was well named that evening, with the carpet of flowers beneath the clean green of new foliage, and as the boy looked, somewhere near by a whitethroat began its plaintive evening song.

Eve turned to follow his gaze. He heard her breath draw in slowly and slip out with a prolonged sigh. It was not an indication of trouble or regret, but as though those things which she had known in such weighty measure were slipping from her heart.

"If my father had come sooner, it wouldn't have been any better for him, would it, David?"

"No; you can't think of that, Eve. He was gone from the time your—mother died. It's all past, and you can't think of it, except to remember that after a blow there's bound to be fair weather."

Her hand felt for his, and he gripped it and looked down into her face and then out across the harbor.

"Somehow, we'll get her rebuilt," he said gently, and she knew he spoke of the *Annabelle*, his hooker that Eldred had burned to the water's edge. "We'll rebuild her and fit her out, and then we'll go, just you and I, wherever the wind takes us—Georgian Bay, the St. Lawrence, Superior and the Pictured Rocks. Wherever the wind or our fancy takes us, Eve—you and I alone, in a hooker that's a lady! If you want to come back, we will—in spring, when Garden Island's a garden, like it is now—we'll remember it like it is now—all fine and green with the flowers——"

Her hand tightened on his, and he looked down at the sweet, sweet smile on her face.

"That night on High Island—the night Mosseau waited for you—when I told you that bolts wouldn't hold me, and you wouldn't open the door. You held it shut; you said— You asked me if there wasn't somethin' I wanted to say first. What was it? What was it you wanted me to say?"

She turned to face him and lifted her arms to his shoulders. She gripped his flesh and held herself away from him so that she could look full into his face.

"I love you! I love you!"

That may have been reply to the question he had asked, and it may only have been that which had seethed in her heart through all those oddly crowded days. No matter. He took her in his arms and held her close, and their lips met in the first lingering kiss, and the good padre from St. James stopped his progress toward them and veered sharply and went through the soft sand on tiptoe toward the big house with long, glad steps, eyes twinkling through the mist that was in them.

THE END

Glory *of* Gold

If You Want Something, Take It—a Perfectly Normal Impulse, Perhaps, but There Are Ways and Ways of Doing It. How It Worked Out in the Lives of a Primitive Girl, a Wonder-Horse and a Plain Man Makes a Striking Romance

By Vingie E. Roe

A SLIM silver sickle rode down the western sky. From the south a little wind was coming, soft and whispering, to stir the leaves of the cottonwoods that lined the drying wash. It was sweet with the scent of miles of small blue flowers, cool with coming night. It lifted the fine silk curls on a girl's temples and kissed her satin cheek, and a man's eyes envied it hungrily.

He stood beside her, his hand on her horse's mane, his own cow-pony drooping in hip-dropped rest a little way apart.

He was young and lean with constant riding, and the gray eyes that searched her dusky ones were sick with longing beneath their smiling raillery.

"Some day," he stated in his soft, low voice, "I'm going to hold out my arms and you're going to come to me—running—and I'll have my dream come true, the dream of your face against my heart. Some day you'll give me my kiss."

A smile curled up the corners of her mouth, a slightly cruel smile, yet beautiful withal.

"And why," she asked, "should you have all this?"

"For no reason on God's earth," he answered slowly, "except that my heart's so bound up with you that other breath's denied me. If I don't see you once in a while, Arland, I feel like there isn't enough air on all the Willasanna range—like I'm dying of thirst in sight of water."

"Many men talk to me after this fashion," she said. "I'm tired of it."

"Yes?"

"Yes; and they boast—like you."

"I thought I was original."

"No. There's Chase and Hansell."

"Chase? Is he in this running, too?"

"Bah!" she said, and her voice was hard. "What man in all this country isn't?"

The man threw back his head and laughed.

"Whew! You don't hate yourself, Arland, and that's a fact! But who could blame them? Those eyes of yours, now, and the red mouth of you—why, I'd go through hell's fire for a kiss from it myself. But Chase—damn him!—I've wanted to kill him for some several moons on account of Gloria de Oro, and this intensifies that desire. If he gets you, Arland, you'll be minus a bridegroom, so help me; for I'll let daylight in him then and no mistake."

At that speech, her dark eyes looked straight at him in a sort of fright.

"Gloria de Oro," she said; "are you after him?"

"Have been for two years, and so has Chase. It's a matter of pride between us. Chase and I have side-stepped each other for quite a while." He might have mentioned a certain night in Santa Ansan when they had side-stepped each other's bullets as well. "So don't set your heart on him, little girl. And now you'd better run home, for it's getting dark mighty fast and you're a

long way from Rancho Gordo. You—you don't think you could give me that kiss now, do you?"

"Not now or ever, Mister High-and-Mighty," she said coldly. "You'll never get a kiss from me. I'm sick of men."

And without more words she whirled the horse beneath her, a good blue roan, and was in instant flight away toward the north.

The man mounted and sat watching her, his broad hat in his hand.

"Spirits of speed," he murmured in admiration, "how she rides! Straight up like an Indian, and loosely—born to it like a bird to the air. O Lord, will I ever get that wild, small body in my arms? She's like a bird—and like a panther, too. There was that vaquero from over Palmo way who tried to kiss her at the dance—he carries the scars where she scratched him yet, they say. Ah, well——"

He struck the pony gently with the hat he held and loped away toward the south. Far down in the mauve shadows he could see the lights of the Double Arrow, whose wide ranges were his own, and the peace of possession warmed him pleasurably.

NIGHT had long since fallen when the girl on the blue roan rode into the home corral at Rancho Gordo. She gave the horse into eager hands and went up the steps and into the deep old house with the quick and haughty step of a potentate. In the living-room three men lounged and smoked, waiting for the tap of the big bell that hung by the kitchen door to announce supper.

"Hello, kid!" said Ben Mead, reaching for her hand as she passed.

She stopped and looked her stepfather square in the face.

"You, too?" she said. "Must I begin to pack a gun?"

There was vitriol in her voice, and the laugh that went up shook in the smoked beams above.

Chase and Hansell rigged the big boss unmercifully, and the girl went on into another room without a word to them. She flung her fringed gloves on a blanketed couch and her face was hard with frowning in the gloom. Her voice, however, was soft as velvet as she went on into still another room, a dim room where a huge bed stood by the west windows that the woman who lay day in day out upon it might see the pageant of the plains sunsets.

"Mother?" she asked softly of the silence.

"Darling," came the answer in the lilting voice of the soul that finds only the good in each passing hour, "where have you been?"

"Out on the range on Roamer. It's early summer, you know, and the world is fair."

She sat down on the bed's edge and for a long time conversed in the slow, intimate way of women who understand each other. Sarah Mead knew this half-wild daughter of hers, yet never ceased to marvel at her strength, her manlike poise and courage.

"You're like your father, Arland," she would say sometimes. "Lin Brace was a man from the ground up. He won me fighting and carried me from my father's door on his saddle-horn. I didn't love him then, and I wept when we stood before the priest—but he was right, for I loved him after—Mary Mother, how I loved him to the day of his death in that Mexican mine!"

Arland gazed out the window where the mauve and lavender had turned to purple-black, thick-sewn with stars.

"He must have been a man," she said softly, "to win and hold you so, to live his wild life in Mexico and to make his stake while he was still young. I've never been able to see, for the life of me, how and why you married Ben."

A sigh from the shadows answered.

"He was very good to me, and I was sick with loneliness," said Sarah Mead, "and you were so little."

The girl said no more, but she thought derisively of the rich Rancho Gordo bought with that "stake" which her unknown father had made in his pride and his youth.

Chase and Hansell stayed late that night, and there was sound of laughter and slapping cards in the living-room where Prince, the range boss, made a fourth at poker.

Arland sat with her mother for a long time, as was her habit, made her comfortable and slipped to her own room on noiseless feet. She was weary to her young heart's core of men and all their ways. But, once alone, she did not sleep. Instead she waited by her window for the slow quieting of the life at Rancho Gordo, and she was fully dressed.

The little soft wind of dusk had freshened. It came out of the south, sweet and cool with the night-feel. The slender sickle of moon

was gone and uncounted stars sparkled on the black-velvet dome of the sky. Where the Little Snake cut down across the Willasannas, cottonwoods and alders stood in ghostly ranks, and there was the slow shine of water where the starlight struck.

AND here in the night and the silence a shadow waited in the shadows, a great dark bulk, massive and yet slim-seeming, that stood in utter stillness save for the even breathing that made scarce a lifting of the satin sides. Snow-white hoofs close together, his great head lifted to quest the pleasant wind, his huge mane standing above it like a milky cloud, his vanity of tail fan-spread behind his heels, a horse, a wild horse, stood in the deepest darkness beneath the alder trees. No part of him showed in the starlight, so cunning had a hard life made him, and only night-trained senses would have found him there.

An hour passed by the wheeling stars and he had not moved so much as one white hoof.

Gloria de Oro, ten years old to the certain knowledge of the Willasanna range, untamed, uncaught, unequaled, a pride and an institution of the plains country, waited in mysterious and nerve-tense quiet for something or some one.

The Mexicans and Indians called him "Gloria de Oro"—Glory of Gold—from the wonderful yellow coat that wrapped him from head to heel like a blanket. There was on him no spot of color, no hair of another shade except the great white mane and tail that flowed and billowed with his running almost to knee and heel.

So he stood, in his poise and his perfection, waiting in that flawless patience which reaches its highest point in the animals.

Then, with some vagrant whiff of the pleasant wind, the breath stopped in his lungs altogether and he listened with all his body. Even with those proud hoofs on the earth he listened, feeling for the first faint vibration. Every delicate hair on his soft hide pricked with listening. Suddenly he let out the holden breath and the questing nostrils flared wide to catch all the scents the breeze might carry; for he knew that that for which he waited was coming.

Far up along the open plains beyond the Little Snake there came presently the beat and rhythm of a horse's hoofs in flight, and Gloria de Oro moved for the first time in his patient vigil, moved all over his flexible body as if a set of springs vibrated to a touch. And out of the night and the starlit silence Arland Brace came riding on Roamer, came straight to the alders and sent before her a soft, peculiar whistle, two notes, one falling, one rising, that called with a thrilling intimacy.

Called and was answered as surely and gladly as if human spoke to human, for Gloria de Oro whinnied deep in his mighty chest and stepped forth like a king to meet her—old Glory of Gold, on whose satin hide no man's hand had ever lain! The girl flung down from Roamer, who drew a breath and stood, and, running forward, put her arms up about the crested neck with a veritable passion of love. The golden stallion bent his great head to nuzzle her shoulder, fluttered his nostrils against her cheek.

"Golden beauty!" she whispered into the silken cloud of the falling mane. "Arland's comfort—her hope and her happiness!"

Like lovers they fondled each other for a space, soft muzzle tucked into softer throat, and the girl kept up her whispering.

"They're after you, my beauty," she said hardly; "and after me as well. Men—the spoilers! Me they would buy or conquer, and you they'd break. I hate the breed!"

From the breast of her dark garment she brought forth the old wile of man to beast, a bribe—sugar, a lump of the brown product brought from the far-distant railroad in barrels for the winter's supply—and held it on the palm of her soft hand for the eager lips to nibble. Many a pound had gone to the sleekening and coaxing of Glory of Gold in the two years since she had first put hand upon him. Standing in the dark beside the alder trees, Arland thought of those two years and the one before them when she had spent days on end in the open reaches, patient, intent, and watched the stallion circle and sniff and pound the earth with his ringing hoofs. It had taken time and unlimited patience to bring him near, step by step and day by day, and always she had feared discovery—and Ben Mead.

When Gloria de Oro had finished the last sweet crumb, Arland turned and led Roamer into the darker shadows, where she left him tied to the ground with a trailing rein. Then she came back to where the other had moved to follow. She pulled the great head

down to earth, flung herself across the high arch of the neck, spoke once, and was lifted with a fling as the stallion raised his head again. With a swift motion, she slid to his back, threw her right foot over and was mounted as gallantly as was ever warrior of old.

Old Glory of Gold swept instantly out from the shadows and stretched away down the dusky plain, for this was an old game to them.

Arland Brace on his back was another person from the moment of that magnificent start. From her face all trace of strain was swept away as by a magic touch. She forgot the ailing woman whom she so desperately loved back at Rancho Gordo, forgot the look on Chase's secretive features, the hard and calculating eyes of her stepfather—forgot also the man from the Double Arrow, the lean dark rider with the good gray eyes, who boasted that some day she would come to him—running.

Of all the predatory males who coveted her, Rod Callentry was the hardest to forget, because of the quiet assurance that left her no surety of her own.

But with the cut of the wind by her cheek, the singing note of the resonant earth beneath the drumming feet as the old king gathered speed and all the unpeopled plains spread out for her amphitheatre, Arland Brace forgot her troubles and her looming dangers and was alight with joy.

An hour before dawn, Arland turned Roamer into the home corral and crept silently to her room. She was up betimes, and there was on her lovely face no sign of that wild tryst where the alders grew beside the Little Snake.

AT SANTA ANSAN, Chase, big and burly, handsome after a certain coarse fashion, leaned on the bar and listened to a conversation.

"Thees Alsandro," boasted a decorated Mexican from across the border, dark eyes sparkling with the tale of prowess he was recounting, "he is the bes' han' weeth the *caballo*. In Chihuahua he is send for always at the breaking. He brings always the wild horse from the mountains. None escapes. Weeth Alsandro there is no failure. Not ever." A little later Chase sat at a table with the speaker, drank and talked in Spanish *patois*, drank again and presently there was the muffled clink of gold as the two parted.

"It cannot be longer than a month, *señor*," he stated, as he swung toward the street of the squalid town; "perhaps not so long. And we must be ready."

"For gold, *señor*," returned the other, with a flash of white teeth beneath his small mustache, "Alsandro is always ready."

Early summer on the Willasannas is heaven brought to earth. Blue flowers scent the wanton breezes and miles of dark-green grass turn silver under the winds' feet. Arland spent nearly all her days in the room at Rancho Gordo that faced the west, for the patient face of Sarah Mead was taking on new lines, vague slants and shades of etheriality.

It bore a handwriting of the spirit that was plain as print to the anguished eyes of her daughter. But though her heart sank in her breast with a deadly fear, the girl was all bright talk and easy hopefulness. This gentle mother was her only human tie. Men she hated and feared with a flame and fire that seared her soul with bitterness.

In her mother's room she met Ben Mead with pleasantness. Outside its door she watched his shifting eyes in cold silence. And she saw the new confidence with which Chase came and went, the understanding that seemed to be between the two. There were many close talks, held in out-of-the-way places, stray conversations that stopped abruptly if she chanced to pass. There was a smiling boldness in Chase's eyes which she could not fathom, and Hansell was sulky. Once the former blocked her way in a passage of the old house and laid a hand on her shoulder. She struck it down with a loathing he could not mistake and turned back. It was then she took to "packing" a gun, as she had threatened.

More than once in the days that followed she looked with tragic eyes at the rolling ranges of Rancho Gordo and knew that they were slipping fast from her mother's failing hand, saw the shadow of Ben Mead's fingers stretched already over them. And the two men continued to talk and whisper, watching like twin vultures from the edge of life. She was thankful for one thing—her stepfather was still kind to the woman in the west room. Arland was becoming worn with her ceaseless vigils and her fears. There were dark circles beneath her imperious

eyes. She missed the stirring comfort of her clandestine flings on the wild stallion's back, fretted for his lonely waitings beneath the alder trees.

But a sterner grief was on her, and she waited, as we all must sometime wait, for the terrible feet of the Reaper to stop beside our beloved.

The leaden days dragged by and the longing became an ache, so that once more she drifted away on Roamer in the dark and the silence. The sickle of moon had waxed and waned and the plains were velvet-black as they must always be when she made the pilgrimage. Old Gloria de Oro had waited many nights in vain beside the Little Snake and he was wild with joy at her appearance, nuzzled her roughly in his eagerness and stepped about her pridefully. In a way, they were both fugitives, and Arland hid her unhappy face in the flowing mane, and scant hard tears trickled amid its shining floss.

"Men—damn them!" she sobbed. "But for them we would be safe, here in the land of our birthright. When the time comes, sweetheart, if we can escape their net together, we will go straight out of the Willasannas to another world and try to forget the purple ranges."

And run as he would that night, sail like a bird all down the sounding levels with curvet and spring, Gloria de Oro could put no joy in his beloved's heart. She was like a dead thing swaying above him, sodden and inert.

ONE day in the week that followed, Rod Callentry came to Rancho Gordo, carrying some titbit of sweets made by the cunning, skilled hands of Felicita, old and brown and kindly, who ruled the domestic domain of the Double Arrow.

His cool gray eyes were guarded when he spoke to Ben Mead and glanced without speech at Chase, who was there again.

"We heard at the Double Arrow that Mrs. Mead is not so well," he said, "and Felicita would send the candied fruit."

"Mighty good of you, Callentry!" said Mead civilly, but there was a covert sneer beneath. Arland, holding the inner door, looked at them all with frowning eyes.

"Bring them," she said shortly, and Callentry followed her. Sarah Mead's dim eyes brightened at the man's advent, and she glowed palely.

Afterward, clanking out through the deep rooms, the rider stopped a second and searched the girl's drawn face.

"If — when" — he floundered — "if you need help, Arland, if Chase or— I'd lay down my life and all the Double Arrow for your sake—I want you to know it."

She raised smoldering eyes to his.

"And the price?" she asked bitterly.

"Nothing," he gritted. "Not so much as a word or a look!"

Then he was gone, and she went frowning about her work.

That day, too, Chase tried to kiss her and she struck him with the handle of a loaded quirt, leaving a red weal where the blood oozed.

"You little hussy!" cried the man. "I'll pay you for that! Is it because of Callentry's politeness, I wonder? Bah! That won't last long!" And he laughed sharply, snapping his thick fingers.

"Threats again!" thought Arland savagely. "I hope they kill each other off." But an uneasy memory of Rod's honest eyes hung at the back of her brain beneath her other troubles.

That week a stranger came to Rancho Gordo. He was young and dark and handsome, and he rode a loose-limbed scarecrow of a horse whose fame was broad across the border. His slow-moving eyes smiled always; his slim brown fingers were stained from a thousand cigarettes. He was Mexican from his silver-weighted sombrero to his vanity of carven spurs, and Chase called him "Alsandro." This languorous stranger put a new fear in Arland's heart, a nameless fear that twitched her fingers, brought her broad awake in her scant and needed sleep. It was not personal fear. Rather it was a foreboding, an intuition, that he meant harm to something that she loved—the seventh sense of woman sounding its warning. He was another of that tribe she hated—men, men always, with their threats and their conquering, their hardness and their evil looks. She wished to high heaven that she might sweep them all from the face of earth—and again she thought of Callentry—Callentry with his kind gray eyes, his gentle voice that bragged.

And that week, too, Sarah Mead passed quietly out in the night, and none knew of her going for an hour, though Arland and two of the serving-women drowsed in their

chairs beside her. She was hardly under the earth in the garden that faced the sunset she had loved when Chase told Arland that he loved her.

"Leave me—you toad!" she said, shuddering, and for once the man backed down from suffering virtue. The anguished flame in her hollow eyes promised action, and the bully knew limits when he met them.

At Rancho Gordo there was a perking-up, a quickening of interest, a sweeping-out and garnishing of methods, as it were. Ben Mead's voice took on a more masterful tone. But still he cringed to Chase in a way.

Hansell had disappeared, and most of the questionable characters that had frequented the rancho ceased their troubling, for all the world as if an ultimatum had gone forth, a warning off preserves.

This quickening took form in the gathering-in of all the horses that ran on Mead's own ranges. The cowboys ran them into the different corrals and there was a great singling-out and selecting, and Arland, watching somberly from the windows, saw that these were the pick of the strings, the fastest, most enduring. Everywhere among them was the Mexican, Alsandro, looking to this and that one. Chase was there with Cyclone and Ben Mead with his brown Rawhide. And Arland felt her heart grow cold.

The preparation narrowed until the night and the morning were left before the culmination, and Ben Mead called her to the living-room and sent the servants out. Chase lounged by a table, smoking, and his fat face was like a vulture's for unwholesomeness.

"Arland," said her stepfather, grinning, "let me interduce your future husband—Mr. Bill Chase, of Ciudad, Mexico." And he waved a hand in derisive playfulness. The girl stood still against the door that led to the inner room where Sarah Mead had waited so long for release—that sickeningly empty room—and one hand felt of her throat helplessly.

"Stop fooling!" she said suddenly, straightening up.

The playfulness left the ugly face of Mead.

"I'm not fooling," he said sharply. "Chase goes south to Mexico in a day or two—*and you're going with him.* If you go quietly and don't make a fuss, he says he'll marry you."

"Marry *me?*" She threw back her head and hollow laughter struck on the silence. "Chase? The toad! If he touches me, I'll kill him!"

Chase roused himself in his chair, and his cheeks turned livid with rage.

"Take care, you young hussy!" he warned. "A man's woman minds him well in Mexico."

Arland ignored him contemptuously. She looked at Ben Mead and spoke.

"So you're selling me, are you?" she asked. "Want to get me out of the way. Rancho Gordo's too rich pickings for the daughter, whose father's money bought it, to share, is it?"

She leaned forward and struck a thin hand against its mate, as that fighting father might have done.

"That you may get, you unclean thief! I cannot stop you in your tricks; but not one hair of my head will you bargain off. I'll see to that!"

And she flung open the door and, springing through, locked it against them.

Wild plans passed through her brain of escape, now, to-night—of a last swift run on Roamer—of Gloria de Oro—and of that great sailing journey out of the Willasannas forever. But that modest mound in the garden where the straw-flowers grew was too new—too pitifully new—for her to leave it yet. At that piteous thought she fell to quivering with sorrow and slid down along the door to cover her face with her hands and fall to weeping, lowly, hardly, in the slow despair of the utterly bereft.

DAWN came up alight at Rancho Gordo. There was stir and movement, and Arland heard the clank of spur and rattle of accouterments. The men ate by candle-light and went away swiftly, leaving silence. She came forth and questioned the serving-women, but there was a curious reticence among them, as if they must not speak. She visited the mound in the garden and stood a while by the poplar trees aimlessly. Life had become aimless to her. There was nothing for her to do, no place where she was needed. The great spread of the Willasannas, pale rose in the sun's first rays, was bittersweet to her in its beauty and its sense of poignant loss. All her memories were centered here. She gazed with frowning eyes along the vast reaches that traveled south and west into infinitude.

To the east the Willasanna Hills rose in majesty. It was a splendid land, widespread and noble, and her throat ached with nostalgia already.

Her vision warped suddenly with the hot and bitter tears that stung her eyes; her lips worked soundlessly—and on the film that drew the levels out of line she saw distorted dots that danced grotesquely.

She dashed the tears away and her eyes narrowed and became keen as a hawk's, so that she recognized the dots for men and horses spread in a vast half-moon far out toward the Little Snake—the men of Rancho Gordo.

Toward Deep Coulee they went, and they were spread for drifting.

What were they going to drift? The cold points of her eyes became tiny flames. A thousand thoughts ran swiftly through her mind—Callentry's words of Chase and Gloria de Oro—Mead's of Mexico City and Chase's going—a stray bit of talk concerning Alsandro and his prowess as a catcher of wild horses in the hills across the border—and then she knew. Knew, and her heart stopped beating to plunge on again, stifling her.

It was Gloria de Oro they were after at last in full panoply of the hunt. Chase, for two years coveting the golden horse—and her—would have them both to take out of the Willasannas! Chase, bought by Ben Mead's money she knew beyond a doubt to clear the way for him to undisputed sway at Rancho Gordo! Chase, the bully—the brute! Chase to bind Glory of Gold and break his heart with spur and quirt! Rage that had not mounted at his threats to her came boiling up like a flood within her at that picture, and she flung into the house, tearing at her garments. It took but a matter of moments to don her riding-clothes, and she came running through the living-room fastening her belt. A good gun hung on her thigh and a quirt was on her wrist. Her face was white as a moon in mist, her dark eyes blazing.

Josefina, her serving-woman, blocked the way, catching at her.

"*Señorita*," she besought, "you are not to leave the rancho—*Señor* Boss's orders——"

"You traitor!" said the girl, and struck her full across the lips.

At the corrals, a Mexican vaquero stepped out and shook his head, but she turned and looked at him with her hand upon the gun, and he turned back.

The bunch of horses left in the corrals was wild and troublesome, and it was long before she had selected, roped and saddled Buckskin, not so young as he might have been, but good once. Then she was in the saddle and gone with only a glance at the garden beneath the poplars.

At the back of her mind was a sharp thought that this was for farewell, that never again would she come sailing home to Rancho Gordo in the twilight. The die was in the casting, and she played a high game with only a gambler's chance—a long chance. If she lost—there was the gun against her thigh, comforting her.

Buckskin, fresh and angry, laid down to earth and ran as he had not run for many moons, but he was old and stiff and his shoulders had been starched, and the woman on his back beheld that far line beat out to the southwest and disappear. With what arch cunning did Chase know the haunts of the wild stallion! Her heart sank as she visioned them startling him from Deep Coulee, cutting him off from water at the Little Snake.

She knew the usual mode of capture of these wild steeds, the cruel relays, the ceaseless driving, the anguish of fatigue and thirst that always won at last. Sometimes, true, it was death that won, according to the temper of the victim. And death it would be for old Glory of Gold, she knew in her heart, for he would never surrender. Not while one white hoof could pass before the other, while there was breath in his deep lungs. Death it would be—perhaps for both—unless Fate, so long against her, should play in her hand on that one long chance.

She beat Buckskin unmercifully with the quirt and got his best.

She made for the country beyond Deep Coulee where the broken mounds and weathered mesas stood. The long chance led her there.

AND out on the great levels the net spread for Gloria de Oro beat its wide circle—with the golden king in sweeping flight before it; for they found him in his haunts beyond the Little Snake.

For years the king had stagged alone throughout that country, unmolested by any but some lone rider, for the unwritten law

concerning him had been that only he who should take him single-handed should own the splendid horse. Gloria de Oro was an institution, a pride, almost a legend, and this that happened now in the early day was against all precedent.

Not a rancher on the Willasannas but would have protested to the point of battle against it. It was injustice. It was underhand advantage, and none but Mead and Chase or Hansell would have dared to do it.

Gloria de Oro did not know all this. He knew merely that the unpeopled plains were suddenly alive with enemies who appeared at every point, and he tossed high his unconquered head, lifted his flaring tail a bit and sailed away from them with consummate ease. Like a bird skimming still waters, he drifted down the levels, magnificent, easeful, a thing of vast beauty, of unbelievable speed.

"*Santa Maria!*" ejaculated Alsandro, who knew horseflesh well. "*Un grande caballo!*"

But far down ahead more enemies appeared, and Gloria de Oro swept back in a wide arc toward the Little Snake. The sun came well up and with it more riders, it seemed. They were here, there and everywhere, and they seemed to have no purpose but to keep him going. Gloria de Oro was hard and fit in every fine, firm muscle. Speed was a joy to him, had ever been. So he swept and circled, stretched out in long spectacular flights that made Chase's evil eyes glow with desire. He was a wonder for endurance and for swiftness, but always there came after him one—a long, lean scarecrow of a horse whose tireless limbs ate up the distances almost as fast as he created them. Always this dark creature was somewhere near; always it circled and swept even as he circled and swept. How could he know that this was that great horse of Alsandro, whose fame was in the land across the border?

But one, watching with strained and hollow eyes from the high vantage of a flat-topped mesa, saw and understood.

"This is why he came," groaned Arland Brace. "Chase, the devil, brought him."

THE morning wore away and the great play went on in the levels beneath the mesas between the Little Snake and the mouth of Deep Coulee.

When the sun stood overhead, Gloria de Oro was running as strongly as he had at dawn. His bright-yellow skin glistened in dry perfection, for he was hard, hard. The riders stopped by relays of twos and threes to drink a cup of coffee at a fire and to change horses.

"By —— ——!" swore Chase excitedly. "If he ain't the great king and no mistake! He'll bring me a fortune in Mexico City."

"You'll need it," said Mead grimly, "to hold that damned wildcat I'm giving you."

The men swung out again and once more took up the harrying of the quarry. Here—there—turn and feint and turn again—so Glory of Gold ran on into the afternoon without a moment's rest. The girl on the mesa gripped her hands and her face was wet with sweat.

Twice she fingered her gun and frowned at the tiny figure of Chase circling below. Buckskin waited patiently, hid in a crevasse of the mesa's rotten stone. The strain was telling on her. Her knuckles stood white in her clenched fists; her face was pale. It seemed there was a tight band about her throat that hindered her breathing.

"It's only a matter of hours," she muttered to herself aloud. "They'll ride in the night—for there's a moon. He hasn't been to water since last night."

And she deliberately began to descend the sliding steeps toward the plain below. What she meant to do in this last moment of extremity was not plain to her. She only knew that she was going—somewhere, for some purpose, some bleak and deadly purpose—perhaps to ride out and blow that grinning fat face of Chase's into a redder blotch of nothingness—to——

She reached the spot where she had left Buckskin, mounted and rode out to stand against the sandstone wall of the mesa, a far, lone figure.

She sat and waited on her destiny, and her heart was bitter and dead as ashes. She thought once of her mother and then of Rod Callentry's smiling face with the kindly eyes, heard him say again, "I'd lay down my life and all the Double Arrow for your sake." For some vague reason it sounded sweet in memory, as if in all that tribe of men she hated here was a gleam of right and honor. But her mother was dead and Rod Callentry belonged to the Willasannas—the Willasannas that she had forsworn.

When the sun went down—when she

should see that sailing golden streak out yonder falter in his steady stride—once again she fingered the gun upon her thigh. Thank God, she was not afraid of death! It was preferable a thousand times to life with Chase.

The light was falling toward the west and long blue shadows of the mesas were beginning to lengthen on the plain when something happened.

Gloria de Oro, running bravely as he had at dawn despite the swollen tongue that was beginning to show between his lips, searching the levels with desperate eyes, saw that far, lone figure in the mesa's shadow.

Eagerly he tossed his head, strained his hawk's vision, opened his mouth for a scream that was hoarse with suffering, and, turning sharply, thundered away toward it, straight as a homing bird. Every man in the outfit saw that sudden change of front and glanced swiftly for its reason. They saw, too, a rider whom none had noticed by the mesa's flank—saw it leave its horse's back and start running with outstretched arms to meet the king. Saw the stallion master a burst of greater speed—saw the distance close between them—saw them meet and slide together in a cloud of flying turf. Then the great head went down, flung up, and Gloria de Oro turned to face them with a rider on his back.

From all around they raced in toward them, and it was Chase who recognized her first.

"You hussy!" he screamed like a lunatic, his coarse face red with rage."

"Stand back!" cried Arland Brace. "I'll kill the first that comes!"

Her lips were curled from her teeth; her face was pale as wax; the gun in her hand trembled only with the anguished panting of the stallion's sides.

"Stand back!" she said again, but Chase struck Cyclone, who leaped forward. There was the sharp crack of the gun and the red face slid spectacularly down behind Cyclone's mane.

She faced the rest in cold stillness. Nothing moved about her save her blazing eyes.

Then, in a terrible silence, she touched Glory of Gold and turned him from his enemies, turning herself to face them, and step by step they drew apart—slowly at first, then with a flash of the power that had made him what he was, the best horse in the cattle-land, they leaped out together on that last great journey toward the sunset and the outside world. Nothing followed save the screaming oaths of Chase, not so dead as she could have wished, nursing a shattered shoulder and raving of Mead's price and its ultimate loss.

DAY had gone from the Willasannas. Twilight and stars had come before the late moon, and the soft wind from the south brought its whispered peace. At the Double Arrow, Rod Callentry sat in the shadows at his ranch-house door, smoked his sweet pipe and dreamed in a sort of pensive sadness. Of late his dreams had lost their hopefulness, taken on a shade of distance and unattainability. The windows that he had dared to hope would some day hold an imperious face seemed empty as his heart.

And then, against the great red disk of that rising moon, something moved, came over the last small rise of land—the figure of a horse, a superhorse, tall, majestic, powerful, whose crested head hung low with weariness, whose gallant feet all but stumbled in their progress and on whose back a slim figure drooped. Out of the night and the travail they came slowly to the beaten yard, and Arland Brace spoke from the dusk.

"Rod," she said unevenly, "we've come—Gloria de Oro and—I—to give ourselves—to you. We've come—through—hell's fire—Rod—to bring you that kiss—to make—your dream—come true." And she slid incontinently down into the loving arms that reached for her in a sort of holy wonder. The proud black head was drooping and there were tears on the weary face. She hid them on his breast and finished her recital.

"I tried to—to leave the Willasannas," she sobbed, "to go on out to another country—to leave it all forever. But I could not—always your face came before me—and your honest eyes—and I—turned south to the Double Arrow at last. Oh, Rod—we've come to you—not in our pride, untamed—but creeping—creeping—Gloria de Oro—and I——"

The tears drowned out the halting voice, and, at the reverent lips upon her hair, the gentle hand reached to the drooping stallion's side. Arland knew in her surcharged heart that they, two poor hunted things, had found their own.

Photographs by White Studio

Ferdinand De Levis (James Dale) again accuses *Ronald Dancy* of theft to their host, *Charles Winsor* (H. G. Stoker), and *General Canynge* (Felix Aylmer).

Ronald Dancy (Charles Quartermaine) tells his wife, *Mabel*, (Diana Bourbon) that the end has come.

Loyalties

To What Extent Should Unqualified Allegiance to Family, Friends, Social Groups or Race Control Us? An Interesting Question Dicussed in a Remarkable Play

By John Galsworthy

Published by courtesy of the author, the publishers, Charles Scribner's Sons, and the producer, Charles B. Dillingham

LOYALTY as one of the cardinal virtues is tried and found wanting in Galsworthy's new play. "It is not enough," he says, after he has demonstrated how thin is the line between loyalties and prejudices, and how difficult it is at times to choose between different allegiances.

Charles Winsor and his wife, *Lady Adela*, have been entertaining some guests at their country home. Late one evening, after they have retired to their rooms, a knock comes on *Winsor's* door, and, in response to a summons, *Ferdinand De Levis* enters. He is a young Jew, dark, and good-looking in an Eastern way. The *Winsors* and their friends despise him for his race and for his social aspirations, but tolerate him for his money. Just now his face is long and disturbed.

DE LEVIS (*in a voice whose faint exoticism is broken by a vexed excitement*): I say—I'm awfully sorry, Winsor, but I thought I'd better tell you at once. I've just had-er-rather a lot of money stolen.

WINSOR: What! (*There is something of outrage in his tone and glance, as who should say, "In my house?"*) How do you mean—stolen?

DE LEVIS: I put it under my pillow and went to have a bath; when I came back it was gone.

WINSOR: Good Lord! How much?

DE LEVIS: Nearly a thousand pounds—nine hundred and seventy, I think.

WINSOR: Phew!

DE LEVIS: I sold my Rosemary filly today on the course to Kentman, the bookie, and he paid me in notes.

WINSOR: What? That weed Dancy gave you in the spring?

DE LEVIS: Yes. I was only out of my room a quarter of an hour, and I locked my door.

WINSOR (*again outraged*): You *locked*——

DE LEVIS: (*not seeing the fine shade*): Yes; and had the key here. (*He taps the pocket of his bath-robe.*) Look here! (*Holding out a pocketbook.*) It's been stuffed with my shaving-papers.

WINSOR: This is damned awkward, De Levis.

DE LEVIS (*with steel in his voice*): Yes. I should like it back.

WINSOR: Have you got the numbers of the notes.

DE LEVIS: No.

WINSOR: What d'you want me to do?

DE LEVIS: I think the police ought to see my room. It's a lot of money.

WINSOR: Look here, De Levis; this isn't a hotel. It's the sort of thing that doesn't happen in a decent house. Are you sure you're not mistaken, and didn't have them stolen on the course?

DE LEVIS: Absolutely. I counted them just before putting them under my pillow; then I locked the door and had the key here. There's only one door, you know.

WINSOR: How was your window?

DE LEVIS: Open.

WINSOR (*drawing back the curtains of his own window*): You've got a balcony like this. Any sign of a ladder or anything? It must have been done from the window, unless some one had a skeleton key? Who knew you'd got that money? Where did Kentman pay you?

DE LEVIS: Just round the corner in the further paddock.

WINSOR: You must have been marked down and followed here.

DE LEVIS: How would they know my room?

Treisure, the butler, who comes in at this point, gives satisfactory alibis for all the servants. It is plain that he resents more, even, than his master the implication that the notes could have been stolen by any one in the house.

General Canynge, *Margaret Orme* and the *Ronald Dancys*, summoned by *Lady Adela* at her husband's request, join the conference in *Winsor's* bedroom, where they await the arrival of the police. They have all the same contemptuous feeling against *De Levis* for violating the laws of hospitality by insisting on a search. When the inspector finally arrives, he does not turn up anything of value, although he attaches great importance to some obvious deductions which he makes. After he has gone, *De Levis* finds himself alone with *General Canynge*, and he accuses *Ronald Dancy*.

Earlier in the evening, *Dancy* had, on a ten-pound wager with *De Levis*, taken a standing jump onto a narrow bookcase four feet high, and balanced there. *General Canynge* and the others regretted the incident, but they excused *Dancy* because he is their friend, and, besides, he is newly married and frightfully hard up.

De Levis uses this incident as evidence that *Dancy* could have jumped from his balcony to *De Levis's*, which is fairly close. He shows a bit of broken creeper, the stalk crushed, where he might have stood on it for his jump back. The general is outraged. *Dancy* is a soldier and a gentleman—which means, in the general's code, that he can do no wrong.

CANYNGE (*very gravely*): This is outrageous, De Levis! Dancy says he was down-stairs all the time. You must either withdraw unreservedly or I must confront you with him.

DE LEVIS: If he'll return the notes and apologize, I'll do nothing—except cut him in the future. He gave me that filly, you know, as a hopeless weed, and he's been pretty sick ever since that he was such a flat as not to see how good she was. Besides, he's hard up, I know.

CANYNGE: It's mad, sir, to jump to conclusions like this—without any proof! This is very ugly, De Levis. I must tell Winsor.

DE LEVIS (*angrily*): Tell the whole blooming lot! You think I've not feelers, but I've felt the atmosphere here, I can tell you, General. If I were in Dancy's shoes and he in mine, your tone to me would be very different.

CANYNGE (*suavely frigid*): I'm not aware of using any "tone," as you call it. But this is a private house, Mr. De Levis, and something is due to our host and to the *esprit de corps* that exists among gentlemen.

DE LEVIS: Since when is a thief a gentleman? "Thick as thieves"—a good motto, isn't it?

CANYNGE: That's enough. (*He goes to the door, but stops before opening it.*) Now, look here; once an accusation like this passes these walls, no one can foresee the consequences. Captain Dancy is a gallant fellow, with a fine record as a soldier, and only just married. If he's as innocent as—Christ, mud will stick to him unless the real thief is found. In the old days of swords, either you or he would not have gone out of this room alive. If you persist in this absurd accusation, you will both of you go out of this room dead in the eyes of society—you for bringing it, he for being the object of it.

DE LEVIS: Society! Do you think I don't know that I'm only tolerated for my money? Society can't add injury to insult and have my money as well—that's all. If the notes are restored, I'll keep my mouth shut; if they're not, I sha'n't. I'm certain I'm right. I ask nothing better than to be confronted with Dancy; but if you prefer it, deal with him in your own way—for the sake of your *esprit de corps*.

Winsor comes in, and the general tells him of *De Levis's* accusation. He gets *Dancy*, and they question him without explaining the situation.

As *Ronald* is about to go, *General Canynge* puts his hand for a moment on his arm with

a challenging glance at *De Levis*, who shrugs and goes out on the balcony.

WINSOR (*as the door closes on Ronald*): Look here, General; we must stop his tongue. Imagine it going the rounds! They may never find the real thief, you know. It's the very devil for Dancy.

CANYNGE: Winsor, Dancy's sleeve was damp.

WINSOR: How d' you mean?

CANYNGE: Quite damp. It's been raining.

WINSOR: I—I don't follow. (*His voice is hesitative and lower, showing that he does.*)

CANYNGE: It was coming down hard; a minute out in it would have been enough—

WINSOR (*hastily*): He must have been out on his balcony since.

CANYNGE: It stopped before I came up, half an hour ago.

WINSOR: He's been leaning on the wet stone, then.

CANYNGE: With the outside of the upper part of the arm.

WINSOR: Against the wall, perhaps. There may be a dozen explanations. (*Very low, and with great concentration.*) I entirely and absolutely refuse to believe anything of the sort against Ronald Dancy—in my house. Dash it, General, we must do as we'd be done by! It hits us all—it hits us all. The thing's intolerable!

CANYNGE: I agree. Intolerable. (*Raising his voice.*) Mr. De Levis!

De Levis comes to the center of the open window.

CANYNGE (*with cold decision*): Young Dancy was an officer and is a gentleman; this insinuation is pure supposition, and you must not make it. Do you understand me?

DE LEVIS: My tongue is still mine, General, if my money isn't.

CANYNGE (*unmoved*): *Must not!* You're a member of three clubs; you want to be member of a fourth. No one who makes such an insinuation against a fellow guest in a country house, except on absolute proof, can do so without complete ostracism. Have we your word to say nothing?

DE LEVIS: Social blackmail? Hm.

CANYNGE: Not at all—simple warning. If you consider it necessary in your interests to start this scandal—no matter how—we shall consider it necessary in ours to dissociate ourselves completely from one who so recklessly disregards the unwritten code.

DE LEVIS: Do you think your code applies to me? Do you, General?

CANYNGE: To any one who aspires to be a gentleman, sir.

DE LEVIS (*sullenly*): I'll say nothing about it unless I get more proof.

CANYNGE: Good! We have implicit faith in Dancy.

MAJOR COLFORD, a brother officer of *Dancy's*, bursts into the card-room of his club one afternoon, three weeks after the affair at the *Winsors'*, and tells *General Canynge* and some of his friends that *De Levis* has just made an infamous accusation against *Dancy* in the billiard-room.

WINSOR: Result of hearing he was blackballed—pretty slippy!

CANYNGE (*to Lord St. Erth*): I told you there was good reason when I asked you to back young De Levis. Winsor and I knew of this insinuation; I wanted to keep his tongue quiet. It's just wild assertion; to have it bandied about was unfair to Dancy. The duel used to keep people's tongues in order.

His friends are confident that *Dancy* will, when he hears the news, settle with *De Levis*, either by fighting him or else in court. They are disappointed when he makes no attempt to do either.

Mabel Dancy, meanwhile, knows nothing of the cloud that surrounds her husband until *Margaret Orme* calls on her the day after the incident at the club.

MABEL: But it's monstrous! Yesterday afternoon at the club, did you say? Ronny hasn't said a word to me. Why? That beast, De Levis! I was in our room next door all the time.

MARGARET: Was the door into Ronny's dressing-room opened?

MABEL: I don't know. I think it was.

MARGARET: Well, you can say so in court, anyway. Not that it matters. Wives are liars by law.

MABEL (*staring down at her*): What do you mean—court?

MARGARET: My dear, he'll have to bring an action for defamation of character or whatever they call it.

MABEL: It's terrible, such a thing—terrible!

MARGARET (*gloomily*): If only Ronny weren't known to be so broke!

MABEL: I can't realize it—I simply

can't! If there's a case, would it be all right afterward?

MARGARET: Do you remember St. Offert —cards? No; you wouldn't—you were in high frocks. Well, St. Offert got damages, but he also got the hoof underneath. He lives in Ireland. There isn't the slightest connection, so far as I can see, Mabel, between innocence and reputation.

MABEL: We'll fight it tooth and nail!

MARGARET: Mabel, you're pure wool right through. Everybody's sorry for you. It isn't altogether simple. I saw General Canynge last night. You don't mind my being beastly frank, do you?

MABEL: No; I want it.

MARGARET: Well, he's all for *esprit de corps* and that. But he was awfully silent.

MABEL: I hate half-hearted friends. Loyalty comes before everything.

MARGARET: Ye-es; but loyalties cut up against each other sometimes, you know.

DANCY is finally forced to take action. He first proposes to his wife that they go to Nairobi, urging that an action will not clear him unless the real thief can be found; but *Mabel* will not hear of this. Like *General Canynge* and all of *Dancy's* friends, she is for taking it to court.

So *Ronald* puts himself into the hands of *Jacob Twisden*, a famous solicitor, and soon the *Dancy-De Levis* case is the talk of England.

In the course of the evidence of *De Levis's* witnesses, the numbers of two of the stolen bank-notes are given. They are advertised in the papers, and the next day a tradesman calls at *Twisden's* office, bringing one of the notes, and also the man from whom he got it. This is *Ricardos*, a wine merchant. Under the solicitor's cross-questioning, *Ricardos* reveals that his daughter was intimate with *Dancy* before his marriage and that this note was given her with others in a settlement of one thousand pounds that *Dancy* made on her under pressure.

Twisden now is in the position of having to discriminate between two loyalties—to his client and to the law. He cannot honorably go on with the case, nor can he make public his reasons for withdrawing from it. After he has corroborated the testimony of *Ricardos*, he sends for *Dancy* and confronts him with the evidence that has come to light.

TWISDEN: I don't pretend to understand, but I imagine you may have done this in a moment of reckless bravado, feeling, perhaps, that, as you gave the mare to De Levis, the money was by rights as much yours as his. To satisfy a debt of honor to this lady—and, no doubt, to save your wife from hearing of it from the man Ricardos. Is that so?

DANCY: To the life.

TWISDEN: It was mad, Captain Dancy—mad! But the question now is: What do you owe to your wife? She doesn't dream, I suppose?

DANCY (*with a twitching face*): No.

TWISDEN: We can't tell what the result of this collapse will be. The police have the theft in hand. They may issue a warrant. The money could be refunded and the costs paid—somehow that can all be managed. But it may not help. In any case, what end is served by your staying in the country? You can't save your honor—that's gone. You can't save your wife's peace of mind. If she sticks to you— Do you think she will?

DANCY: Not if she's wise.

TWISDEN: Better go. There's a war in Morocco.

DANCY: Good old Morocco!

TWISDEN: Will you go, then, at once, and leave me to break it to your wife?

DANCY: I don't know yet.

TWISDEN: You must decide quickly to catch a boat-train. Many a man has made good. You're a fine soldier.

DANCY: There are alternatives.

TWISDEN: No. Go straight from this office. You've a passport, I suppose; you won't need a visé for France, and from there you can find means to slip over. Have you got money on you? (DANCY *nods*.) We will see what we can do to stop or delay proceedings.

DANCY: It's all damned kind of you. (*With difficulty*.) But I must think of my wife. Give me a few minutes.

TWISDEN: Yes, yes! Go in there and think it out.

A formal verdict for *De Levis* with costs was the court's decision when Dancy's representative withdrew from the case. *General Canynge* and *Colford* call on *Twisden* when they hear. Colford is infuriated at the turn of the tide against his friend.

TWISDEN: Sh! Dancy's in there. He's admitted it.

Photographs by White Studio

Major Colford (Wilfred Seagram) breaks up the card-party—(left to right) *Charles Winsor* (H. G. Stoker), *Lord St. Erth* (Laurence Hanray), *General Canynge* (Felix Aylmer), *Augustus Borring* (Deering Wells)—with the astounding news that *De Levis* is openly accusing *Dancy* in the clubhouse.

(Left to right) *Mabel Dancy* (Diana Bourbon), *Margaret Orme* (Jeannette Sherwin) and *Lady Adela Winsor* (Cathryn Young) discuss *De Levis* and his outrageous conduct.

COLFORD: What? (*With emotion.*) If it were my own brother, I couldn't feel it more. But—damn it!—what right had that fellow to chuck up the case—without letting him know, too? I came down with Dancy this morning, and he knew nothing about it.

TWISDEN (*coldly*): That was unfortunately unavoidable.

COLFORD: Guilty or not, you ought to have stuck to him. It's not playing the game, Mr. Twisden.

TWISDEN: You must allow me to judge where my duty lay in a very hard case.

COLFORD: I thought a man was safe with his solicitor.

CANYNGE: Colford, you don't understand professional etiquette.

COLFORD: No—thank God!

TWISDEN: When you have been as long in your profession as I have been in mine, Major Colford, you will know that duty to your calling outweighs duty to friend or client.

COLFORD: But I serve the country.

TWISDEN: And I serve the law, sir.

Dancy comes back.

DANCY: I'm going home to clear up things with my wife. General Canynge, I don't quite know why I did the damned thing. But I did, and there's an end of it.

CANYNGE: Dancy, for the honor of the army, avoid further scandal if you can. I've written a letter to a friend of mine in the Spanish War Office. It will get you a job in their war.

DANCY: Very good of you. I don't know if I can make use of it.

De Levis is announced, and, after a moment's hesitation, *Twisden* nods to his clerk to admit him. The three wait in silence with their eyes fixed on the door. *De Levis* comes in and is advancing toward *Twisden* when his eyes fall on *Dancy* and he stops.

TWISDEN: You wanted to see me?

DE LEVIS (*moistening his lips*): Yes. I came to say that—that I overheard—I am afraid a warrant is to be issued. I wanted you to realize it's not my doing. I'll give it no support. I'm content. I don't even want costs. Dancy, do you understand?

Dancy does not answer, but looks at him with nothing alive in his face but his eyes.

TWISDEN: We are obliged to you, sir. It was good of you to come.

DE LEVIS (*with a sort of darting pride*): Don't mistake me. I didn't come because I feel Christian. I am a Jew. I will take no money—not even that which was stolen. Give it to a charity. I'm proved right. And now I've done with the damned thing. Good-morning. (*He walks out.*)

CANYNGE (*suddenly*): You heard what he said, Dancy. You have no time to lose.

THE hardest thing for *Ronald* is facing *Mabel* with the outcome of the case. He drives straight home from *Twisden's* office and blurts it out almost before he gets into the flat. She is overwhelmed by the news, for she has believed in him to the utmost.

DANCY: You wanted this case. Well, it's fallen down.

MABEL: Oh, why didn't I face it? But I couldn't—I had to believe.

DANCY: And now you can't. It's the end, Mabel.

MABEL (*looking up at him*): No!

Dancy goes suddenly on his knees and seizes her hand.

DANCY: Forgive me!

MABEL (*putting her hand on his head*): Yes; oh, yes! I think I've known a long time, really. Only—why? What made you?

DANCY (*getting up and speaking in jerks*): It was a crazy thing to do; but—damn it!—I was only looting a looter. The money was as much mine as his. A decent chap would have offered me half. You didn't see the brute look at me that night at dinner as much as to say, "You blasted fool!" It made me mad. That wasn't a bad jump—twice over. Nothing in the war took quite such nerve. (*Grimly.*) I rather enjoyed that evening.

MABEL: But—money. To keep it!

DANCY (*suddenly*): Yes; but I had a debt to pay.

MABEL: To a woman?

DANCY: A debt of honor—it wouldn't wait.

MABEL: It was—it was to a woman! Ronny, don't lie any more.

DANCY (*grimly*): Well—I wanted to save your knowing. I'd promised a thousand. I had a letter from her father that morning, threatening to tell you. All the same, if that tyke hadn't jeered at me for parlor tricks— But what's the good of all this now? (*Suddenly.*) Well—it may cure you of loving me. Get over that, Mab; I never was worth it—and I'm done for.

MABEL: The woman—have you—since?

DANCY (*energetically*): No. You supplanted her. But if you'd known I was leaving a woman for you, you'd never have married me.

MABEL (*coldly*): What has happened—exactly?

DANCY: Sir Frederic chucked up the case. I've seen Twisden; they want me to run for it to Morocco.

MABEL: To the war there?

DANCY: Yes; there's to be a warrant out.

MABEL: A prosecution? Prison? Oh, go! Don't wait a minute. Go!

DANCY: Blast them!

MABEL: Oh, Ronny! Please! Please! Think what you'll want. I'll pack. Quick! No. Don't wait to take things. Have you got money?

DANCY (*nodding*): This will be good-by, then?

MABEL (*after a moment's struggle*): Oh, no! No! No! I'll follow—I'll come out to you there.

DANCY: D'you mean you'll stick to me?

MABEL: Of course I'll stick to you.

Dancy seizes her hand and puts it to his lips. The bell rings.

MABEL (*in terror*): Who's that? (*The bell rings again. Dancy moves toward the door.*) No! Let me!

She passes him and steals out to the outer door of the flat, where she stands listening. While she is gone, Dancy remains quite still till she comes back.

MABEL: Through the letter-box—I can see—it's—it's police. God, Ronny! I can't bear it.

DANCY: Heads up, Mab!

MABEL: Whatever happens, I'll go on loving you. If it's prison—I'll wait. Do you understand? I don't care what you did—I don't care! I'm just the same. I will be just the same when you come back to me.

DANCY: That's not in human nature.

MABEL: It is! It's in me.

DANCY: I've crocked up your life.

MABEL: No, no! Kiss me!

A long kiss till the bell again startles them apart, and there is a loud knock.

DANCY: They'll break the door in. It's no good—we must open. Hold them in check a little. I want a minute or two.

MABEL (*clasping him*): Ronny! Oh, Ronny! It won't be for long—I'll be waiting. I'll be waiting—I swear it!

DANCY: Steady, Mab!

Mabel spars for time with the officers, using every argument and expedient, to give *Ronald* time to get away. Presently he calls out: "All right! You can come in now." There is the sound of a lock being turned, and almost immediately the sound of a shot in the bedroom. Mabel rushes to the door, tears it open and disappears within, followed by the inspector of police, just as *Margaret Orme* and *Colford* come in from the hall. They hurry to the bedroom door, disappear for a moment, and then *Colford* and *Margaret* come out, supporting *Mabel*, who faints as they lay her on the sofa. *Colford* takes from her hand an envelope and tears it open.

DEAR COLFORD: This is the only decent thing I can do. It's too damned unfair to her. It's only another jump. A pistol keeps faith. Look after her. Colford—my love to her, and you.

Margaret gives a sort of choking sob; then, seeing the smelling-salts, she snatches the bottle up and turns to revive *Mabel*.

COLFORD: Leave her. The longer she's unconscious the better.

INSPECTOR (*reentering*): This is a very serious business, sir.

COLFORD (*sternly*): Yes, inspector; you've done for my best friend.

INSPECTOR: I, sir? He shot himself.

COLFORD: Hara-kiri.

INSPECTOR: Beg pardon?

COLFORD (*he points with the letter to Mabel*): For her sake—and his own.

INSPECTOR (*putting out his hand*): I'll want that, sir.

COLFORD (*grimly*): You shall have it read at the inquest. Till then—it's addressed to me, and I stick to it.

INSPECTOR: Very well, sir. Do you want to have a look at him?

Colford passes quickly into the bedroom, followed by the inspector. *Margaret* remains kneeling beside *Mabel*. *Colford* comes quickly back. *Margaret* looks up at him.

MARGARET (*wildly*): "Keeps faith!" We've all done that. It's not enough.

COLFORD (*looking down at Mabel*): All right, old boy!

Thomas Robinson *and the* Underworld

Thomas Robinson, Very Serious Himself but Seemingly Born to Make Others Laugh, Is a Well-Known and Welcome Contribution to American Fiction Types

By Harrison Rhodes

FRESHMEN were once ridiculously young. This is not a reference to the time when Longfellow or whoever he was entered Harvard College at the age of twelve. Times much later are meant; if you wish to be precise, when you and Thomas Robinson's father were there. And the question is not one of age merely in years; it has to do with a curious childishness which, so far as a fellow going to college now can discover, seems to have been one of the chief characteristics of the last century.

Thomas Robinson's apartment itself would, to an intelligent observer, date our story. There were in it no crossed college flags or crimson cushions contributed by impressionable young girls at boarding-school. Though young Mr. Robinson had been in Cambridge a month, there were on walls no signs stolen of an evening by blithe lads returning from Boston or, for example, the cap belonging to the conductor of a late Cambridgeport street-car. His sitting-room might almost have been anywhere in the world. Not, of course, carefully thought out, like one bounder's from Milwaukee, who was said to have had an interior decorator (female) in to do it, but in taste of a sort.

The young gentlemen gathered there—they *looked* young, it must be admitted—had chanced upon this subject of their parents' freshmanhood. And in a mellow, modern and indulgent way they exchanged anecdotes of this quaint early period as parents and other old "grads" had recounted them.

"They just 'played pranks,' didn't they?" commented a red-haired boy from Boston, whose tone was known to be very modern and correct. He sounded faintly sarcastic, and yet he smiled tolerantly enough as he stretched himself out among Thomas Robinson's cushions (not contributed by boarding-school pupils). "I think," he concluded, "they sound rather sweet—our parents."

"I suspect they still play pranks at Yale and Princeton—" began another fellow.

"Prep schools!"

"Well," drawled the red-haired boy, "we know the undergraduate students of those two universities *are* very quaint and sweet."

"I'll tell the world," remarked Bobo Lindsay. The remark was not particularly apposite. Not at all witty. But it was in the vernacular of to-day and so passed muster. Bobo lit a pipe and meditatively wondered about the clever set of fellows Tom was gathering round him.

"I think," began Thomas Robinson, being in a mood to improvise, and then *did* think; "I think they ought to have a course

in the History Department on the college itself."

"Freshmen I have known."

"Habits and customs of earlier days."

"Or we might found a society to take up the work ourselves."

"Boston stuff!" remarked Thomas Robinson. "Founding societies! Still, I propose we start it at once—the Harvard Archeological Society. To investigate the nineteenth-century freshman as revealed in the traces of him to be discovered on the banks of the River Charles.

"It may be in my blood," Thomas Robinson went on. "My father told me once that, when he was here, he got up a fake Society of Colonial Drinks, to 'study their use and abuse.' To belong to it you had to prove to the satisfaction of the committee that you had had an ancestor who was a Colonial drunkard. Of course," he added lightly, with an enormous air of man of the world, "that was before prohibition, when drinking was probably more uncommon than it is now."

"Some boy, your father!" ventured Bobo Lindsay, who knew the gentleman.

"Still is," remarked his son, glad to be able to say a kind word for his parent.

But then Bobo struck what we hope seems to every reader almost a false note.

"I think," he said, "they must have been great days, those. They must have had some pep then."

"And you think we haven't pep now, Lindsay?" asked the youth from Boston.

"Oh, I don't know," muttered young Mr. Lindsay, slightly uneasy now that public attention was being called to him.

"If you want moving-picture exploits, you ought to have gone to Hollywood, not Harvard."

Thomas Robinson was extracting a cigarette. A meditative smile was on his face. Perhaps he was thinking of further exploits of the elder Robinson.

"You'll admit—won't you, Harvey?"—he said to young Mr. King, of Boston, "that their stunts had a good deal of charm. And took nerve."

"For example?"

"I was just thinking. My father was made by a freshman secret society to steal the president's watch out of his pocket at a freshman reception. Silly, of course, and wrong, but——"

"But," said Bobo, "*you* wouldn't do it."

This was the psychological moment for the cigarette, which Mr. Robinson lit with great deliberation.

"I don't say I wouldn't," he remarked almost coldly, "in the interests of the Archeological Society, of course, as Exhibit A in their museum. Not to please you, Bobo; though I might mention that I won't let you put anything over on me. I'll bet you twenty-five dollars."

"Isn't the freshman reception Friday night?" some one asked innocently in the slight silence that ensued.

"Yes. But nobody goes, I understand," replied Thomas. "Isn't that so, Harvey?"

"Not usually, except the four or five hundred freshmen who aren't anybody. I wasn't thinking of going; but why not? Wouldn't it be a good red-blood, world-safe-for-democracy, three long Harvards kind of thing to do? Especially if Robinson's going to snitch the president's watch."

"How," returned young Mr. Harvey King, "are you going to get the watch? Are you a pickpocket? Of course I know that most New Yorkers of the capitalist class——"

"No," answered Thomas Robinson; "I'm not a pickpocket. *Is* there anything in your pockets here in Boston to pick? But I think you've given me the idea—the modern, efficient way to do it. I'll get a good up-do-date pickpocket and take him with me as my guest to the freshman reception."

"Where," asked some one, "do you go to get good up-to-date pickpockets in Boston?"

The red-headed boy made himself still more comfortable among the cushions.

"I understand," he drawled, "that the South Station actually swarms with them. I have an aunt who lives in Dedham who had a terrific time there. Some one rifled her Boston net bag."

"I will go in there to-morrow afternoon and get a pickpocket," announced Mr. Robinson, still with great calm. "And perhaps you'd like to drop in here to-morrow evening and meet him."

OUR young friend, arriving at the railway terminus the following afternoon, had assumed, or tried to assume, an odd, bland, sheepish expression such as is often seen in young gentlemen with adenoids. He looked rich, too—he hoped—as well as an ass. But a tin watch was at the end of the

neat gilt chain, and his scarf-pin was safe at home. He was, however, infested with dollar bills. With one of them he had bought some peppermint drops at once and stuffed the change and another bill or two which his first haul had produced rather carelessly into the outer side pocket of his coat. The peppermints gave the innocent, inviting look he had planned, but it was really rather pleasant to eat them, he found, and to stand guilelessly looking at the train-arrival announcements. He had come, so he decided, to meet a rich maiden aunt who was arriving from Springfield. He could have elaborated the character of this aunt very easily, but he could not feel that such mental processes would be so outwardly visible as to attract the criminal classes to his guilelessness. He looked over the news-stand and bought a copy of *St. Nicholas;* such a purchase on the part of a man of his age would most certainly indicate arrested development. He bought cigarettes, dropped a bill on the floor, picked it up, stuffed it into a waistcoat pocket, where the corner of it showed. He was aiming to produce the effect not of intoxication but of a certain temperamental nonchalance which might attract the notice of the best pickpockets. The plan was excellent, only, unfortunately, it did not seem to attract the notice of anybody.

At last, a little exasperated, he went into the smoking-room and, sitting on a bench, closed his eyes after a little as if to sleep. Such a posture must, he felt, be singularly seductive to any pickpocket not obviously slacking on his job. Perhaps it was because Thomas Robinson had been up rather late the night before—studying, of course—that he really had now what, in his grandfather's day, used to be called a "cat-nap." For the briefest instant he forgot where he was, and then in a dream saw the revered president of the university purloin a Long Island duckling from the pocket of a prima donna about to sing *"Caro nome."* Such flights of the subconscious creative imagination require, so scientists tell us, only the briefest possible time. At any rate, our friend, suddenly coming to and slyly clutching his tin watch, realized that the sleepy interval had been too short for any work to have been done upon his temporarily unconscious person. And yet he had suddenly the very oddest kind of feeling, as if something had happened, or, if it had not happened, was just about to happen. Before he even so much as raised his eyes, Thomas Robinson, as it were, clamped an iron control down upon himself. And then looked up. His eyes caught at once a pair of very bright-blue ones fastened from across the room upon him with great intentness. This look passed instantly; the eyes wandered away in great indifference. But Thomas Robinson knew they were the eyes of a pickpocket.

This is perfectly true, but it will, perhaps, be the only thing in the story which readers may find hard to believe. We do not especially care to discuss this point, being quite content merely to say that the fault is the reader's rather than the writer's.

The owner of the intent blue eyes should be, perhaps, some romantic geese of readers will be thinking, a young and beautiful woman. But it might as well be confessed that this is a man's story for men, and that there are absolutely no females in it. The fair sex has for years had a great deal to do with Thomas Robinson's life, but it seems quite suitable, we think, that the first story of his college life should be quite free from women—undersexed, if you like.

The owner of the intent blue eyes was a young man of about Thomas Robinson's age. There was, so it might easily have seemed, nothing criminal about his appearance except the "trick" cut of his coat, which *was* rather wicked, and the look of his vest, where strapping with the same cloth had gone farther than God ever meant vest fanciness should go. He had light-brown hair and a pleasant pale complexion. Not a gentleman, yet an agreeable-looking common sort of fellow. But Thomas Robinson, tingling with certainty, knew not only who but what he was.

WITH a detachment equal to the stranger's, he rose and again strolled into the main hall. He had the satisfaction of seeing, out of the tail of his eye, that the unknown, after a decent interval, languidly rose, too, and lounged in the same direction. The would-be victim carefully adjusted a bill in his waistcoat pocket, so that a corner of it tantalizingly showed, and joined a little crowd that had collected round an elderly maiden lady waiting, with a negro porter and two parrots, for a train to be announced.

Her situation was, it must be admitted,

slightly unusual and engaging, but it did not really justify the astonishing intentness of interest which Thomas Robinson now displayed. The pickpocketee, if one may coin that word, may have looked like a gaping fool, but his nerves were tense, and when a hand stole slyly to his pocket, he caught it with a grip that he hoped was "like iron." It was always "like iron" in novels, and it looked "like iron" in the movies, whence, indeed, his fullest knowledge of the present procedure came, due to close-ups of the creeping hands of criminals with hearts of gold. He rather hoped his captive would have such a heart; it would perhaps make it easier to deal with him.

Thomas Robinson half turned, and in a low tone muttered:

"You are quite welcome to the money, I assure you; and I have more in another pocket. But I want to talk to you."

The sentiment evidently came as a surprise to young Mr. Eddie Mather, because he allowed Thomas Robinson to lead him away from the little group round the porter and the parrots. But surprise abated and poise came back.

"What's the game? Are you going to preach to me? Something like this happened to me once when I was going through a parson. He wanted to slop a lot of brotherly love over me and make me give up my profesh."

"I don't want you to give it up at all," said Thomas Robinson. "I want you to do a job of pickpocketing for me to-morrow night."

"Are you—" began the other boy.

"Oh, no; I'm a perfectly—" Thomas Robinson had meant to say "a perfectly honest person." But he suddenly realized that this wouldn't be very nice manners and that, too, under the circumstances, perhaps some people—the president, for example—might think his honesty open to discussion, to say the least. So he finished by asserting that he was "a perfectly amateur crook."

"Amateur crook," fairly snarled his companion. "How do you get that way? Reading them stories in the magazines? Listen; there ain't no amateur about it. You either are or you aren't. Now, I am, and I've got the sand to say so. Though I wouldn't before a judge—where I'm not going, you see——"

"Well, you're not going on my account," politely replied young Mr. Robinson.

"You're a nut, you are," commented young Mr. Mather.

THEY sat down on a trunk—it was over near the baggage-room—and an explanation was made of the kind of thing to-morrow night was going to be, and about "snitching" prexy's watch and how it had all been done partly because Bobo Lindsay had, as it were, "dared" Thomas Robinson to do it.

"I said you was a nut," was Mr. Mather's final comment. "Of course," he admitted handsomely, "I see about not letting that Bobo get your goat. Bobo! Gee! That's a swell name, ain't it? Do you suppose he'd mind if I grabbed it? 'Bobo Mather' sounds pretty good to me. But I don't get you. I'm to pinch a watch that I don't own afterward, anyway. And which you'll never put up and get anything on, so it seems. 'Cause you've all got watches and money and education to burn. What I ain't got."

"You understand—don't you?—that of course I'd pay you what you think the job is worth."

"Gee, kid!" laughed Eddie Mather, and he slapped Thomas Robinson on the leg gaily. "I will do it for the treat of knowing a swell nut like you. You're all right, kid, even if you have got things all wrong. You see," he went on, "while my mother was alive and I went to school to the Fathers, I thought I wanted to be educated. And I wasn't such a mess at it. I could still do you that bit about all Gaul being divided into three parts."

"I flunked Cæsar on my entrance exam," remarked Thomas meditatively.

"I ought to have gone to Harvard. I'd have made a swell break there," said Mr. Mather, with gay mock grandiloquence.

"Well, won't you come out now and stay till after to-morrow night? And meet a few of the fellows at my rooms after dinner. How about it? I've got an extra couch-bed. I can put you up."

"What do you mean—put me up? Turn me loose in one of them dormitories all night? I might get that dough I didn't get just now and beat it. Have you thought of that?"

"Oh," said our hero, if he is, at present, at all a hero, "I believe there is honor—" He stopped and felt himself blushing. What was the matter with his manners, anyhow?

" 'Honor among thieves' is what they say. Well, why not? It's a big idea."

"Then you'll come?" asked Thomas Robinson, feeling somehow oddly young and immature with this brisk, brilliant, competent, unashamed young man. But just a if to alleviate his feelings, a sudden kind of shyness seemed to pass over his companion.

"I'd like to see what this college stuff really is. If you're in it, I mean. But"—was Thomas Robinson right in thinking that a faint flush now rose to his brow?—"what about clothes? In the evening you would all be in the soup and fish, I guess."

It was an agreeable picture, like an old book of etiquette, this of Harvard College universally in evening dress after sundown. It gave the Harvard man a little laugh, but it restored his confidence.

"Oh, not a bit like it." And he passed his arm almost affectionately through the other boy's. "We'll taxi it out."

TO ONE who, unlike most modern writers, has been singularly little occupied writing about the criminal classes, it is a little difficult to depict Mr. Eddie Mather to just the right point. There was a certain quality of agreeableness and likableness about him which it is only fair to show. Yet, since he was a self-confessed crook, the interests of morality forbid, somehow, that he should be made too pleasant.

There is, of course, another way out, which Thomas Robinson, again guided, perhaps, by popular fictional art, took. As it seemed to him quite out of the question that he should experience the somewhat exhilarating sense of companionship which he did with any one wholly bad, he decided that Mr. Mather was not wholly bad. He hesitated at first as to whether his friend were stealing to support a decrepit and aged mother or a wife and three small starving children. He looked, it is true, a little young to have three children, starving or otherwise. It might be, of course, that any wish to reform was being stifled in him by the grim forces of the established order; he might indeed be being crushed back into the mud by the sinister brutality of the police. This seemed likely, though just how this would function to make a young pickpocket go on pickpocketing was a mystery to Thomas Robinson. But he, with several other blithe spirits, had encountered a policeman only the other night when they were all coming home from a party at Arthur Merriweather's, and he had not found the officer at all sympathetic with or tolerant of the gaiety of youth.

It was comparatively easy to believe that Eddie was all right, once you knew about him. And Thomas Robinson imagined that in a leisurely taxi journey all the way to Harvard Square it would be easy to find out. The situation was significant and gripping—these were just the adjectives he used to himself.

Something of these meditations upon the power of an unfortunate environment Thomas Robinson broached to his young friend in the cab. It gave Mr. Mather an easy opening, he thought. And perhaps, under the influence of a little manly sympathy, he would break down and tell his unhappy but awfully fascinating history to this new friend from Cambridge. This was the sort of thing that often did happen, so Thomas Robinson had understood. The other boy looked at him with a singularly cool eye.

"Look here, kid," he began—it was extraordinary how he, who was obviously about Thomas Robinson's age, kept calling him "kid"—"look here; we've been on the level so far. Let's stay there. I can't pull no sob stuff; honest I can't." And then, quite unexpectedly, something like a wave of feeling passed for the first time over his face. "I suppose if my old lady hadn't passed out, I might have kept on going to school to the Fathers. *She* wanted me to go to college, the Jesuits', you know, not like you. And be a priest. Gee! Funny, ain't it? I'd have made a swell priest! Well, anyhow, when she was gone, I cut all that out. And it didn't take long for me to get into my present job. I always knew I had pretty light fingers, and there's always someone to help you. And then a girl got hold of me. Oh, she was all right, but she could use the coin. Well, so can I, if it comes to that."

"Eddie," said Thomas Robinson gravely, "I think that's sob stuff enough."

"Do you, kid?"

"Why, yes! It makes me feel like—well, what was it one of those old writers said? There, but for the grace of God, goes Thomas Robinson."

"What do you mean? Have you been getting into any trouble, kid?"

"Oh, no," answered our young friend. "I was only thinking that I was in college mostly because my mother wants me to be. And my father. Most of the fellows are. I don't know what I'd do if I was left to myself. And if I didn't have any money."

"Aw," said young Mr. Mather, "you and me could be pals." He laughed gaily. "What's that?" he cried, as the first of the old university's buildings came into sight. "Show me round to-morrow—will you?—like I was coming here as a freshie myself."

THOMAS ROBINSON was destined to show him round, though the episode both was and wasn't to be quite what he expected.

The evening, from any social point of view, was a great success. Mr. Mathers' manners in a group were, as might have been expected, taking and easy. Of course, those admitted to Mr. Robinson's rooms were hand-picked. Blighters who weren't wanted were simply told at the door that an organization meeting of the Harvard Archeological Society was taking place. Their surprise would have been in some cases extreme if they could have seen the guest of honor—or dishonor, if you prefer the phrase—demonstrating to passionately interested students certain methods by which the game of poker, commonly classed as a game of chance, could be made measurably less so.

This, which indeed, in many ways, was the evening's highest point of originality, was meant as a tribute to Bobo Lindsay, before the magic of whose name their guest remained spellbound as when he had first heard it. But it was Harvey King, proud and languid scion of Beacon Hill, who proved to every one's astonishment the aptest pupil. Mr. King's manner was still cool and restrained, but after he had succeeded in bringing three aces from up his sleeve, his words showed fire.

"It is quite obvious," he said, adjusting himself again among Thomas Robinson's cushions, "that I have found my *mêtier*, which is what no one in Boston ever expected me to find." (For the benefit of uneducated people like Bobo, "*mêtier*" is French for "job.") "And if this institution were a practical thing and made any attempt to prepare young men to confront the problems of life which they will encounter after they leave its sheltering bosom, our friend here would be made a professor at once and his course in cards compulsory. As it is, I think I shall begin at once giving university-extension lectures in the Boston clubs."

Some one produced a mandolin, and it was found that Eddie Mather thrummed a wicked string. And the night became gay with music and song, which are not necessarily quite the same, as Harvey King deftly put it.

"I think," said Thomas Robinson, "singing is perfectly archeological. In a minute they'll do 'My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean.' Scratch a twentieth-century freshman and what do you find, Harvey?"

"I guess," said Harvey, "you just find his father."

When Mr. Lindsay was leaving, Thomas Robinson said quietly,

"I get your twenty-five, I guess; don't I, Bobo?"

"Well," said Bobo grudgingly, "if you do, you do. But I'll say I like your friend, Tom. He's a fine fellow. If I could afford it, I'd send him to Yale."

Left to themselves, our two young gentlemen sat a while in talk before they turned in.

"You've got it fine here," meditated the young man from the station. "Maybe I missed it. Though I don't suppose the Jesuits' college would have been up to this." His host was mending the fire and made no answer. "I bet you," went on the guest, as a tiny flickering flame responded to Thomas Robinson's ministrations, "half of you fellows don't know your luck."

"Perhaps half of us almost envy you."

Mr. Mather, going rather far in a guest's prerogatives, gave the fire a vicious punch.

"You don't need to," he said and scowled.

The next day, after lying late, Mr. Mather in the bed, his host upon the couch, they dressed slowly, and Thomas Robinson determined to cut every lecture that day. He would show Eddie the university. Incidentally see it himself, which, of course, he had never done. He inclined to begin with the stadium, but, as it turned out, his guest had already seen that—"worked there," he rather grimly said. But they strolled down to the Charles's side and in the sun hung over the bridge by the boat club and watched the operations of shells and wherries taking water.

"It's free to any one of us, I believe," explained the *cicerone.*

"So *you* use it?"

"Oh, no," said Thomas Robinson lightly, and, "Damn fool!" said his guest.

They saw the gymnasium and had a peek at the laboratories near by; they had a look into Memorial Hall, saw the flags and the lists of students who had died so long ago in that half-forgotten Civil War.

"I'd have gone to the war over there only I was too young," said the boy from Boston.

"Same here," said Thomas Robinson.

"I suppose you'd have been my 'loot' and give me orders." This was almost sullenly.

"Oh, I don't know," answered Thomas Robinson. "Perhaps we'd just have been two soldiers. It was like that, you know, when you were fighting for your country."

Eddie Mather put his hand for an instant on Thomas Robinson's shoulder.

"Perhaps. But, anyhow, kid," he said, "it can't ever be quite like that no more. I know I am like a wild animal to you fellows, and, believe me, to me you are all some zoo."

"Isn't it wrong somehow?" asked Thomas Robinson. A fair question, perhaps, if we understand it as put to the Maker of the universe, but not to another boy.

They saw all the museums. It was incredible how interesting they seemed to Eddie Mather, seeing that sort of thing for the first time. Thomas Robinson did not feel it necessary to explain that he, too, was seeing them for the first time. But a shy feeling, almost of respect for the great university to which he had attached himself, welled up within him in spite of himself—pride, too, that he was there.

They went into the library, quiet, both of them. And again the centuries of students and even more of books pressed in upon them. Again they caught a vision—that is, Thomas Robinson did—of the great institution coming down all the years of American history, beneficent, proud and oblivious of freshman antics. Why, viewing fair Harvard with a little pickpocket from the South Station, should you find her serenely beautiful as never before?

"Gee!" said Eddie Mather. "Have you got to read all them books before they let you out?" And the laughter that followed seemed for both of them to break the spell.

Whether any spell had been cast upon the stranger, it would have been hard to say, although a fair sort of guess might have been made about young Mr. Robinson. Perhaps, in that flitting moment, the ancient university—"*alma mater*," they call her—which had known so many boys of so many kinds from so many varied boyhoods, came for an instant into some sort of contact with a little pickpocket's soul, and for him lit up with her torch the arid country of his life. Who knows? Not Thomas Robinson at the time, certainly.

Mr. Mather had to go to Boston for the afternoon, he said. But he promised to return. And Thomas Robinson had to take him at his word—indeed, just what else was there to do? That afternoon in Edward Mather's life intrigues his chronicler. Did some unmentioned family call him, or a girl? In either case, we can only guess at the scene that followed. Or did he fly, like the homing dove, to the South Station? Where Mr. Mather's money came from, no one knows. But he returned to Thomas Robinson's quarters with a parcel which contained the complete "soup and fish" or "Tux" purchased in a swell joint in Boylston Street.

"I thought it would look more respectful like," he said, "when I pinched the president's watch."

AN INEXPERIENCED writer, writing this story, or one who composed without a strict regard for logic or a real feeling for the probability of the events which he pretends to recount, might most likely think that the climax of it all would be the moment when a slim, pale hand slid to the president's waistcoat pocket and came away with his watch. But, on the contrary, every bit of art which Mr. Edward Mather possessed was of course exerted to make the climax as unobtrusive as possible. Indeed, all that Thomas Robinson himself knew was that, as they were about to pass by prexy in the line, there seemed to happen a sudden congestion, a slight confusion in the order of approach, that he heard a murmur of pardons as somebody stumbled and that the next moment prexy's watch was slipped into the side pocket of his dinner jacket. The climax was to be, he saw plainly, when a half-hour later he delivered his trophy to the Harvard Archeological Society in his rooms. Or when he collected that twenty-five from the wholly conquered Bobo.

About five minutes they gave to the general social amenities, and, to avoid any possible suspicion, Mr. Robinson and Mr. Mather even lost each other for the briefest moment in the crowd. But they were soon at home, flushed with triumph, among the agreeable group which had surrounded them the evening before.

Thomas Robinson had judged that it was the moment for a little oratory. For oratory itself was a little in the note of a generation or two earlier. But although he mounted an armchair rostrum with great dignity, his remarks, even his opening remarks, were drowned in cheers, long Harvards, cat-calls and other expressions of freshman exuberance which, somehow, to an extramodern and sophisticated ear might have sounded like just the kind of thing that went on in the despised days of the senior Robinson. Bobo Lindsay had brought something in a bottle—not that anything can be said about that in a public publication which might fall under the notice of any sort of government officials. The orator fixed the mob with his eye, determined to cow it as one does a tiger. But there seemed no dignity or shame left in Harvard. Harvey King, whom the congested condition of the room had prevented from being stretched among cushions, advanced like a ringleader among pirates and merely yelled,

"We want prexy's watch!"

"All right!" yelled Thomas Robinson in reply, and somehow there was a little space of comparative calm in which he might have been heard if any one had been listening very carefully. But at that moment Bobo Lindsay— However, that is no integral part of our story.

"Listen, fellows! Just to prove that freshmen nowadays can be just as young and foolish and dashing and you know all that sort of thing as their fathers, my esteemed young confrère and I bring you prexy's watch!"

THERE was again a cheer. Thomas Robinson had just long enough to think how darned gay and amusing college life really is before he put his hand into his pocket—and found that prexy's watch was not there!

"Good Lord!" cried Thomas Robinson. "It's gone!" And he turned very white and the laughter in him died.

It would seem that it is not possible to write a true story, even of the gayest kind, as is this, without having also to write of sadness and of things that deeply agitate men's souls.

Thomas Robinson had all along known that the stealing of prexy's watch was only a joke, and that in due time the timepiece, which had, perhaps, very precious and intimate memories for the dignified old gentleman, must be restored to him. A joke is a joke, of course; but this had gone too far. Oh, a great deal too far! It was quite easy to be heard now in the room.

"It's gone!" repeated Thomas Robinson, and then, with perhaps all the poor little gallantry one may expect of a boy who is not yet twenty, "It's nobody's fault, fellows, but my own," he said. "I'm awfully sorry I am an ass."

He looked forlornly lonely. It is rather coming a cropper to find out that really all you are is a fool. He saw himself not so much in jail—though, of course, that would probably happen—but, what was much worse, expelled from the university, because, of course, he should go to the president and tell him everything. Not really everything, of course, because he couldn't tell him about Eddie Mather. Whatever had happened before he met Eddie may have been Eddie's fault. Whatever had happened since was all Thomas Robinson's.

He got down from the chair and found young Mr. Mather standing by his side.

"It isn't your fault, Eddie," he said—after all, he was still the host. If you choose to ask even a pickpocket from the South Station to break bread with you, you have—haven't you?—taken him under your wing.

Young Mr. Mather favored him with one long look of such mingled scorn and affection as it is really rather difficult to describe.

'Aw, kid!" he said. His voice was suddenly more than usually unpleasant and nasal. Almost every one stopped to listen—even Bobo Lindsay. "You are a nut. I said so when I first met up with you. Who do you think took the watch out of your pocket? And where do you think I put it? Back in old prexy's pocket, where it belongs, and where I knew you would really think it ought to be when you came to your senses." A queer little cheer somehow rose around. "Aw, you"—and his scorn was for

everybody—"why didn't you stop him in the beginning? You fellows don't know when you've got it good. You ought to be down on your knee-bones thanking the Lord you got a chance like this to make some good out of yourselves. Gee! I believe I'll come to Harvard College and learn you what it ought to be."

"Would you like it better than your own magnificent and romantic occupation?" asked Harvey King, with an odd, whimsical little smile on his lips.

"That's my job. You leave it alone," retorted Eddie. "Anyhow, I do my job better than you guys do yours here."

"*Touché!*" murmured Mr. King. "I apologize," he added in a louder tone.

"Well, you lay off my job—unless you want it."

The red-haired boy from Boston gazed at Eddie intently.

"Do you want mine?" he asked slowly, his cultivated voice ringing out very clear, somehow.

"Aw, after what I've seen out here, I might like it. But I'd look swell—wouldn't I?—going in after my lecture to get my money to pay my room-rent at the South Station? Not that I couldn't."

"Eddie," began Thomas Robinson, "when you were at school 'to the Fathers,' how close do you suppose you were to being ready for college?"

"I'd been ready for the Jesuits in two years."

"And all your family and everybody, your mother especially, would have been happier if you went to college."

"Oh, she was hell bent on my getting learning," meditated Eddie.

"How long," asked Harvey King, "have you had that job at the station?"

"Oh, about a year."

"Then you could, perhaps, bear to give it up without too much of a wrench?"

"Oh, I ain't having no change of heart about my job. It's all right. And it's my living. What's the use of my talking about my giving it up? Some hop-dream; that's all."

"I've already offered," called out Bobo Lindsay, "to be one of three to send him to Yale."

THERE was a slight commotion in the corner while they threw Bobo on the couch and covered his head with pillows.

"I thought," said Thomas Robinson, "we might send him to Harvard. Or, at least, to a school where he could get ready to come. Would you go, Eddie?"

"Aw, kid—" began Mr. Mather, blushing furiously.

"I think it's a big idea. As a kind of ward of the Archeological Club. I think it's the kind of thing prexy would approve of. Eddie and I would go and talk it over with him to-morrow. I think it would be swell. I think that I'd study all the harder if I thought we'd got Eddie sweating somewhere. And then, when we were juniors, he'd come in as a freshman, and we—well, we could knock the tar out of him," concluded Thomas Robinson breathlessly.

There rose a faint murmur of approbation from the Archeological Society.

"Will you, Eddie?" The question was put in a low voice.

"Gee! Why not, kid, if that's the way you really feel about it? And make good."

It might have been almost a solemn moment but for Harvey King.

"I have a great idea," he suddenly said. "Eddie said I showed promise. I'll work in the South Station if he'll give me a few lessons, and I'll make enough to finance the project."

Thomas Robinson turned on him sternly.

"The trouble with you, Harvey, is you've too much sense of humor. If you want to help, pick my pockets now. And don't miss anything."

He stood up very straight, and Mr. King dexterously took his money—eight dollars—and a watch and chain and a silk handkerchief and then hesitated over a half-smoked package of the cheapest cigarettes.

"I'll buy those now for five dollars!" called out Bobo. "I'm dying."

"Now, will everybody give up?" called out our young hero.

And with Mr. King's dexterous assistance, the oddest pile quickly accumulated on his desk.

Suddenly Thomas Robinson had a thought.

"And I'll put in the twenty-five I bet and lost. May I, Bobo?"

"I'll put it in, Tom," cried Mr. Lindsay. "I've really lost. 'Cause if prexy were here now, I bet you'd get his watch at last."

The Swan and the Mule

A Novel Complete in This Issue

Louisiana in the Old Days, When Young Lovers Sometimes Encountered That Stern, Often Unscrupulous Opposition That Furnishes an Effective Ingredient of Stirring Fiction

By Della MacLeod

Illustrations by J. M. Clement

ANDREW MACDONALD sold the top crop—the final picking of his year's cotton — in Cottonville, Mississippi, at nine o'clock. He stopped at the Cotton Planters' Bank to deposit the check he received for it—sixty thousand dollars—and caught the ten-o'-clock train for New Orleans.

MacDonald, when he started for the little river town at sunup, had no thought of selling his cotton that day, or the remotest intention of going to New Orleans. He had heard that cotton might touch new high levels at fifty cents. He closed out the last bale he had with the first buyer he met for seventy cents a pound.

Without even a hand-bag, the planter boarded the south-bound train. There was an outstanding mortgage on his plantation, Rainbow's End, for fifty thousand dollars. Until he had the mortgage and the canceled notes in his hand, Andrew could not feel that the plantation was his own. As far back as he could remember, he had borne the load his father had carried and bequeathed to him on his death-bed—debts, debts, debts, that dated back to the terrible period of reconstruction following the Civil War.

MacDonald reached New Orleans late in the afternoon. He called up the banking-house of Jules Fortescue, Ltd. from the station, asking to speak with Craig Levecque, Fortescue's nephew. He asked Levecque to have his uncle wait at his office until he could get there.

"Come along, old man!" The young creole's voice was cordial over the telephone. "But what's the business that can't wait until tomorrow."

MacDonald simply replied that his business could not wait. Nor did it. An hour later, Jules Fortescue, Ltd. was fifty-odd thousand dollars richer, but held no negotiable paper of Andrew MacDonald's.

Old man Fortescue, shrewd as a fox, concealed his disappointment. Rainbow's End was a plantation of increasing value in the Mississippi delta, the richest soil in the world. He could not help regretting seventy-cent cotton that enabled his creditors to settle up. Nevertheless, the creole banker congratulated the young planter and offered him assistance in the years ahead if he should ever need any more money.

"I shall never borrow another cent," was MacDonald's grim rejoinder.

"Well, you never can tell," the hook-nosed old money-lender cackled. "Life is a seesaw, MacDonald. Up to-day, down to-morrow. Men like myself are you planters' ballast." He touched a hidden bell.

An old mulatto entered. He was impressingly like the banker at first glance, but the likeness disappeared at the second. Also at second glance, the impression of age was somehow dissipated. Andrew felt the force of a powerful personality.

"Gin fizzes, Charlie," the banker ordered, "to celebrate Mr. MacDonald's good fortune."

The mulatto bowed to Andrew and departed to mix the drinks.

Liquor was not MacDonald's weakness. But he had lived alone for ten years; he had been under a strain all that time. And now, unexpectedly, it was over. He was out of debt long before he had thought it possible that he could be. Nor was he aware of the insidious power of those drinks that looked like distilled moonshine and that Charley had mixed after the famous old Ramos recipe. He stared and laughed when Craig Levecque turned to him and said,

"You're coming with me to the Kittens' Ball."

"Not I!" he said finally. "I don't like cats—and I don't dance. But what's the joke?"

"No joke." Levecque was in earnest. "The Kittens are—well, it's a secret organization of a lot of girls. They have a fancy-dress ball once a year, and to-night's the night. I'm going—and so are you!"

Andrew regarded Levecque with the same tolerant amusement Craig had inspired in him when they had been at Princeton together. Levecque, small and insignificant, had attached himself to him. Andrew had been a football hero; there had been lamentations when he had left college in his sophomore year to manage niggers and mules on a Mississippi plantation.

"No costume," he grunted.

"Don't need it. Hire a dress suit—I've everything else. A mask's all the costume you need, and that's easy."

Andrew was too tired, perhaps too much confused by the drinks, to argue. Before he knew it, they were walking down Royal Street. He grinned as they passed Madame Ravenel's window, with its display of false faces and carnival masks.

"I might go as a mule—it's the only thing I'm familiar with these days," he said, pointing to a donkey's head.

"The very thing!" Levecque was enthusiastic. "Now for the suit——"

It was Levecque's affair. Andrew, with a shrug, resigned himself. And he turned up at the Kittens' Ball at the old Athenæum as a Mississippi mule.

"GO OFF and play," he told Craig, once he had passed the committee. "I'll stand without hitching for a while."

He expected to be bored. And bored he was as he stood and watched the endless play of the dancers—the crowd of monks, troubadours, knights, Dianas, Cinderellas, Pierrots, Columbines. And then, suddenly, he started.

Other eyes than his turned to the door; a strange thrill seemed to run through the crowded room, and through the door a swan floated in—a swan, and yet a woman. She was all glittering white feathers; she had all the grace of the bird she represented.

How it happened, no one knew. But afterward, in the dancing, the swan and the mule drew all eyes. The mule danced not much better than a mule would; the swan was the poetry of motion. When some one cut in, the mule waited patiently, dancing with no one else until the swan drifted back into his arms.

Neither knew who the other was—they were just mule and swan to one another. Yet all of those who watched them, piqued, amused, pleasantly or maliciously interested, knew. Knew, too, that Calla Fortescue was challenging gossip—since she was engaged. She was to marry Henry J. Montross, of Chicago, multimillionaire, suzerain of thousands of miles of railway. And she was, aside from that, the most prominent girl of the moment in New Orleans, since every one knew the secret that had not yet been officially revealed—that she was to be queen of the coming carnival—an honor her charm had helped to bring her in addition to the amount of Jules Fortescue's contribution to the Mardi Gras fund.

Tongues wagged among the chaperons. Who was this MacDonald? Nobody—a cotton-planter—an old acquaintance of

Craig Levecque, who had brought him to the ball. And Calla—well, she cared nothing for Montross, of course. How could a young girl care for a man old enough to be her father? Her grandfather, old Jules, had made the match, greedy, rich though he was, for the additional wealth, the prestige such a connection would help him to obtain. But, after all, an engagement—and making herself conspicuous like this!

And she hadn't rebelled. It wasn't as if she had been in love with any one else. She had seemed to be as much interested in Montross as in any other man.

Montross was mad about her. Every one knew how he had gone to old Jules Fortescue and asked for the girl. He had been married before; the wife of his poverty-stricken youth was long since dead. He wanted beauty, breeding, good birth—he would have them all in Calla. He had everything else—immense wealth, power almost unmeasured. How would he take this pretty picture of his swan in a mule's arms, dancing dance after dance?

Tongues wagged, indeed. An old scandal about her mother; that queer tale about her father. But however that had been, the family was of the best, the blood of the bluest. Some one ought to do something—speak to Craig Levecque. "Some one" was any one else. "Any one else" was no one. Nothing was done.

Masks off at last. Midnight! Craig Levecque looked for Calla. There was no sign of her. There was a general departure for supper-parties. He thought she must have gone with the Jenkins girls; she was to have supped with them. He went there, and did not find her. He went back to the Athenæum. In a window in an upper balcony he found Calla and Andrew.

"Well!" he said. "Do you know the ball is over—that every one else has gone?"

They stared at him and then at one another.

"Who introduced you to Calla Fortescue?" Craig asked Andrew.

"No one—I never heard of her."

Calla laughed at Craig's mounting excitement.

"Ever heard of a man called Andrew MacDonald?" he asked her. She shook her head. "Well—it's time I introduced you, then, and that you said good-night."

"I forgot you had a name," the girl said to the stranger, "and that I had one."

"She is mine." Andrew held out his hand. The girl put hers into it. "She is for me."

"Good God!" Craig exclaimed. "Have you lost your mind, Calla? You are to be queen of the carnival in a few weeks, and your engagement——"

"Yes; I did forget," she said simply. "I forgot everything—to-night."

Craig piled them into his runabout. Calla, in her billowy wrap of swan's-down, with aigrettes and diamonds sparkling in her red hair, sat between the two men. Andrew was bent on seeing old Jules Fortescue, to tell him he was going to marry the girl.

Craig had only one thought: to avert the scene—until morning, at least. Andrew had said that he had to go home then.

When the runabout stopped before a palace of a house far out in St. Charles Avenue, it was Craig who leaped out of the car first. He suggested to Andrew that he himself go in to make an appointment for his uncle to see the planter early in the morning. Andrew agreed absently.

"Go on in, then, Craig," the girl said, drawing back when he started to help her out of the car. "Leave me here for a moment to say good-night to—to—him."

The girl lifted her great gray eyes to the dark face bent over her. Their hands found each other—and clung. The man's eyes drew her, helpless as filings before a magnet.

"Good-night!" Her lips tried to frame the words. The tragedy of parting, even if only until the morning, swept them simultaneously. Each looked deep into the other's eyes, intoxicated past reason.

"We are for each other," the man said.

"I know," she agreed quite simply. "For each other."

"Will you come with me?" he asked.

"To the end of the world," she whispered.

"Now?"

"Of course! I love you."

A MOON three-quarters full swung like a silver censer high in the starry heavens. The scent of orange-blossoms from the groves along the highway perfumed the silent night. The runabout sped along the misty road beside the river. Two strangers were running away together.

At dawn they reached Magnolia Point, a small town on the river. They were

married as the sun came up over the live-oaks by a deaf old justice of the peace, who also owned the country store, which he opened up before seven o'clock for the bride to buy her trousseau, while her husband went out to make preparations for their honeymoon.

A SLEEPY negro butler admitted Craig. Mr. Fortescue was still up and in the library. A strange gentleman was with him—Mr. Montross, he thought the name was.

When Levecque came back to say that his uncle would see Andrew at nine o'clock in his office the next morning, on what the banker assumed to be business connected with the plantation, the runabout was gone. The butler admitted he had been asleep. He did not know whether Miss Calla had come in or not.

The runabout was gone. Craig knew that his cousin had not come into the house, but he sped up to her room—to find only a sleepy maid.

He spent the remainder of the night in a taxi-cab, the driver of which took him to be a young gentleman, very drunk, with a fixed idea that seemed perfectly wild, but for which he was evidently prepared to pay.

Long before dawn, the taxi-driver knew that his fare was not intoxicated but desperately sober and determined to overtake and stop a couple eloping in a red runabout, No. 77077, the car one of famous Italian design and a speed-maker. The futility of chasing such a machine in a second-class motor-car rebuilt for city service after it had been discarded by its original owner was obvious. But the taxi honked on.

It was nearly nine o'clock; New Orleans was far behind. The taxi-driver, after beating round the city streets for an hour or two, had suggested that they take the river road. Most eloping couples, he remarked, went in that direction. Levecque had long since given up the hope of overtaking Calla and Andrew. He was merely killing time to avert the hour he dreaded when he must return with his report.

"Ain't that your car?" The taxi-driver nodded toward a cloud of dust far ahead, out of which emerged a red runabout. "It's coming this way."

Craig strained his eyes. The car held a single occupant, the driver. Craig leaped out of the taxi and held his hand for the stranger who drove his car to stop. At first the stranger demurred, but when he was charged with having Craig's car in his possession, he quickly changed his tone and told his story. He had been engaged to deliver the car to its owner in New Orleans. He produced a note, written in pencil. It was addressed, the stranger said, to the owner of the car.

"My name is Levecque," the young creole said. "Craig Levecque."

The countryman handed the note to him and waited for his instructions. Craig read the note slowly, then handed it back.

"You take the car on to the city," he said. "This note is to be delivered to Mr. Jules Fortescue himself. Say you were instructed to deliver the note to him if you couldn't find me."

Craig settled himself back in the taxi-cab.

"We will keep up our search," he ordered, "by stopping for breakfast at the next town. No hurry."

The young creole dreaded facing his uncle. He knew that the blame of this wild escapade would be put on him. In a way, Craig felt responsible. It was he who had persuaded Andrew MacDonald against his will to go to the Kittens' Ball. It was in his care Jules Fortescue had sent Calla to the ball.

No one knew just what the relation was between the mulatto, Charlie Craven, and the proud old creole, Jules Fortescue. There were those who whispered that the bond was one of blood. Some averred that the old mulatto was a half-brother of the merchant banker—that they had the same father, while Charlie was the son of a quadroon slave.

There was no gainsaying the fact that, whatever the mysterious bond, old Charlie played a dual rôle; he was servant as well as confidant to the creole gentleman. He took orders and he gave orders. No one knew where his servility ended, where his authority began. Yet both were patent.

The countryman who brought Craig Levecque's runabout to a halt before the great banking establishment, the address of which Craig had given him, was met by the mulatto. Old Charlie offered to take the note in to his master. The stranger was insistent on seeing the banker in person. His instructions were to put the note into

no other hands. The mulatto disappeared to find out if his master could be seen.

As he entered the sumptuous office, the stenographer, finishing up the morning's dictation, closed her book and withdrew.

"Well, Charlie?" the old banker greeted the newcomer. "You look pretty ashy this morning. Algiers, eh, last night?"

The mulatto nodded.

"Big night," he said; "under the very eyes of the police. They saw nothing, heard nothing."

"The voodoo queen laid her spell, huh?"

The mulatto smiled.

"'Tis she and old Charlie Craven who fix the spell," he said, his beady black eyes narrowing. "We voodoo the crowd. The worship of the serpent grows."

The creole's eyes gleamed with interest.

"Get them in your power," he said. "The more people you can dominate the more power to us."

"There's a white man from the country asking to see you." The mulatto changed the subject. "He has a note that must be delivered to you alone. Better see him. I get it here"—tapping his forehead—"that he brings a surprise."

THE countryman delivered his note to Jules Fortescue, who received him alone in his private office. The stranger saw the great purple veins slowly rise in the forehead of the banker as he reached to strike a hand-bell on his desk with tremendous force. The mulatto reentered instantly. Fortescue handed the note to him to read.

Neither Fortescue nor the mulatto betrayed their emotions. First one and then the other questioned the stranger, who could tell them nothing further than that he had been paid to bring the car from Magnolia Point, a town fifty miles up the river, back to New Orleans. He did not know the name of the man for whom he had driven the car back or anything about him.

Convinced that the countryman knew nothing, Charlie Craven told him he could go, and almost pushed him through the door, which he slammed and quickly locked. He knew the meaning of those distending purple veins in the banker's forehead. Without a word, the mulatto poured the powerful stimulant his master needed to counteract the danger that menaced him when he allowed himself to become overexcited.

Charlie Craven's voice was that of authority. In half an hour Jules Fortescue was himself; the apoplectic stroke was averted. The mulatto poured another drink, more to his master's liking. When this had been drained, he delivered his warning:

"Think without thinking red. Plan; but let me do the work. Don't make a damn fool of yourself and let this get out."

Jules Fortescue reached for the note penciled in his granddaughter's handwriting.

Please tell my grandfather that I have gone with the man I love.

The note was enclosed in a cheap envelope addressed to Craig Levecque.

"Where is Craig?"

"He has not come in yet," the mulatto replied. "The countryman could not find him at his rooms. That is why he brought the note to you."

"Magnolia Point," the banker repeated to himself. "They left in the boat." He was in deep thought.

"You have an appointment for luncheon with Mr. Montross. He is coming here."

"I shall have to tell him the whole story."

"In the mean time?" Charlie Craven pointed his question.

"Have a note sent to the society editors of the newspapers," the banker directed, "saying Miss Calla Fortescue is out of town for a few days, visiting friends up the river. Have her trunks packed. Take them to MacDonald's plantation, Rainbow's End. You can reach it by boat."

Just then, Henry J. Montross was announced.

Montross was a self-made man. Born in an old box car in which his poverty-stricken parents kept a cheap eating-place for day laborers, he himself had begun at the very bottom. From a railroad section-hand at a dollar a day he had risen to be president of the system the cross-ties of which he had helped to lay. Some one had truthfully described him as a "human power-house." His phenomenal rise in the world was a trumph of mind over matter. He had scrupled at nothing that promised his advancement.

Jules Fortescue had been born to the purple. He came from aristocrats on both sides of his house. The family fortunes had varied with different generations, but the

family position had never been shaken. Great diplomatists, famous military leaders, friends of royalty, counsellors of kings had been his forebears. The French Revolution had turned his great-grandfather's fortunes to the New World, with other nobles fleeing from the Reign of Terror in France. All the family history was in the fine parchment of old Jules Fortescue's face. His eyes were subtle, his thin lips crafty; his nose, with all its fine delicacy, was hooked, his chin uncompromising in its determined cruelty. His long, slim hands, that had been beautiful in youth, were like eagle's talons in his old age.

Henry J. Montross suggested nothing so strongly as a massive bulldog with an iron jaw—one whose grip could be reckoned to hold on forever. Jules Fortescue, bent with age, that seemingly had only sharpened his mind, quickened his mental faculties as his physical powers had waned, suggested most of all some old cardinal of the Renaissance. He seemed a veritable embodiment of craft, subtlety, housed in a body pale as carved old ivory.

Jules Fortescue did not beat round the bush. He came directly to the point—as straight to the point as the railway magnate had done when he came to ask the old banker's permission to pay his suit to Calla Fortescue. At no time since the engagement had been announced had the millionaire the faintest illusion that the girl had accepted him for his personal charm. Indeed, she had seemed strangely indifferent to the whole business, though in no way averse to the marriage. Her grandfather had put the matter before her, its advantages, his wishes, before Montross proposed. Calla had acquiesced as calmly as she was accustomed to do to all her grandfather's instructions. Montross had felt, when he left the Fortescue mansion engaged to the old creole's granddaughter, just as he was accustomed to feel when he had successfully put through a deal that meant tremendous advancement to himself.

Jules Fortescue fitted his old-ivory fingers together, studying the man before him. Then he made his extraordinary announcement quite casually.

His granddaughter had eloped with a stranger she had met for the first time at the Kittens' Ball the night before. He wished to consult Mr. Montross about his plans for bringing his affianced wife back.

The railway magnate demurred.

"If she is married—" he began.

The old creole put up his trembling hand.

"She is not married in the eyes of the Catholic Church," he said. "My granddaughter shall not repeat the scandal her mother made by an elopement. She returns to my house. She shall be queen of the carnival. She has been selected for the honor, and I do not purpose that the tongue of gossip shall get hold of this escapade. As to her marriage with you, which has already been formally announced—" He waited for the other to finish the sentence.

"I am quite willing to overlook this piece of folly," Henry J. Montross said. "My dearest wish is to marry your granddaughter."

"Then we will set our little wits, yours and mine, to work," said Fortescue, "to bring the young person home and to give her back the birthright she has so recklessly flung away."

Montross was opening a leather case. He held up its contents for the banker's eye. It was a string of perfectly matched pearls.

"This was to be my engagement-gift to her," he said. "They tell me it was the favorite necklace of the czarina—poor lady!"

ANDREW and Calla bought their trousseau together, Andrew making more suggestions than his bride as to what she needed. The country store did not have much to offer. But she bought a flannel shirt-waist, a brown khaki skirt, brown corduroy breeches, and a coat that almost fitted her, high brown boots, much too large for her, and a cap. Andrew directed the storekeeper to add heavy underwear, a horn comb and other toilet necessities while his bride was in the back room of the store changing from her ballroom finery.

"We are going to the woods wild-turkey hunting," Andrew told her. "I'll pack our bag." The things he bought for himself went into the cheap paper suitcase, the only traveling-bag the store could offer. When the Swan came out, she was dressed in the brown corduroys. She handed him the paper parcel containing her ball-gown and wrap. Her jewels were wrapped in a piece of tissue-paper, which she tucked in one corner of their one valise.

"Now I'm ready," she announced.

Through the door a swan floated in—a swan, and yet a woman. She was all glittering white feathers; she had all the grace of the bird she represented.

They had breakfast on the *Nancy Lee*, a packet-boat that plies between Memphis and New Orleans, and a hasty bite at noon, before they left the boat at Friend's Point, where they took the train to Mound Bluff. At three o'clock they left the train there.

The quaintest-looking individual the girl had ever seen met them. He wore buckskin trousers and a flannel shirt. His shoes were moccasins, and a coonskin cap sat on top of his grizzled head.

"Thought you said over the 'phone," was his greeting to Macdonald, "that you was bringing a party with you."

"This is the party." Andrew indicated the girl. "My wife." Then, to her, "This is Buck Mellows." He had not yet called the girl by her name—if, indeed, he remembered it.

The woodsman led the way to a wagon to which was hitched a pair of sturdy mules. The wagon was loaded with a canoe, guns, hunting-equipment in general and supplies. Buck vaulted easily to the driver's seat.

"Reckon we can make it befo' dark," he observed.

Andrew lifted the girl to a seat in the rear of the wagon, and they started.

"Plenty of turkeys," Buck observed, taking a bite from a plug of tobacco. "The weather's been so dry and clear they don't seem to know it's Christmas. Been married long, Andy?"

"Not long," was Andrew's reply.

They jogged along in silence.

"Tired?" Andrew turned to the girl. She shook her head happily.

"The canoe will be easier," he said. They sat, mile after mile, with hardly a word to each other.

"Made a fine crop this year, I hear 'em say, Andy. Didn't you?" said Buck.

"A fine crop—yes," Andrew replied.

"Get a good price for it?"

"Yes."

"Paid out of debt yet?"

"Yes."

"That's good!" Buck touched up the off mule meditatively. "Out of debt and married!"

Andrew reached for his wife's hand. Their eyes turned to each other.

"That's fine!" Buck surveyed them approvingly.

"Buck is a very old friend," Andrew said. "About the best friend I have in the world."

"You bet!" Buck spat tobacco juice over the side of the wagon.

They turned into a forest, through which the mules seemed to know their way as well as the driver. They came out of the forest onto a river-bank. Buck pulled up the mules, and hitched them. Then he and Andrew began to unload the wagon. The canoe slipped easily into the water. The supplies were transferred to it.

"This is where we shake Buck," Andrew told the girl.

"When d'you want me to meet you here comin' home?" Buck asked.

"Two weeks from to-day." Andrew pushed off the boat. Buck watched him wistfully. It was the first wild-turkey hunt on which he had ever missed accompanying MacDonald.

"Good luck to you!" Buck waved his coonskin cap. "And to the lady!"

"Good-by, Buck!" She waved back. "We've had great luck so far."

ABOUT them mystery. And in them, and in their hearts, a greater mystery than that of the stream cutting a golden path through plain and forest, greater than the mystery of the deep woods and of the night. Love that had flamed up between them and fused them—made of them one flesh, one spirit, bound heart and soul to one another.

The endless movement of that first day, that had its end at last where the ground rose sharply from the stream to the wooded bluff above. The making of their first home—cleared ground, a tent, a trench about it, a fire that blazed as the pitch-pine sizzled in the mounting heat of blazing chips. Night, and long hours in the firelight—hours of a soundless speech in which each told the other much.

Morning and, though it be Christmas, a swift plunge for the Swan into an enchanted pool, and a breathless rush for the tent then—gray blanket hugged about her—lest he see her—even he! And then the woods, and the hunt, and the great turkey that Andrew shot, and the Christmas cheer to go with it, when he had shown her how to cook it—a Christmas dinner such as never before had even lovers eaten.

Time was not for them, and yet it passed and brought, a day too soon by any reckoning and very centuries by theirs, Buck

Mellows. Yet they had snatched one night to talk from all their silence, just the night before he came. And what a piece of folly gave it rise—that talk! Why, just that he had lost the memory of her name!

"I've almost forgotten it myself," she said, "and the person I used to be."

"But what was it they called you?" he persisted. "Not Lily, was it?"

"I suppose, if my grandfather had given me a middle name, it would have been Lily." She laughed. "My grandfather had me christened 'Calla.' I don't know why. He adopted me legally and gave me his name, Fortescue."

"Oh, yes; I remember now—Calla Fortescue—that's what Levecque asked me"—he smiled at the remembrance—"'Who introduced you to Calla Fortescue?'"

"My mother's name was Leda," the girl said. "My father's name was La Vitte. So you see I should have been called Leda—Leda La Vitte." A shadow passed over her face.

She told him all she knew of her mother. It was not much. Only what old Minette, the laundress, had told her.

Her mother was sixteen, and the only child of Jules Fortescue, whose wife was dead. One day, her mother coming from mass at the old St. Louis Cathedral, met a stranger. They looked into each other's eyes and loved. He came home with her. They stood at the courtyard gate all the afternoon, talking, forgetful of time. Her father returned and angrily ordered the stranger away, forbidding him ever to speak to his daughter again, and sent the girl to her room.

That night, the stranger climbed the great old wistaria vine to her window. And together they came down-stairs to leave by the front door. The servants fell on their knees before the stranger, pleading with him not to take the girl in her father's absence.

But she had clung to him, as eager to go with him as he was to have her go. And they never saw her again. Old Minette had told her how Charlie Craven had been sent, ostensibly to be her servant in her new home, but really to kill at the first opportunity the man she had married. Minette had told her how old Charlie had used a voodoo poison to kill her father. Shortly after, her mother had died—at her birth. Minette had been sent with old Charlie to fetch the baby from the Gulf island back to Jules Fortescue's home in New Orleans. And all the servants who remembered her mother had been sent away—all except Minette, whom her grandfather thought he could trust.

But Minette had told her, because Minette had loved her mother.

"My father followed the sea. Old Minette says the fisherman's wife on the island where I was born told her my father was a pirate."

So ended Swan's story.

IT WAS barely daybreak when Buck Mellows beached his canoe and came up the river-bank. Andrew went to meet him.

"Any news from Rainbow's End?" was his greeting to the woodsman. Buck had heard nothing from the plantation further than that it was raining in that direction.

"Good-mornin', young lady!" Buck warmed his hands nonchalantly at the fire, ignoring Andrew. "Got acclimated to the woods, I see."

He surveyed the young woman approvingly. Two weeks in the woods had worked wonders for her. Her pallor had been replaced by sunburn. She was now almost a nut-brown maid.

She poured Buck a cup of coffee.

"Yes'm; I'll take it straight." He reached for it. "No milk or sugar for me." He drank it slowly, not waiting for the other two to be served. "She does kinda fit in with the woods—now, don't she, Andy?"

Buck was perfectly at ease. These two were in his drawing-room, the forest, and he felt himself the host as he surveyed the girl. Swan laughed and thanked him.

"It's that hair of her'n," the woodsman continued. "It's like hickory leaves jes' after the first frost teches 'em, when they are yaller and brown and full of chestnut lights—and sunsetty."

"Glad my hair harmonizes with the woods, Buck. Won't you have something else?"

He shook his head.

"A cup of coffee and a chaw are all the breakfast I ever eat, young lady." He produced a plug of tobacco and bit his breakfast from it. "Yes; you've picked up considerable, young lady." He went back to his survey of the girl. "Fact is, you're as pink as a wild crab-apple tree in bloom."

"What brought you, Buck?" Andrew interrupted. "The time isn't up until tomorrow—and you were to meet us on the other side of the river. You had some reason——"

Not so much reason, after all. It had been raining hard; the roads were bad, and —out it came. Some question of a stranger, who might be white, or a very light mulatto, and had been asking some questions—wanting to know what hunters were in the woods. Andrew laughed; Swan asked more questions.

"I'm thinking of old Charlie Craven," she said. "You didn't hear his name, Buck?" Buck shook his head. "I'm afraid of him." Swan shivered. "Minette says he knows everything—through voodoo."

Andrew laughed mockingly.

"Voodoo! Why, child, even the niggers don't take any stock in voodoo any more!"

"Oh, but they do, my Andy! It's secret —oh, they don't tell! But they have poisons and tricks—and the old, horrid rites."

"They can't hurt us!" His arm was close about her. And his strength reached out to her and crushed her fears.

"There'll be a car meet you at Cottonville," said the old woodsman. "I 'phoned to have them send word to Rainbow's End. Them swamp roads is pretty rough for a lady."

A SMALL Ford car, literally encrusted in mud, panting like a spent dog, wheezed up to the Cottonville station as a train rolled in. Swan followed her husband through the crowd of negroes collected to see who got off and who got on. It was early dusk.

The sea of upturned black faces, the flashy clothes of a new type of darky, the Delta negro, gave the girl a curious feeling that she was seeing a strange race in a foreign land. These creatures in their yellow satins and red calicoes, grass-green velvets and white organdies, bedecked in cheap jewelry and gaudy head-dresses, all in holiday mood, unrestrained in their banter, impressed MacDonald's young wife as being theatrically unreal.

A band struck up; a fresh tidal wave of the semisavages in festal array poured toward the Jim Crow coach. Then she saw the occasion of the demonstration. A very large matronly black bride in white satin, orange-blossoms and veil, bursting white gloves with which she held up a long train that revealed bright-tan shoes, clung to the arm of a wizened little negro man dressed soberly in black, with a brown derby on one side of his head. The couple was evidently entraining for a honeymoon.

"Yonder's Marse Andrew!" The black bride swung her little groom round and faced MacDonald and Swan. "Howdy Marse Andrew? Me and Silas 'cided to git married."

"Sally deviled me so I jes' had to marry her, suh," Silas explained. "We are steppin' off fer a few days' weddin'-tower."

"All aboard!" the conductor called.

"Your train's leaving you." Andrew dismissed them. Then, as a troop of little negroes surrounded the bridal couple, "You aren't taking the children with you?"

"Yessuh," Sally grinned. "Seem lak me an' dey paw cudn't go off on a honeymoon 'thout de chillun."

Swan watched the brood swarm in the train with fascinated eyes.

"What a funny family!" she laughed. "Whose children are those little negroes?"

"Theirs," Andrew replied dryly.

Out of the crowd emerged a squat little man, even blacker than his companions. He touched his cap.

"I brung de car, boss," he said, leading the way toward the Ford. He saw Andrew take Swan's arm. "Dee's a burst heah"—the little negro indicated the hotel omnibus —"ef de young lady is gwine round town somewheres. Ouah car ain't hardly fitten for her to ride in."

"This young lady, Ed," Andrew said, "is not stopping in town. She is going home with us."

"Suh! I didn't know, Marse Andy, you had any sisters or lady kin."

"I haven't," Andrew said. "This young lady is my wife." Then, turning to her: "Swan, this is Ed Pecan, one of my most trusted negroes. And, Ed, this is your mistress."

"Howdy, Miss Swan?" The black man's quick ear had caught the name by which his master addressed his wife. "Miss Swan" would be the plantation's "entitle" for the newcomer. "Glad to see you, miss." Then, to Andrew, "You gwine stop in town for anything, Marse Andy?"

"No." Andrew helped his companion into the back seat of the car, tucked a mud-encrusted lap-robe round her, then crawled in himself. "Go on to Rainbow's End."

Rough and hard was the going; Ed Pecan had his doubts—and voiced them freely—about the car. Andrew laughed at him; Swan listened only to him. Yet, after twelve miles, Ed's fears were justified. For, after trying to emulate a submarine, the car gave up. A wheel went flying; the engine died. And Swan and Andrew had to wait while Ed went on for mules. When they came, he mounted one, and Swan rode behind him, clinging to him.

Negroes had come, greeting "Miss Swan." Already they knew her name. So they came home, to more negroes and a pair of bird-dogs that came, vociferous in their delight—Aladdin and Dolly Varden, Andrew said. They welcomed Swan as well as Andrew, understood, it seemed, that she was to be their mistress.

Ed Pecan followed with their luggage.

"Dee some trunks on de front gal'ry, Marse Andy," he said. "Dee come on last week's from Nuaw 'Leen's boat."

He went ahead and struck a match. On the long, low veranda were several trunks.

"They are mine!" Swan exclaimed, incredulous; then, turning to her husband, "He had them sent."

"Which is a sign," Andrew said, "that you are forgiven."

The girl shook her head.

"I'm not so sure about that. My grandfather is tricky as a fox."

"I'd lak to speak wid you privately, suh!" Ed said in an aside to the cotton-planter. "I'll wait out here till you takes Miss Swan in."

Andrew opened a door into a vast, lofty room, half lighted with the glow from a dying fire in a cavernous fireplace. He threw a pine-knot on the coals, and in the flood of light that succeeded, the girl saw a young man, hardly more than a boy, either dead or in a profound sleep on the brilliant-red sheepskin rug before the fire. His face was ashen white, even in the rosy light of the pine blaze; his curly brown hair clung in damp tendrils about his forehead. Andrew pushed him savagely with his foot.

"Jimmy," he commanded, "get up from here!" The youth turned over, opened his bloodshot eyes and went back to sleep. Ed advanced from the doorway apologetically.

"I didn't know Mistah Weed wuz in heah," the little negro said. "Da's one thing I wanter speak to you about. Dee been gwine-ons heah."

"Where did he get anything to drink?" Andrew was still trying to rouse the offender. "Call Milly."

Ed disappeared.

"This is Jimmy Weed, my overseer," Andrew told Swan. "His weakness is liquor. I'm sorry for you to see him like this."

She had taken off her cap and coat.

"Let me help with him."

"Milly's drunk, too, suh!" Ed reported, *sotto voce*, a few minutes later. "I've called some of de boys workin' wid de mules ter help me."

"What's the matter with the mules?" Andrew asked anxiously.

"Da's what I wanted to see you about, suh," Ed replied. "There's a few mules sick. Jes a half-dozen or so in de uppah lot. Mistah Weed wuz workin' wid 'em when I lef' dis mawnin'. De boys says it wuz a stranger what come in de boat dat brung de liquor. He been prowlin' round de house all day. He give Mistah Weed whatever he's had to drink. He must have give Milly some, too. Dee ain't de fust sign of suppah in de kitchen."

The negroes had arrived by then. Andrew told them to take Weed to his small office, which stood some distance from the house. Ed asked instructions about the mules.

THEORETICALLY, a Mississippi mule is the Rock of Gibraltar in the animal kingdom, the original they-shall-not-pass, first defense of every plantation stronghold, with sinews of steel, a constitution of iron and an adequate supply of chain lightning for every emergency in his heels. In reality, a mule has no more stamina than Jonah's gourd, no sturdier constitution than a butterfly. He has no real code of living, and no compunction whatever about dying any day the wind does not blow to suit his convenience, no matter how vital his presence may be to the crop.

A mule has none of the ethics of a thoroughbred to hold him to a job undertaken. Properly looked after, nursed, sheltered, humored, petted and cozened, he may be

kept alive and at his work year after year, just as the negro who plows him may be held with judicious management. But once let a mule get a breath of a plague, he sucks it to his soul as a bee sucks honey. The more mysterious the malady the more eager is he to sniff its symptoms, to develop them with new and strange complications.

There must be among these strange beasts some faith in a future state of bliss, a paradise in which, maybe, mules plow negroes instead of being plowed. If this were not so, every mule would not be such a fatalist or court death so assiduously. The spread of wild-fire is a mild term to describe the rapidity with which one mule can infect his confrères for miles around. No doubt the afflicted one has visions of the drove arriving as a happy unit in the mule paradise.

No other theory accounts for the heavy mule mortality. When one mule coughs behind his hand and says he does not feel so well to-day, all the human intelligence on a plantation flies, as a fire department does to a burning building, to his rescue. That mule must be wooed back to life, won from death, or every mule on the place will be calling for a doctor or waiting on the undertaker to-morrow.

Andrew sent Ed Pecan, loaded with bottles and instructions of what to do next, back to the upper stable-lot. Then he turned to his young wife. He had as yet told her nothing about conditions on the plantation; it would be time enough to tell her once they were there. Now he asked himself what he must do with her.

The drizzle had turned back to a soggy rain that beat on the tin roof; a cold wind had risen. The far lot was no place for a girl. The only shelter there was the stable in which the negroes were working on the sick mules. There would probably not even be a dry spot where she could stand if he took her with him. On the other hand, he knew the perils of leaving her alone. In ninety-nine cases she would be safe. It was the hundredth he feared. Drink and drugs are the keys that unleash the brute in the black man. Jimmy Weed, unconscious, and Milly, drunk in her cabin, pointed to drink being on the place.

"What is it that troubles you?" Swan lifted her hands to his shoulders, searching his eyes. "I must know, my Andy."

Briefly he told her what the mules represented, next year's cotton crop and that on this crop depended everything, all the things for which he had fought so long—freedom. And freedom meant to him only one thing—to be out of debt, to stay out of debt, to owe no man anything. A half-dozen of his mules were sick; he could not afford to have anything happen to them.

"You must go to them yourself," she said. "If I can help, take me with you. If not, I'll stay here."

"There is not even the cook to keep you company," he said.

"I am not afraid to stay alone. Let me have the dogs and a revolver. I can shoot, you know."

Ed Pecan knocked at the door. He had to report that one of the mules was growing rapidly worse.

"You better come, Marse Andy," he said. "I ain't never seed mules sick lak dese is now."

Andrew was changing his wet, muddy shoes for high boots. A cloud of dust rose from the latter as the planter knocked them out; he sneezed.

Swan kissed him good-by gaily. He waited outside until he heard her lock and bolt the door. He heard a shade fly up and whir round and round. Then he plunged into the rain and darkness toward the stable-lot, half a mile from the house.

THE plantation lay in Stygian darkness, blackness unrelieved by even a star. The clouds hung heavy and low, but a wind was rising. In the stable-lot, flickering pine torchlights cast uncertain illumination in the improvised hospital under the stable-shed in which Andrew worked with his sick mules. The cotton-planter, with his shirt-sleeves rolled up to his shoulders, grimly led the round-up to turn the stampede back earthward. Most of the negro men on the plantation worked with him. Some were drenching the mules; others fed the fires kept smoldering with tar and old gunny-sacks, which seemed to relieve the oppressed breathing of the poor beasts. Andrew poured powerful stimulants down this rebellious throat and that one; unmistakably the animals were being relieved.

"Ole Beck's axin' fer fodder," one negro announced.

"She's better," Andrew encouraged.

"Keep her head over the smoke and don't give her any feed yet. Put a blanket there on old Bill"—to another darky. "And get this down his throat."

"We need mo' coal-oil, boss," Ed Pecan announced. "I think we could save by my gittin' de big torchlight frum de boat-house when I gits de oil."

Ed, and Pete, a younger negro, started off to get the torch and the oil from the boat-house, where the kerosene was stored.

"You know where the key of the boat-house is?" Andrew asked Ed.

The negro nodded.

"Yes, suh; hangin' on de front gal'ry of de big house."

"Be careful, Ed," the planter warned, "not to make any noise."

"Sholy, suh. I wouldn't disturb Miss Swan," the little black giant assured him.

"If she should hear you and call," Andrew said, "tell her I'll soon be there."

"We gwine pull 'em all through, boss," one of the negroes announced. The mules were not past the danger-point, but they were certainly better.

DOWN by the boat-house, Ed Pecan and Pete were busy. They had found the torch and filled it; Ed was pumping oil into a can. And suddenly the furious barking of dogs rang out in the stillness.

"See what dat is!" Ed Pecan pushed the pump back into the blue hogshead. "I thought dem dogs was in de big house wid Mis' Swan."

The boy ran toward the wharf, whence came the barking. A shot sounded. Ed ran after Pete who was crying for help now, and for Marse Andy. Ed shouted as he ran. And now, on the wharf, he saw the dogs attacking some one heavily burdened. Horror-filled, Ed saw that the stranger carried a woman slung about his shoulder—Miss Swan!

Then Ed recognized him for the mulatto who had brought the trunks, who had been hanging round the plantation. One dog was limping; the shot accounted for that. Even as Ed ran, he saw Pete close in, saw the pistol fall from the mulatto's hand. Pete reached for it. But the mulatto, free for the moment, dropped the girl—into the river, it seemed. Actually, though, it was into a motor-boat that had been waiting.

It was Pete he flung into the river a moment later. And before Ed Pecan could reach him, he was in the boat and had started it. It was off, leaving a wake of white foam as it sped on, with Aladdin swimming desperately after.

"He's got Miss Swan in de bottom of dat boat!"

Pete crawled up, choking and gasping, to the wharf. But Ed Pecan had acted already. He had launched a skiff and set out just as Andrew came tearing down and leaped into the boat with him.

"Follow along the bank with the torch!" cried Andrew. Pete had remembered that and lighted it.

But oars were useless against a motor. Only the mulatto's unfamiliarity with the stream and its shifting bars and currents could check him.

And then, suddenly, Andrew heard something that was sweeter in his ears than any music they had ever heard—a missing beat in the roar of the engine ahead of them, a coughing and a sputtering.

"Faster!" he cried. "He's in trouble!"

He was holding a double-barreled shotgun, waiting. He dared not risk a shot at first—not while any other hope remained. A bullet might strike Swan, might glance from the boat, should it miss old Charlie Craven—for he never doubted now that it was Craven in the motor-boat. He could not see his wife.

Now the skiff was gaining, for the motor was almost dead. In the light from the shore he could see the mulatto working desperately. And suddenly his efforts were rewarded. The motor roared out again; the boat leaped forward. And Andrew took his chance and fired.

There was a shout from Ed Pecan.

"You got him, boss!" he cried. "Done fell—and dat boat's headed straight for the sand-bar!"

Now, in the light flung once more on the motor-boat, Andrew could see a figure hunched over the wheel. The boat reeled in the stream; a minute later it was fast in the sand.

When the skiff drew up beside the motor-boat stuck tight in the sand, its engine still throbbing irregularly, Aladdin was tugging at the muffler which enveloped Swan's head and face. Andrew jerked it off, threw the cloth, still reeking with chloroform, overboard and reached for her heart. It beat

strong and sound, though she was insensible.

"Thank God!" Andrew MacDonald held her in his arms to examine her face, while the bird-dog licked her limp hands and barked his joy.

Swan was lifted into the skiff. A groan from the mulatto over the wheel caused Ed to turn back to him.

"He ain't dead, suh," Ed announced. "We mout as well finish him up, hadn't we, boss?" The boat-load of black men were ready at the word from their master to kill this half-breed with no more mercy than they would have shown to a rattlesnake.

"Take him across to Pete's cabin," Andrew directed. "Send two of the boys to Cottonville for a doctor for my wife—and have them report this to the sheriff. He is not to be touched except by law."

SWAN'S pulse was strong, but there seemed no waking her. All night they walked her up and down the long veranda, Ed holding one arm, his master the other. Ammonia and coffee and cold water and fresh air finally roused her. She protested sleepily that she was tired of walking. But at Andrew's stern command she kept on. Gradually she came to her senses and Andrew told her what had happened. She did not seem surprised.

"Where is old Charlie Craven now?" she asked. Andrew told her.

A repentant, shamedfaced Milly was shaking the ashes out of the stove in the kitchen for breakfast. Pete came up the walk to announce that Dr. Winters was coming in his car, and that Marse Dick Steel, the deputy sheriff, would be on hand by sunup. Puffing little Dr. Winters was met at the gate by Andrew, who recounted to him the events of the night, asking him to have a look at his wife.

Milly announced breakfast.

The little doctor had known Andrew all his life. He was surprised at the cotton-planter's request to "have a look at my wife." His astonishment was greater when the girl joined them. She was fresh and glowing from a cold tub. She showed none of the effects of the terrible experience through which she had passed. She had changed into the costume she wore at the ball. It was the only change she had. Her corduroys were soaking wet, caked with mud from the journey, and the flannel shirt she had worn the night before still reeked of chloroform. The heavy walking-shoes had been replaced by her white-satin dancing-slippers.

Dr. Winters' quick eye took in the fantastic evening gown, the extraordinary wrap of white feathers. He wiped his glasses and peered at the stranger—from the toe of her slippers to the crown of her glowing red head. Andrew presented his bewildered old friend to Swan. She held out her hand with the charming simplicity of a child.

"Rather an unusual costume for breakfast, isn't it, Dr. Winters?" she asked. "But these are my only other clothes for the present. My trunks are here, but I have no keys to unlock them."

Old Milly entered with a plate of hot biscuit.

" 'Scuse me, miss," she said to the apparition sitting at the head of the table; "dat yaller man brung yoh trunks las' week on de Nuaw 'Leens boat. He say he wuz sont wid 'em. He got de keys waitin' ter give 'em ter you."

"Thank you," said Swan.

Andrew asked Dr. Winters if he thought Swan was all right. The little physician gravely tested her heart, felt her pulse.

"I've never seen so much vitality," he said, "such health. Your wife's got a marvelous store of reserve strength to draw on."

Then he went off to have a look at old Charlie Craven. The physician's verdict was that the mulatto could not live through the day.

A dying person attracts negroes as molasses draws flies. The story of the night had spread all over the plantation, gaining in craftiness and brutality with each narrator. The news of the cotton-planter's marriage was in itself a seven days' wonder.

The mulatto lay dying in Peter's cabin. The doctor had pronounced his doom. The deputy sheriff was even now waiting to see what turn events would take.

Old Charlie Craven roused himself out of his dying lethargy at noon. He fumbled for the bag about his neck and swallowed his last pills of cocaine.

He announced that his end was near and that he wanted to speak to all the negroes on the plantation before he died. Most of them were loafing near the cabin, perched

on the fence and stumps of trees like so many buzzards.

Ed Pecan and Pete were at the stables with the convalescing mules. Andrew had taken the deputy sheriff and the little physician to the stable-lot to get their opinion on the mysterious malady that had struck his mules so suddenly.

DEEP down in every negro, carefully hidden from the white man, hardly even acknowledged to himself, lurks the fear of defiance to the jungle traditions of his forefathers.

Voodooism is commonly supposed to have been wiped out as thoroughly as the old yellow-fever menace years ago in the far South. So secret is the organization, so guarded are its rites that the existence of the voodoo cult in Algiers remains unsuspected under the very nose of the law. White inhabitants of the suburb of New Orleans would laugh at the preposterous statement that the queen of the voodoos, the high priestess of this ancient order, is a citizen of their town. Yet less than an hour's walk, or, rather, crawl, from the ferry, in the heart of an unsuspected marsh, is the voodoo sacrificial pile, near which the sacred snake is kept a pampered prisoner.

Old Charlie Craven held a high position in voodoo circles. As master magician in the sinister organization, he it was on festival occasions who beat the big drum, carefully muffled, that carried the jungle-call of the *bamboula* which African blood, no matter how diluted, is powerless to resist.

Pete's old banjo hung on the wall. The mulatto motioned for it as he gave his orders that all the negroes be sent for to hear his dying message. Already the cocaine had lifted him beyond pain and weakness. Doubly stimulated by the enormous amoun. he had taken, he roused himself for his final deviltry.

Softly he began to beat the weird measure of the *bamboula* on the drum of the banjo; over and over its insistent, savage call resounded, growing louder and louder. The spell of the serpent was being laid. The negroes sped to answer the summons. The crowd about the cabin grew. Still the hypnotic drum-beats kept on, steadily increasing in volume and dominant power.

The negroes were swaying to its rhythm, moaning and groaning, wailing like lost souls, some chattering with fear, others beating time to the demon measure that hypnotized them. Atavistic memories stirred their blood. They followed the path the *bamboula* made—straight back to the beginnings of the black race, to the jungles of Africa. Once more they were savages with a tribal soul, appeasing with this self-same devil-dance the powers of evil whose protection they invoked.

MacDonald, Steel and Dr. Winters were returning from the stable-lot. Pete's cabin lay just ahead.

"Are they preaching his funeral already?" Dr. Winters asked, as Andrew put up his hand for silence. A stentorian voice was lifted in the cabin, which was set in a sea of black faces. The three white men, approaching from the rear, could see into the cabin through a window, which was open for the mulatto to get air. The small room was packed to suffocation with negroes.

The old mulatto was propped up against the dirty sacks that served Pete for pillows. His blue shirt, blood-stained and powder-blackened, was torn away from his throat, which gleamed almost as pale as a white man's.

"I'm a blue-gummed nigger," old Charlie Craven proclaimed. "De sperrits of our black fathers and mothers speaks through me. I calls through de voodoo dat made us kings and princes in Africa before we wuz sold into slavery. I calls you," he droned, higher and higher. "United we stand," he intoned; "divided we falls. Will you come? Will you come?"

Moans and groans from the negroes answered him.

He began a low, monotonous singsong that gradually grew louder, accompanying his drum-beats. The negroes huddled closer together. As individual units, they no longer functioned. Old Charlie Craven felt his strength rising as their will and strength ebbed. They were hypnotized. At a word, they would have thrown themselves as a body into the river.

MacDonald made it a rule never to interfere with the religious or social life of his negroes as long as they kept within the law. Dick Steel, the deputy sheriff, wished to find out, if possible, what had incited the mulatto the night before. The doctor's interest was pathological.

The three white men outside the window

had long since fallen into silence. Each had heard vaguely of the phenomenon they now beheld, as they had heard of mango trees growing from a fakir's basket, but, until now, not one of them had come within the radius of such a performance.

THE mulatto's eyes swept over the huddled forms, moaning and groaning, swaying as wind bends willow branches. He lifted his yellow hands as if to pronounce the devil's benediction.

"I lay de curse of de voodoo on dis plantation." He intoned the incantation. "If you stay here to make a crop, you will die befo' de crop is got in. Every one of you present what remains—dies." Wails from the terrified negroes answered him. He went on: "I lay de voodoo curse on de mules. They will sicken and die. I lay de voodoo curse on de hogs. Cholera shall take dem. I lay de voodoo curse on de crops. Cotton shall be eat by boll-weevils, and no corn shall stan'——"

His voice sank lower. The cabin seemed to rock as the negroes swayed back and forth. The mulatto felt the access of power. It fed him with life, sweet and strong. He no longer needed the pillows to support him; the banjo, having accomplished his will, was cast aside.

"Old Charlie Craven, where are the keys to my trunks?"

Framed in the doorway stood Calla. She stepped inside the door in the midst of the kneeling, hypnotized negroes, huddled like frightened sheep, packed like sardines in the cabin.

The mulatto did not reply. It was as if he had not heard her words. He lifted his grizzled head as proudly as she carried hers and surveyed her. The girl's glowing red hair seemed to burn a more vivid crimson. Sleep had brought high color to her cheeks and lips. She was dressed in the fantastic swan costume. Close up about her throat clung the white feathers of her wrap.

The powers of Darkness faced the powers of Light. And Darkness seemed for the moment ascendent. The bird-dogs at Swan's heels fell back, whining with terror, tails between their legs. Old Charlie Craven sensed it. He knew there could be no help for her from the three men outside the window. Andrew MacDonald lunged forward as if to reach his wife. He fell prone against the window, his muscles too limp to do his bidding.

The girl stood erect, facing the baleful eyes of the old mulatto. His arm was uplifted. At last he spoke.

"I have laid de curse of de voodoo on dis plantation," he chanted. "Cursed are all of my race who stay here wid de curse of death. Cursed are de mules; they shall die! Cursed are de crops; there shall be none to gather! Cursed are de hogs, cursed de cattle——"

The bird-dogs shivered and moaned and crept nearer the girl.

"I have already laid dese curses." Charlie Craven's voice was that of a savage priest, full-toned, far-reaching, terrifying. "And now I lay de most tur'ble curse of all de voodoo——"

"Stop!" The girl strode across the prostrate negroes to get to the bed. She struck down his uplifted arm. "Don't you dare——"

"Dare!" old Charlie Craven hissed up at her. "Dare! Who's to stop me!" His laughter was that of Lucifer half-way to hell.

Andrew MacDonald, at the window, made a mighty effort to move, but he could not. The little physician, round-eyed and staring, supported him on one side, Dick Steel on the other. The drama before them seemed set in an ether into which they were powerless to enter. Neither could they lift a voice to penetrate the nightmare that held the cabin and its stupefied inmates.

Only the girl and the old mulatto seemed vividly alive. It was as if their disembodied spirits rushed to combat. What seemed to be human beings were as if they were not—immaterial vapor whose physical likeness had vanished, leaving only two mentalities, opposite as the poles, different as day is from night, each confident in its strength to overcome the other.

The girl's eyes flashed as if strong sunlight streamed through them; the mulatto's eyes were coals of a low-burning fire.

"What I have did," old Charlie Craven croaked, "I kin do again. Befo' you was born, your mother thought she could get away as you thought you could get away. Ha! You t'ink you stop voodoo curse on——"

"Don't say it!" She stood over him, an avenging goddess. "Don't you dare say it!"

The mulatto turned his face toward the window, where Andrew MacDonald struggled for strength to speak or to move. He could only hear—and as if from a far distance. Charlie Craven triumphed.

"Who are you?" The mulatto's voice rose higher as he turned back to the girl. "Who are you to say old Charlie Craven, voodoo magician, priest, shall not lay de voodoo curse on—" He lifted his hand to point to MacDonald. Again the girl struck it down savagely.

"Who am I?" She repeated his words with superb scorn. "You know who I am, you yellow dog! I am the daughter of my father, Jean La Vitte, the pirate!"

It was as if a new entity, some terrible presence he dreaded, had taken possession of her. The mulatto huddled back in the pillows, shivering. His eyes were wide and staring. The girl's forefinger was pointed like a pistol at his head.

"My father's spirit is with me now." The girl spoke in new terrifying tones. "My father, Jean La Vitte, is with me now, defying you, who betrayed him, murdered him with your voodoo poisons." The mulatto shook as with an ague. "Just outside of life"—the terrible announcement translated itself to his understanding—"he waits for you—my father, the pirate!"

The mulatto huddled in a pitiful heap, picking at the bed-covers.

"My father, Jean La Vitte, the pirate," the girl repeated, holding him with her blazing eyes, "who in life cut out the tongues of his enemies, who put out with red-hot pokers the eyes of those who wronged him before he swung them up by their thumbs to wait for death——"

Vainly the mulatto beat the air, trying to speak, to remember a Christian prayer, to make the sign of the cross. He tried to moisten his purple lips with a tongue dried from horror.

"My father, the pirate, waits for you—there!" She pointed to the darkness fast settling outside. She leaned nearer the terror-stricken negro. "You dare lay a curse on the man I love, old Charlie Craven! You dare—with my father, here, waiting, unseen, to settle old scores with you! What are all your voodoo devils compared to my father, the pirate?"

There was a terrible death-rattle in the throat of the mulatto. Now his hands picked the covers; now they were lifted piteously for mercy. His eyes could not leave the girl's face. The ague shook him again.

She descended from the heights of melodrama to the commonplaces of every-day speech with bewildering swiftness.

"My keys? Where are the keys of my trunks, old Charlie Craven?"

Feebly the yellow claws dived under the rags that covered him and would have surrendered the bunch of keys. It fell to the floor.

A sound as if he struggled with an unseen hand at his throat—then a wild shriek. Old Charlie Craven fell back, dead.

At the same instant, Andrew MacDonald, at the window, dropped across the sill. To all appearances, he, too, was dead.

DR. WINTERS stayed; he could not, as he had planned, go back to Cottonville that night. Andrew's illness baffled him. It was a fever, mysterious and sinister, and, he felt, too likely to prove just as fatal. He had little medicine; he needed ice. That was on the sixth day of the fever; it had to be checked.

But Swan, going out to send a negro to town for what the doctor needed, found Jimmy Weed in distress. There were no negroes. They had gone—scared away by old Charlie Craven's curses. Even Milly had gone; Weed had been doing the cooking. Ed Pecan and Pete remained; the honeymooners and their children might return. And the mules were dying like flies! Five days had passed—and Weed, as long as he could, had kept the bad news from her.

"You don't—you can't believe old Charlie Craven had anything to do with this!" Swan cried out in angry protest. But then she remembered something. "Old Charlie Craven—he was around!" she said. "He has poisoned the mules. And Andy—I remember he sneezed that night when he put on his boots. If Charlie Craven had put poison in them!"

"That's what I'm afraid of," Weed mumbled. "And the liquor——"

Shame overcame him at the memory of his own dereliction.

"Won't the negroes come back? They're badly needed."

"We'll have no crop next year without them—and the mules. We've always held

them well before this. They loved MacDonald."

But Dr. Winters soon restored some cheer. He could take his own car and go to Cottonville and back. Sally and Silas, the bride and bridegroom, returned; they had not seen Charlie, and so had no fear of his curses. Sally took Milly's place. And Weed and Swan had directions for the care of Andrew and the use of quinine and morphine.

And then Weed, staggered by the magnitude of the disaster, felt that he must find forgetfulness if he was to go on. He craved liquor; the passion for it ran through his veins.

He knew that on a plantation about five miles away was a gang of lawless negroes suspected of making an illicit liquor, known as "gosh," a by-product of sugar-cane after the molasses-grinding, resembling rum, which, mixed with ginger ale, formed a terrible combination. The overseer put the direct question to Silas, who was heaping the fire-wood he had cut on the back gallery.

Silas scratched his woolly head. Liquor was his own weakness, but he did not dare touch it since Marse Andy had forbidden it. Besides, he was afraid of Sally.

But Weed overcame fears and scruples alike, and Silas found what he sought nearer than he expected—in a shanty-boat a short distance up the river. It was on the shanty-boat that he heard for the first time of the mulatto's dying curse. The vendor of the illicit liquor adduced as evidence of the mulatto's being a true voodoo the swift destruction that had struck the plantation. The mules were nearly all dead; MacDonald, the report was, was dying. It was only a question of time when every living creature on Rainbow's End would die. The mulatto had laid the curse.

Silas sped back to the plantation, delivered the jug to Weed, refusing to accept even a small drink for himself. He went straight to tell his news to Sally.

"What you say we gwine ter do dis time er night," Sally demanded. "How we gwine git ouah things moved frum de cabin ternight?"

"We gwine leave evahthing," said Silas. "We gwine flee wid jes de chillum, lak de Israelites fled when de plagues wuz put upon Egypt."

Sally closed the kitchen door softly. She cast a backward glance at the house in which the young wife sat alone by the bedside of her husband. Sally hated to leave Miss Swan like this, but life was sweet. Silas warned her again that to linger meant that he and she and the children would die overnight as the mules were dying.

Jimmy Weed, in his cabin office, was fast losing all sense of his own identity. He was half drunk and still drinking the terrible concoction that would bring him the forgetfulness he craved.

The rain settled to a steady downpour. Half-way to Cottonville, stuck in a morass of mud that held the car in its slimy, mucilaginous embrace, Dr. Winters was straining his engine.

The wheels of the little car whirled as futilely as wheels in a squirrel-cage. He honked for help, but he was in a lonely stretch of cypress swamp. He crawled out and fashioned a mattress of branches to put under the wheels. The engine throbbed confidently; the car moved forward, then settled back. The engine was dead. It was then Dr. Winters discovered there was no gasoline in the tank.

The rain increased in violence. The short Southern twilight faded into blackness. He was still ten miles from Cottonville, and he had given his word to Andrew MacDonald's young wife to return to Rainbow's End before nightfall.

WHEN supper was not announced and it was quite dark, Swan left the sick-room to ask Sally to hurry the evening meal, for she was ravenously hungry. She found food on the dining-room table as if placed there hurriedly. The room was lighted by a solitary candle, burned almost down to its socket.

Swan passed on to the kitchen. It was dark and empty. The coals in the range gleamed red through the grating. Sally had disappeared.

Swan sat down to the table and ate the unappetizing cold food—bacon soaked in a gravy that had congealed, biscuit hard as bricks, a dish of hominy that still held a little warmth, and lukewarm coffee. It tasted like ambrosia to the hungry girl. Dolly Varden sat on one side of her chair, Aladdin on the other. She fed them bits from the plate as she ate, and talked to them.

Darkness had fallen like a black-velvet

drop. In the vast blackness and silence, the deserted plantation seemed to stretch to the ends of the world. Swan stopped on the back gallery, arrested by the stillness. The great old cedar tree beyond the graveyard seemed almost a presence. In the blackness that blotted out everything else, it towered like a friendly giant sentinel over the place. No far-off light gleamed in any direction; there was no sound—only the labored breathing of the man she loved in the room beyond.

Swan did not suspect the gravity of Andrew's condition; the thought that he might die had not once occurred to her. All day, since Winter had gone, she had administered the hypodermics alone. The last had been given some time ago. It was time for another, but there was no more. Dr. Winters would be returning soon, bringing medicine and ice. Swan went back to Andrew.

The sick man stirred uneasily. Swan straightened his pillows, soothing him. He grew quiet. She stood studying his thin, haggard face. He was wasted and white; his eyes were deep-sunken, black-circled. His hand felt a little less hot; his pulse beat a little more steadily; his fore head felt slightly moist.

The wasted man on the pillow seemed the figure in a dream. Swan laid her cheek softly down to his. She could not credit any sense that told her this shrunken form, inert, unresponsive, could be the reality of the man she loved. It could not be true. She leaned nearer to see if there was any change. Andrew lay in a stupor, unseeing, unhearing. Swan passionately denied the evidence of her eyes.

She busied herself with homely little preparations for the night—building up the fire, sweeping the hearth. A fresh candle was needed; she cleaned the tallow remains of the last one from the candlestick. She changed her shoes for bedroom slippers and her linen frock for a soft padded kimono. It was not yet nine o'clock.

She wound the clock. There was nothing to do until Dr. Winters returned with Andy's medicine. She sat in Andy's chair, Andy's Bible at her elbow, Andy's pipes on the table, his tobacco on the mantel. Her eyes rested on the carnival masks, the mule and the swan, hanging together over the mantel.

Gradually the present erased itself. She suddenly stepped into the past. Her eyes were closed; she leaned far back in the chair. The gray-crêpe kimono fell in soft folds like the foliage of some slim, upstanding plant about her. Her vivid red hair was piled high on her head; her face, with its tea-rose tints of bronze and pink, was like some strange new flower blossoming in a friendly atmosphere.

She whirled to the throbbing, passionate music of a waltz in the arms of a stranger at the Kittens' Ball. The green waves of the Mexican Gulf dashed against their feet; in the wind that blew her and the stranger along were also her father and her mother, young, care-free, intoxicated with happiness, even as she and the stranger were. Inextricably entangled with the pulsing measures of the music were the wind and the waves dashing against an island that she also recognized instinctively.

Her own love interpreted to her the passion of her young parents. They were nearer than they had ever been, more vividly alive, though they had been dead so many years. Swan had been kept isolated in her grandfather's home and, as he supposed, in ignorance of all that related to the two beings from whose love she had sprung; but no longer was she an exile from the regions of high romance where they dwelt. She seemed to rise to a finer ether, to breathe an atmosphere rare and heady. Old Minette's stories drifted back.

She whirled to the sobbing strains of a waltz in the arms of Love, even while she seemed to live again the wild adventures of her pirate father and his bride. She exulted in his strength, even as her mother had done. Life ran so strong in her father's veins, old Minette had told her, that he could bring back life to the dying, the dead. She saw him now; she felt his power—as if he leaned down to give more life to her.

SWAN was wakened by Aladdin tugging at her skirts; Dolly Varden whined beside him. She opened her eyes, trying to remember where she was. A mist filled her mind. Sleep would have drawn her back had she not heard Andrew moan.

Instantly she was beside him. The fever was gone, but he shook with a chill. He opened his eyes weakly. She saw he recognized her, but he was too far gone to speak.

In vain his lips tried to fashion words. He shook his head. He was powerless to lift his arms when he would have drawn her down to him.

Like a lightning flash came to Swan the realization of her husband's condition. She knew he was trying to say farewell. She knew Andrew MacDonald was dying. His eyes looked past her to the mule and swan masks over the mantel. He tried to smile.

Back from her dream came old Minette's stories of how her father could restore life to the dying—how the drowned on the island were never given up if Jean La Vitte were there to bring them back to life.

Never had Swan felt such an inrush of life, of power. She threw off the enveloping kimono and gathered the man she must save close in her arms. The palms of her hand sought the palms of his hands. Her strong heart beat against the feeble flutter of his heart. Her throbbing, electrical body strove to give to him its vitality.

And all the while she pleaded with him, denying the power of death, her spirit stimulating his, her mind and will feeding the dying flame of his.

"O my beloved," she cried passionately, "the transfusion of my spirit shall save you!"

His heart beat a little stronger. He moved his arm as if to hold her even nearer to his heart.

"We are one, my love," she whispered, as if to conserve the more strength for him. "My heart pumps power back into your heart. From my strength I pour strength to you. We are one. What is mine is ours."

She felt an electrical thrill from his inert body. His heart beat stronger. Closer she held him in her arms. Warmth came back to his shivering limbs. She knew the instant he was saved to live. But her work did not relax. All night she held him close, her marvelous vitality, like an electric battery, recharging him with her own glorious strength and life.

ANDREW slept late. At last he stirred and opened his eyes. Swan patted him softly as a new mother touches a baby.

"I—I—thought"—he stared, confused—"that we were in the woods." He sat up, rubbing his eyes to clear his memory. "What happened?"

"What *has* happened?" she echoed at the window, peering out.

Andrew got up, reeled, tottered to catch a chair, and finally joined her. The river covered yard and garden. As far as eye could reach stretched a lake of yellow water.

"What's the matter with me?" Andrew appealed to her. "I can't seem to stand up."

Swan told him he had been ill with fever for over a week, that he had eaten nothing.

"You haven't been here alone with me out of my head with fever?" He regarded her with perplexed eyes, sensing that she was keeping the real situation from him. Then, weakly, "Tell Milly to bring my breakfast in."

When Swan returned with a tray, Andrew's suspicions grew stronger. She assured him that this was the first day that she had had no negroes to wait on her. Perhaps, she argued, it was the high water keeping them away from the house. She made no attempt to account for Jimmy Weed's absence.

Andrew asked her to bring his revolver. He fired all the barrels. It was his emergency-call to the plantation. Still no one came. The yellow water was rising slowly but surely.

There was a swishing sound from the steps, the grating of a boat. Andrew sprang to his feet.

"Hello!" sounded a voice that both joyfully recognized. It was Buck Mellows in a dugout that bobbed up and down in the yellow water. He leaned on his paddle. "Thought I'd jes' drop by," he drawled, "to pass the time of day with you city folks. Medicine from Dr. Winters." He laconically indicated the parcels he had put into Swan's hands. "He's stove up himself and couldn't get back."

Buck knew everything that had happened. But he told MacDonald nothing of the trouble on the plantation. Craven was buried; a wire to Jules Fortescue telling him of his death had brought a disclaimer of all knowledge of the dead man. Montross's private car, which had been on a siding at Cottonville and at Craven's disposal, had been recalled.

"Queer about Fortescue, though," said Buck. "S'posed to be buyin' up property 'round here—he and Montross. All o'

Cottonville, pretty near, and plantations wherever they can."

Buck was going to stay, it seemed. And he relieved Swan of the cooking at once—took full charge, indeed. In the morning he found Ed Pecan and Pete, marooned with the surviving mules in the stable. They knew all about Charlie Craven's curses, but, to Buck's surprise, they meant to stay.

"That's fine!" he said. "Now, you boys ain't married. I want you to stah't co'tin right away—marry a widow wid a flock of children."

They understood and grinned. Labor cannot legally be induced to leave one plantation for another—but a woman may take her children, even if fully grown, and go where her husband is.

BUCK was invaluable as Andy grew better. He prevented a relapse when Weed's defection was discovered. He cheered Swan; he worked hard himself. Presently Ed Pecan and Pete returned. Ed's bride had seven children, all old enough to work, and Pete's five, three of whom could be used in the fields.

Gradually, now, Andrew learned what had happened. He was going to dismiss Weed; he consented to let him work in the fields instead. Buck was to stay. What overseeing was to be done would fall to him and Andrew. But Weed did make himself useful.

The flood was receding now, and what might have been the crowning blow to MacDonald turned out to be a blessing. It had completely demoralized the negroes, and they had been scattered far and wide from their plantations. So Weed, cruising about in a flat boat, picked up quite a number of hands. The receding waters, moreover, left the soil greatly enriched, as they always do after a flood. Moreover, the flood had come and gone early; prospects for a great crop were excellent. There would be hands enough, and Andrew could buy more mules.

"Got money enough?" asked Buck.

"Just about. In the Cotton Planters' Bank. Where's yours, Buck?"

"In a hollow tree. My banker's a squirrel."

They laughed, but Swan looked curiously at Buck.

Andrew went to Cottonville next day to buy mules. Swan knew as soon as she saw him, when he returned that evening, that something was wrong.

"Tell me," she said. "What is it, my Andy?"

"The bank's failed," he said in a strange voice. "Your grandfather bought the controlling interest in it some weeks ago. And he let it fail last week!"

She quivered, then rallied.

"Can't you borrow money?"

"Montross and your grandfather control every bank near here—every bank that would be able to lend on my security. No—I'm done."

"Because you married me!" she cried. "My grandfather and Montross——"

He caught her in his arms.

"I'm thinking of you—dragged into poverty——"

"As if that mattered!" She laughed. "I'd be happier in a tent in the woods than I've ever been—if you were with me."

He echoed her laugh.

"We'll get a crop—even if it's small," he said. "With what mules I've got left, and Buck's——"

He began to plan against the new disaster. And Buck, who was away, came back next day to find him anything but cast down. He had heard about the bank.

"They haven't beat us yet," he said. "Better stop tradin' in Cottonville, though."

MacDonald nodded.

"And I got another idea," said Buck. "Can't get mules. All right. Mules—they're ondependable critters, anyway. Now—tractors don't get sick and they can't be pizened. S'long as you had the mules, 't' weren't worth while to think o' tractors. Now it's dif'rent. I'm aimin' to turn capitalist—invest some money in Rainbow's End. Buy tractors with this, Andy."

And he flung a buckskin pouch, heavy and bulging, down before them. Surprised, Andrew counted the hundreds of dollars it held.

"My bank didn't fail," he said. "'Member I told you it was in a hollow tree and its president was a squirrel?"

"But—this won't be enough—" MacDonald was thinking. "The tractors would save us if we could raise some money. But I can't borrow a dollar——"

"Wait!"

Swan flashed out, was back in a moment with a parcel in her hands. She poured out its gleaming contents. The firelight flashed from diamonds.

"The things I wore in my costume as a swan!" she cried. "And—" She laughed. "Look—this is my engagement-ring from Montross! I meant to return it—but if he's trying to ruin you, it's only poetic justice to sell it and use it against him."

PROSPERITY seemed to have come again to Rainbow's End. Handicapped though he was by a shortage of negro labor, the cotton-planter had the satisfaction of seeing every tillable acre of the plantation green with new crops.

The tractors had turned the trick, Buck declared. Swan had driven one of them from the first day. The girl was now brown as a berry. She continued to work in the field as did Andrew, Buck and Jimmy Weed. From the first streak of dawn to the last ray from the setting sun, every human being on the plantation, except two black piccaninnies, worked in the cotton and corn.

Buck had taken over all the cooking at the plantation-house. He declared Swan beat him so far in the fields that he felt he could be better spared for housework than she.

Working in the open had done wonders for Jimmy Weed. He, too, was brown and healthy. Andrew's superb strength enabled him to do field-work that formerly three negro men had done. But the heat of the summer was not yet upon them.

"But if we can't get negro hoe-hands," Andrew said, "we'll have to chop cotton ourselves."

Swan laughed and showed her bronzed arms.

"Feel my muscle," she boasted.

Swan would often fall asleep eating her supper. With the utter weariness of a child, her head would drop forward on the table. Andrew and Buck would exchange glances of amused pity; then Andrew would lift her, the red head thrown over his shoulder, and put her in bed. It was a healthy fatigue, out of which she came glowing at earliest dawn.

A mocking-bird in the cedar outside the window waked her a little after four. She would spring from bed into her cold bath, and then waken Andrew while she went outside to greet the miracle of the new day. She never grew blunted to the beauty of the early morning—the waking world of birds and beasts, of the pageant of dawn. Wading through the dewy grass was to her a new adventure, fresh every day.

One morning she made a discovery that she called Buck and Andrew out to explain. In the old flower garden she discovered two great holes, newly excavated. What did this mean? Andrew smiled.

"You remember," he said. "I told you the story of the great-uncle from Cuba—the treasure-chest he is supposed to have buried in Rainbow's End?" She nodded. "Well, there's always some poor fortune-hunter sneaking in to try to discover it. Those holes represent two more disappointments."

"Must have dug all night." Buck examined the deep excavations. "Reckon they got anything?'

"If there was ever any gold buried in Rainbow's End," Andrew replied, "the vandals who burned the old mansion during the Civil War got it."

"Waal," observed Buck, "if my guess is right, I can work this buried-treasure business to advantage with a lot of shanty-boat Gipsies down the river and get the hoe-hands we need."

"It's always somebody who lives in a shanty-boat," Andrew said, "who digs here at night for the treasure."

"I'll investigate," said Buck.

After breakfast he paddled off in his dugout instead of going to the fields.

He had a fine day of it, and twenty-five new hoe-hands were added to the field-force the next day. Buck talked about the buried treasure as he chopped cotton, but, according to his account, the Cuban uncle had buried it near the old cotton-gin.

The next day he reported to Swan that the treasure-seekers must have spent the night down near the deserted gin-house, for the place he had indicated to them showed signs of somebody's activity.

"We'll get out of the grass," Buck concluded, "before they get disheartened and quit."

The shiftless shanty-boat fortune-hunters hung on to the job they had undertaken—to help "lay by" the crops—in order to work

The mulatto's eyes swept over the huddled form, moaning and groaning. "I lay de curse of de voodoo on dis plantation." He intoned the incantation.

under cover, as they thought, for the buried gold.

The fields were now clean as a table. The river Gipsies were disgusted with themselves for doing so much work. They had in hand only the wages they had received for working by the day. Their night work, digging for the treasure, had netted them nothing. They untied their rickety craft one night and departed as silently as they had arrived.

Andrew MacDonald walked over his beautiful fields, Swan beside him. As far as the eye could reach were the waving green banners of the young corn; but better than that he saw the cotton fields stretching to unnumbered acres. He was not imaginative, but each brave little cotton plant, loaded down with white-and-pink blossoms, seemed to him to be laden with golden fruit. Cotton was soaring in the market; the crop was reported small, but his prospects had never been for so large a yield.

He had got his cotton planted three weeks ahead of any of the neighboring planters, because Rainbow's End plantation was higher ground than theirs and the water had receded from his fields first. It seemed a recompensation for the loss of his mules and his negro tenants.

He said something like this to his young wife.

"And how soon shall we begin to pick it, my Andy?"

"How soon? At this rate, by the first of August."

"And we shall be rich enough for you never to worry again?" she asked him.

"If cotton goes to the price it seems headed for this year," he told her, "you shall live like the little queen you were the night I found you."

"Never again like that, I hope." She clutched his arm convulsively. "What you think have been hardships for me have been —oh, just happiness, my Andy!"

But that night, like a plague out of Egypt, devastation swept over the plantation. Buck Mellows discovered boll-weevils before noon the following day. Rainbow's End had never been invaded by the pest. MacDonald had not been apprehensive this season, for he had heard nothing of weevils up and down the river.

Even so, could others have told him, he had felt secure. The mystery of the boll-weevil is baffling. It will pass directly over miles and miles of enticing cotton fields, to settle finally on a plantation seemingly marked for destruction and begin its deadly work. So it was the boll-weevil came overnight to Rainbow's End. The next day not a "square" was on a cotton plant.

At first the planter hoped to fight it. By the end of the week he knew that his cotton was worthless. All told, the crop would not be half a bale.

Swan sat on the back-gallery steps. Andrew stalked up and down. A silhouette in the field nearest the house, he was etched out against the rosy gold of the sunset. Buck Mellows had departed, silent, in his canoe. There was nothing as yet they three could say to each other.

For herself, Swan did not care. But she knew what the cotton crop meant to her husband. What it meant to Buck, she could only surmise. She suspected the old woodsman had gone off to be alone, not because of his own disappointment but because he could not face Andrew's silent, hopeless woe.

BUCK MELLOWS paid several calls in the course of his paddling up and down the river. One was to Sweet Home plantation, just above Rainbow's End. Buck had heard that the plantation had been sold, crops and all, just as it stood in midsummer. The name of the purchaser was not known to the woodsman, who was as familiar with this part of the country and the old inhabitants as he was with the forest and its "varmints."

Ebenezer Dole was the reputed owner and new manager of Sweet Home. Buck tied his canoe to a gum-tree and went up the river-bank to scrape acquaintance with the newcomer. He found him cordial to the point of effusiveness. Dole was a stranger in those parts. Buck gathered before his visit had come to an end that Dole was the type of man who has no background, no home. He asseverated lustily that he had always been living about, that his home was wherever he hung his hat up.

The woodsman quickly detected Dole's interest in the affairs of Rainbow's End.

Indeed, he seemed more than well informed about everything that had taken place on the plantation. It was too bad, Dole declared, about MacDonald's losing his cotton crop. He repeated gossip he had heard of the mulatto's curse. Buck angrily branded the stories as lies. Dole apologized, explaining it was common talk up and down the river, that he was only repeating what the negroes who fled from the neighboring plantation had said, and commenting on the coincidence that seemed to substantiate their stories that the place was branded with bad luck.

Buck delivered a few home truths about the custom of the country—that white men in that section stood together, that "nigger lies" were not encouraged or nigger superstitions fed by credence given to their stories. He hinted that Dole would do well to establish himself with his few white neighbors by stronger ties than the retailing of sensational "nigger-cabin talk."

The woodsman's next call was at Green Tree plantation, just below Rainbow's End. That place had also recently passed into the hands of a stranger, a certain Fred Wince, also unknown to Buck. He found Wince to be of the same caliber as Dole, a wishy-washy individual who could give no direct account of himself.

Buck knew that neither of the men could ever have had the capital to buy the plantations, that neither was of the type ever placed in charge to manage such places. He shrewdly surmised that both were tools of the man who was trying to break Andrew MacDonald. Yet there was no direct evidence to support the woodsman's suspicions.

When he returned to Rainbow's End, Buck found that Andrew was already trying to save something from the ruin. The cotton was nearly all plowed under. Andrew meant to raise a late crop of corn. Corn promised to be high; here was a chance to get some capital for the renewed adventure of another year in cotton.

A FEW days later, Dole and Wince came visiting. And, despite Buck's warning, Dole, talking of the boll-weevil, had the temerity to ask Andrew something about the mulatto's curse. And Andrew promptly kicked him off the gallery and invited Wince to follow or share Dole's fate.

"And don't come back—either of you!" he ordered.

But Dole came back—came back within a week to offer help when Andrew was struggling desperately to save his hogs, infected with cholera—as old Charlie Craven had willed that they should be! And Andrew menaced him with a shotgun.

"Go!" begged Swan. "Go, before he hurts you—he really doesn't know what he's saying."

She laughed a little when Dole, scared and white, had gone.

"You mustn't, Andy dearest," she said. "You—you scared *me!* It was almost as if it were true that you didn't know what you were doing."

"I don't know that I do," said MacDonald. "And I'll kill either of those snakes if they come again."

Other snakes were near by, too. The Cottonville paper recorded the visit of Jules Fortescue and Henry J. Montross, who had come in a yacht and had stopped for a few days before going on up the river. But at Rainbow's End that news was not known.

So the appearance of the yacht off the plantation, with the grandfather and the man she had jilted, came to Swan as a stunning surprise.

Her grandfather kissed her, reproached her gently for having abandoned him and for her silence. And Swan, recovering from her amazement, took her cue from him.

"There must be no cloud on your happiness," said old Jules. "That is why Montross has come with me. We want to see your husband. We must have a general reconciliation."

Swan was worried as she sought Andrew. He had been dull and apathetic for days. Buck had suggested a touch of malaria. Swan was afraid his troubles had really affected him. And she was afraid of the effect upon him of seeing on his own place the men who were certainly responsible for some of his troubles, if not for all.

He greeted them without any sign of dislike, however; indeed, it was almost as if he had forgotten what they had done. Fortescue asked some questions about the crops; MacDonald answered, and went with him to show him something. Swan, left alone with Montross, expected—anything. But he only laughed.

"I bear no malice, Calla," he said. "I only want you to be happy."

"Thank you," said Swan. But she was thinking desperately.

This visit had a meaning—and an ominous one. In spite of all that had happened, some new and crushing blow must be in prospect. She knew her grandfather, and one minute's sight of Montross had been enough. She understood now something that had been hidden from her before Andrew had come into her life. Montross still wanted her, still meant to have her. And what she had been prepared to accept before filled her now with loathing and horror.

She was glad beyond all words when the visitors went back to the yacht and the yacht itself moved up-stream. But she would have found confirmation for her fears had she known that that night it slipped silently down to Cottonville.

THE next night was one of stifling heat. Buck, unable to sleep, went out into the air. He sought the comfort of the woods. And suddenly he heard the sound of horses' feet on a disused road. He hid himself and waited, listening. Soon he heard voices, recognized two of them with a thrill of alarm. Wince and Dole—and a third man, a stranger. What could they be doing near Rainbow's End?

Buck crept nearer.

"We can't be very far from Rainbow's End now—and they ought to be in bed. What time is it?"

Wince had spoken. A pocket-light flashed, and Buck saw that all three men were armed.

He had no need to wait for more. He hurried back toward the negro quarters. Ed Pecan and Pete were away; Buck left word for them to come to the house when they returned. Then he sought Andrew and Swan, and found them in the gallery, Andrew, as he had been for days, lost in melancholy. He could hear the approaching horsemen. He suspected their purpose. But to warn Andrew to flee would do no good. Suddenly Buck was inspired. Andrew must be roused. And he knew the way.

"Fortescue's men are coming!" he cried. "To take Swan away from you!"

The words were like an electric shock to MacDonald. His lethargy left him and he sprang to his feet. Swiftly he and Buck barred doors and windows. Outside there was a whispered consultation, then a pounding on the door.

"Open—in the name of the law!"

"Go to hell!" Andrew flung back his answer. "Strike a light," he whispered to Swan. Then he fired through the door.

"Open up—I've a warrant! Or I'll break down the door!"

"Come ahead!" cried Andrew. "We're ready for you——"

Shots came through the door, but they were aimed high—to spare Swan, probably. Buck had found Andrew's revolver and loaded it—but few cartridges were in reserve.

Now they were attacking the door. Outside there was a sudden clamor; they heard Weed's voice and the curses of Wince. Then Dole and the other man broke in, and Andrew clinched with Dole while Buck attacked the other.

But, outside, Wince had disposed of Jimmy Weed, leaving him unconscious—Jimmy, who had attacked armed men himself without a weapon. And Wince arrived in time to turn the issue against the defenders. Andrew and Buck were overcome; Andrew was tied. Wince menaced Buck with his revolver.

"No doubt about his being mad!" said Dole. "God! They say a maniac's stronger than a sane man."

"Mad!" Andrew strained at the ropes that held him.

"He's a deputy sheriff." Dole pointed to the stranger. "Name's Dooling. He's got commitment papers. Wince and I testified to it that MacDonald was dangerous—kicking neighbors off his gallery—threatening them with a shotgun when they come to help him in his trouble. And old man Fortescue—he's your grandfather, ain't he, Mis' MacDonald? Well, he was scared for you and wanted your husband put away so's you'd be safe. We're aimin' to take you to him——"

"Not to-night, though!"

A new voice broke into Dole's triumphant explanation. Dole spun round. Dick Steel stood in the door, a double-barreled shotgun in his hands. Behind him Swan saw Dr. Winters, and others were crowding in. Steel came in.

"Turn MacDonald loose!" he said.

For a moment no one moved.

"Hear me—Dooling?" he said. "Loosen that rope! Else it's likely to be used—quick—another way!"

Dooling hurried to obey. All the bounce was out of him. Dole and Wince were cowering as the room filled with grim-faced men, MacDonald's old friends and neighbors.

"You're under arrest, Dole—and you too, Wince. On general principles for the minute—but I reckon we'll find a plenty to hold you both—you skunks! Got here in time, didn't we, Andy?"

"But how did you know?" Swan cried.

"I was away on business," said Steel. "Left this"—he made a grimace as he jerked his thumb at Dooling—"this in charge. When I got back, I found papers in his office about Andy, here, goin' mad. So I hustled over to see Doc Winters. Found he didn't know anything 'bout it—began to get suspicious then, when I saw who he'd taken with him to help. So I gathered up a few of Andy's friends and came along."

"Waal"—Buck stretched and yawned—"I'm plumb beat out. Think I'll turn in before the blow starts."

After seeing Dick Steel and his departing party round the bend, the old huntsman and Andrew had returned to the house and rehung the battered-down door.

"I'm pretty sleepy myself," Andrew admitted. "Feel like I used to after a football game at Princeton."

Andrew fell asleep the minute he touched the bed. Sleep—after so many nights of sleepless tossing! The rain on the roof was like the sound of advancing cavalry. Swan was wide-eyed. She did not feel that she could ever close her eyes again. She was living over again the events of the crowded night. She thrilled at the recollection of Andrew, his courage, his strength.

Andy was himself once more. The wind rose higher; a blind was twisted off. Still Andrew slept.

The strong old house was rocked back and forth. Swan felt it must be an earthquake. Rain poured down the chimney. The rain turned to hail.

The lightning illuminated the room, showing the disorder of the demolished chairs, the broken table, the shattered lamp; the smell of kerosene pervaded the place. The lightning flashes were like torches thrown in to set the place on fire. The wind rose to a wild shriek. It was blowing things about the room. And the hail now seemed to be poured in bucketfuls on the roof. Still Andrew slept, the sleep of utter exhaustion.

The dogs crept to the side of the bed. Swan put out her hand to reassure them. A leak started in one corner of the room. Swan could hear the water pouring in. The terrific heat had turned to a temperature that was almost frigid.

There was a crash that rocked the house until it made the girl giddy—a peal of thunder that sounded as if the very heavens were falling.

"Something's struck!" Andrew exclaimed, waking. "Swan!"

The girl was safe in his arms, soothing him as a mother comforts a child.

He was wide-awake. Another flash more terrific—with thunder that deafened them.

"My last crop is gone, Swan!"

"Oh, my Andy"—she held him close—"we still have each other! Crops come and go. There is next year to look forward to. But if to-night——"

A gust of strong feeling shook her. It was as if she were stricken with a rigor. Andrew forgot all in his sudden anxiety for her.

Then all the terrible fury that had gone before was as nothing in the blinding illumination.

"That struck the corn-cribs," Andrew said quietly.

"What can you do about it, beloved?" The shivering girl in his arms begged him to tell her.

"Nothing," he replied.

"We still have each other," Swan repeated wearily. "Let's go to sleep."

ANDREW was sleeping soundly when Swan wakened at early dawn. The storm had passed like a bad dream in the night. A mocking-bird was singing in the cedars. Dolly Varden's cold nose lay close to the girl's head on the pillow; the faithful creature had slept leaning against the bed.

Swan rose noiselessly up, slipping on sandals and dressing gown. She tiptoed from the room, followed by the bird-dogs.

She surveyed the peaceful scene. Sweet and green, new-washed, the plantation stretched before her. The corn stood erect, like undaunted soldiers. It was not beaten down or, seemingly, hurt. The corn-cribs still stood. She went down the steps toward the back of the house.

When she turned the corner, looking toward the burying-ground beyond the old flower garden, she saw what the lightning had struck—the mighty old cedar tree that she had come to consider a family friend, even a close relative. Like a giant prone, the mighty monarch was stretched.

Swan held her skirts high out of the rain-soaked grass and went to the fallen tree. Its roots were a revelation to her. They seemed to have been a tree underground in their tangle of branches. The earth was torn up as if an earthquake had made a fissure.

Swan fell back in horror as she peered down into the abyss. Tangled in the roots, near enough for her to lift it, was a small coffin. She waited to see no more. She reeled back to the house. Her first thought was to tell Buck, have him rebury the dead before Andy would waken.

Just as she turned the corner of the house, she fell into the arms of her husband. She had not meant to tell him. But there was no gainsaying his demand. He had never seen her look so.

"Don't go there, Andy!" she begged. He was half-way to the tree, and she was with him. Then she told him of the child's coffin in the roots.

"There's never been a child buried here," Andrew said. He was climbing down, not the least overcome.

"This is no casket!" he called to her. "Come here!" She obeyed. "Seems to me an iron box of some sort." Buck strolled up. "Give me a hand here, Buck."

They pried the stout iron chest out of its network of roots and finally hoisted it to the level ground. Buck got a crowbar. The top yielded.

Swan was the first to catch a glimpse of its contents.

"It's gold!" she cried.

"Nonsense!" Andrew laughed.

A shower of gold coins fell on the grass.

"By Jove!" Andrew said at last, when he got his breath. "The old boy did tell the truth! Here's the treasure he put away."

"The shanty-boaters said it was a million in gold," Buck drawled, his hands in his pockets. "If you ask me, I'll put it nearer a billion. Better come along in and get your coffee. It's ready."

Just what the exact value of the treasure was could not be told at first. The coins were so old, most of them gold eagles, that Andrew said they would have to wait for some bank-expert to figure out what their income tax would be.

ED PECAN came to the door while they were eating breakfast. He had just got home, he explained, and his wife had told him he was to come to the house. He had evidently heard nothing of the night's excitement. He was full of news that he knew would please his master.

The negroes who had left the plantation were coming home. None of them had made crops. They had hired out when they left him in the spring as day laborers and in town. They all wanted to come home to Rainbow's End.

"Dey know we ain't got no cotton," Ed explained. "Dey say dey'll come and help gether de corn, and if we starves dis winter, dey starve wid us. Dey all homesick, boss. Doan' be hard on 'em."

"When can they come?"

"Dey all heah now," Ed replied. "Dese wuz de hands me an' Peter stepped across de river last night to git. De storm hilt us up."

"Where'd you like to spend Christmas?" Andrew asked Swan. "We can choose from the whole world now. Buck and Jimmy Weed and Ed Pecan and Pete can look after the plantation while we go off on a second honeymoon-trip. Where shall it be?"

"Andy," she said gravely, "out of all the world, the place where I'd *rather* spend our second honeymoon is where we spent our first—in those yellow-brown woods, wild-turkey hunting."

"Then," he said, "that's where it shall be."

Swan lifted her radiant face to his.

"But I can't," she said. "If you don't mind, I'll stop a few days in the hospital. Where's the nearest one?"

He was all anxious concern.

"Are you ill, Swan?"

"Ill?" she mocked superbly. "No; I'm not ill, my Andy. But—but—I want our baby to be born in a house."

The Trap

In Which Are Contrasted the Attitudes of Two Men Who Do Not in the Least Understand the Feminine Method of Meeting a Crisis

By Beth B. Gilchrist

Illustrations by Helen Jameson

MISS AMBURY stumbled on the steps leading from the specialist's office. It wasn't in character for her to stumble; what could ever be in character again? The little head lifted proudly; she set her feet carefully. Inconceivable to feel so well! There were points, she perceived now, to being ill—presumably you wearied of living; points, too, to sudden death—you couldn't see it coming. But to stand up and walk deliberately through the calendar! Six months! And three months ago it had been too late. Suddenly to the girl's eyes there appeared something shocking in the substantiality of the physical. In the sunshine, the houses of the quiet street wore their stone and brick façades with ghoulish familiarity, their very changelessness the direst change. The few people whom she met moved through a veil of unreality. So, she thought, might a ghost walk in baffling estrangement through the accustomed scene.

On the corner stood one of those churches whose doors are always open, but she felt no inclination to enter. An act like that savored too frankly of compulsion. She never had gone in; why should she go in now? A good deal was to be said for habit. In a crisis you made use of such resources as you had in hand. She wondered whether she were at all adequately equipped to deal with this emergency. "Grenna's nerve" had carried off more than one precariously poised event; but now her bluff had been called, hadn't it? If decency demanded you keep your skeletons under lock and key, success was attainable only on condition that no one suspected their existence. Curiosity or sympathy always bade people pick locks. Her choice of a specialist had turned as much on the fact that the man was personally unknown to her as on his reputation. But you couldn't, of course, conceal your own funeral. There the thing would out.

And Miss Ambury loathed funerals—that anything so unspeakable should ever happen to her!—loathed their unctuousness, their breath-bated solemnity, their flowers wrenched from the clean, bright ways of health to deck decay. People moved so awkwardly in the face of death. For once she would be able to do nothing to put them at ease. They must sit stiff and long-faced in her presence, though she had always been accounted socially competent. They would be shocked because she had been young, and dubious because she had been gay, and only Cousin Adeline would actually miss her, and she merely because they had lived together and Grenna had become a habit. Cousin Adeline clung to habits.

A wild impulse moved the girl to hilarity, to laugh outright in the too smiling face of day. Hysterical, probably. Was she who had never known a nerve in her body to give way now to such weakness? But she wouldn't tell any one before she had to—not even Cousin Adeline. You couldn't live under the same roof with Cousin Adeline if she knew a thing like that about you.

The doctor's grave voice returned to her,

studiously bated to compassion in pronouncing the preposterous sentence. That was the kind of thing she must school herself to meet now, of course. Good heavens! Didn't she know how people would take it? The thick, stifling breath of their compassion rose in her nostrils. Never for a minute would they let her forget it; never for a minute in her presence would they forget it themselves. Pity! The incredible thing was that she would have to take it, couldn't avoid taking it, must let them—when they knew—be sorry for her.

Yet the etiquette of the occasion demanded plans—something more adequate than mere abstinence from possible sanctuary, than keeping your mouth shut. But what sort of plans? The length of the sentence shut out effectually any program that required time. Six months! Even if she had thought it "square," there wasn't time to learn how to be very good in six months. And she didn't particularly wish to be good. That was a fact. You had to be honest.

Miss Ambury drove her thoughts back along the road they had traveled since that infinitely remote period when her turn had come in the specialist's waiting-room. What had been her plans before that? What purposes had concerned her in the walk to his office? The relative merits of Palm Beach and California, how best she could score off Jean Chamberlain, whether Bruce Barnard would like her better in henna or black at the dance to-night. Black—pah! That dress should be given away to-morrow. But there seemed not much zest now in any of it, not even in ensnaring Bruce Barnard. The little hands in the mink muff clenched suddenly. Now, ah, now the thing was getting at her! No longer could she hold it off. Realization was here in this pain, turning her giddy, sickening her as though it were physical—pain that stabbed and slashed and drew off only to stab again.

"AREN'T you going in the wrong direction, Grenna?"

The voice recalled Miss Ambury to the necessity of turning on her world a smiling front.

"Probably. When you are thinking hard, you don't always notice where you are heading."

"Nothing unpleasant, I hope."

"Don't I look as though I had read my death-warrant?"

The truth, if you dared tell it, was always discredited.

"Bad as that? Come with me and take a look at the pups. They'll cheer you up."

"Vik competing?"

"No ribbons, though I hoped a bit. Just missed out, they say."

He hailed a taxi.

"Vik's such a beauty it's a pity to handicap her with a name like that. Bolshevik's such old stuff, you know."

"I'm thinking of a change. What would you suggest, Viking or Victoria? They're both older."

Her soft voice lifted the gay talk lightly. Jack Herron was nothing to her—the better for that! Intimacy would press too closely on the raw. His lean, homely presence offered her refuge from her thoughts. Suddenly her heart craved refuge—people in bulk, no selected packages of near acquaintance. Among the pleasant, friendly, frightened little beasts, surely she wouldn't feel so hard.

"That poor scrap, Jack! He's so scared. It's a shame for any master to leave him."

"Mistress in this case. That's Sue Walton's new prize-winner. Some racket he's making!"

"Poor tad! If I were a puppy and were dumped in a big new place like this, all alone with hundreds of strange dogs, *I'd* squeal."

"You! You don't know how to whimper. Let's sit down on this bench for a bit and watch 'em."

Not until she leaned back had Miss Ambury realized her weariness. Odd that a mere piece of information, a mental brickbat, should bruise your very body. Under the man's easy, "doggy" talk she relaxed, let herself go a trifle—not too far, not so far that instantly she couldn't pull up.

"Come to lunch with me."

"I'd like to, but I promised Cousin Adeline faithfully. She's having an old friend, and she wants to show me off as you did your puppy." Deliberately she turned on the sparkle in her eyes. How easy it was to do it, and how little, how less than nothing it meant!

Cousin Adeline's old friend had disappointed her. Cousin Adeline sat up very straight opposite her niece across the

luncheon-table. She had a grievance. Her voice quivered with it.

"Inconsiderate—extraordinarily inconsiderate! As though I myself had no engagements! The Pennington musicale—and really I wished to attend that musicale. Anne Pennington had made such a point of my coming. 'An old friend, my dear,' I told her, 'a friend I haven't seen for thirty years. We were girls together.' And Marcia herself selected the day. But I should have foreseen. Marcia always was a flibbertigibbet. You'd think thirty years might have changed her. Thirty years, I am sure, have changed me; though I own I have kept my figure. Grenna, why will you slouch in your chair so? Haven't I often told you that if you wish to have any sort of a figure thirty years from now, you must keep your shoulders straight?"

"I'm not particularly interested in my figure thirty years from now, Cousin Adeline."

"Then you should be. No matter how young your face is, if you carry an old figure——"

"Did she mention any other day in her note?"

"To-morrow. As though I had nothing in the world to do but stay at home to receive her! I've a mind to wire it's not convenient. There's a linen sale at Smythe's."

"But we have enough linen."

"One can never tell what one may pick up at a sale. And in these days when linen is as a rule so poor and so dear. It isn't as though I had only myself to consider."

"Oh!" said Grenna. "Just whom have you in mind, Cousin Adeline?"

The jeweled fingers twinkled over the grapefruit.

"A little preparation is never out of place, my dear. And when you announce your engagement, as may occur any day——"

"Don't let that trouble you."

The lady smiled wisely.

"So girls always say. I never knew one who would acknowledge what was as plain to the eyes as a pikestaff."

Grenna laid down her spoon.

"Cousin Adeline, there is no possibility of my announcing an engagement within the next six months."

"I hope you've not quarreled."

"I'm simply not planning to be married."

"Then you have quarreled. Not that it matters—a quarrel, I mean, of course. People always make them up."

"There is no quarrel at all, Cousin Adeline."

The lady shook her finger archly.

"Grenna! Grenna! Now I see I *must* get that linen."

"But if you have a guest——"

"Don't be exasperating, my dear. If a person breaks her date, am I bound to put myself out a second time to receive her? My mind is quite made up."

"Very well"—quietly. "But don't purchase anything for me."

Cousin Adeline smiled.

"Dear, dear!" she said. "How very certain we are! Not that you haven't always been positive, Grenna. And outspoken. I used to be afraid it would interfere with your popularity."

"So you often told me."

"For your good, my dear. But I can't see that it has. I'm frank to say I don't pretend to understand modern young people. Though I've thought now and then of late that you were going out a bit too much for your health——"

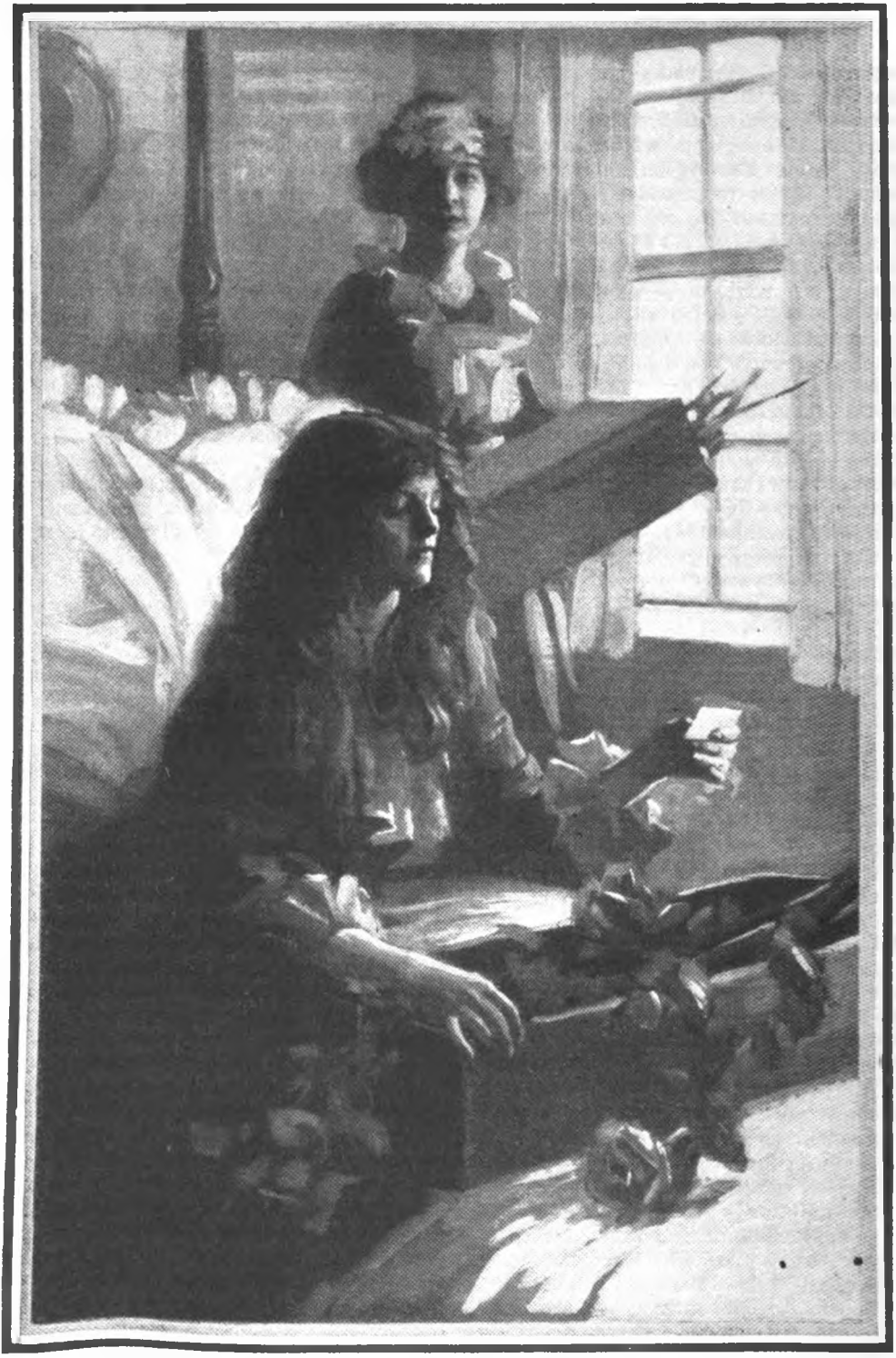
"You mean that I'm not looking well?"

"A shade less fresh than you used to."

"I think," said the girl, "I'll stay in this afternoon and take a nap. There's a dance to-night."

BEAUTY-SLEEP! Cousin Adeline wouldn't disturb that. But could she sleep? And if the sleep were no sleep, but a mustering of resources, what were the loss? There wasn't much use in sleep now. The universe drew to one dreadful issue. Though her round be inadequate, it was all she knew. The doctor had warned against exercise, but somehow you must keep time moving. Unimaginable to camp on a specialist's door-step, hands folded, and wait for the executioner. If six months ago she had started those beauty-parlors, the idea of which had so shocked Cousin Adeline, she would have something to do now. A business, a profession, a fad, even, would make a more significant hop-off for another world than whirling in a continuous merry-go-round.

And what would that world be like? Nothing she had ever heard on the subject had sounded alluring. Neither old-style



The fact that there might be a message in the envelope, a thing contained in the container, could have no particular bearing on the issue.

harping nor new-style dictophoning engaged her interest; the one seemed as likely to prove tedious as the other undignified. Good heavens! If there were nothing better to do than by some sort of transcendental wireless to bombard equally wooden heads and tables with the drivel both varieties of operator reported receipt of, what, after all, was the point of a resurrection? What, when you came to it, was the point of anything?

Bruce! There was a point, if she only dared think of it. And why not? If the tables were reversed, if it were Bruce who walked under the shadow! A lovely light dawned in the girl's face. It wasn't fair not to treat Bruce as she would have wished to be treated.

Despite Jean Chamberlain, she thought she knew what she meant to Bruce.

Jean was a blind, merely one of the moves in the immemorial game they had been playing.

Never had Grenna Ambury dressed so carefully. Always hereafter she must be careful; she who had scorned care must call to her aid resource. No sign as yet of actual deterioration; keenly she scrutinized her mirrored face. It would come—must come, of course—paling cheek, fading hair, shrinking contours.

Meanwhile, she wanted to look her best for Bruce. Death didn't matter; Bruce was all that mattered. Her soul clung to that warm certainty.

AT THE dance, locked in Bruce's arms, she went deaf and blind. It wasn't like her to forget the world, so completely to miss the comedy—whisperings of watching dowagers: "Best dancers in the room; but her dress—" "Aren't they all? In our day, my dear—" Envy of girls less endowed by nature, less enhanced by art, studious indifference of Jean Chamberlain, open admiration of the men. Least in character to let slip that subtlest fillip of all—what would they say if they knew? They? Deliberately she had forsworn them. In all the world were only Bruce and she. Only one question: What would Bruce say? Not even that! Revolving in his arms, timed with him to perfect synthesis of motion, didn't she know? Love like this that quickened their veins could have but one meaning. It defied death; snatched, held for a glorious hour, its perfection. There was not time enough left to her to smirch it. To go out on the crest of the wave, thrall to this ecstasy—that was sanctuary, triumphant, inviolable. Nothing in the universe could touch it.

"You're the prettiest girl here."

"You flatter me."

It didn't matter what they said. Words were nothing. But she couldn't dance like this long. And last year she could have gone on all night.

"I don't, and you know it."

No subtlety about Bruce. Bruce didn't require subtlety. Bruce was beautiful—the most beautiful thing she had ever seen.

"You're rather good-looking yourself, Bruce."

"Little witch! Do you like me?"

"Don't you know?" How her breath caught!

"I'll be darned if I can make out."

Her eyes laughed at him.

"Imp! I say—but you *are* an imp. I've got to talk to you. Let's get out of this."

She let him guide her into a green place of tinkling waters. Bruce was a competent stage-manager. Instinctively or studiously he chose his effects well. Grenna thought it was instinct. Hitherto she hadn't been sure.

Now she knew—everything she had ever wanted to know. Moved out of his normal gay calm, voice shaken, eyes ardent, Bruce talked to her.

"What's in you to-night? Thought I knew you. But I didn't. And you've got me. I'm clean bowled over. Don't know whether it interests you or not—couldn't for the life of me tell. But to-night—to-night I'm hoping. Say when, dearest. And, oh, Grenna, say it quick!"

"Do you love me?" Her lips lifted.

"You know I love you."

His eyes triumphed. He kissed her again, holding her tight. She clung to him, whispering his name.

"Gren, have I really got you? I'm mad about you—you lovely, lovely thing! And you're mine—mine!"

"Yours, Bruce."

"Darling, there's a house. Passed it last night. Golly, but it struck me then! Just the sort to begin in. To-morrow morning, first thing, I'm going after it."

"But, Bruce——"

"What's the matter?"

"I—I can't marry you."

"*Can't marry me?* Why not, I'd like to know?"

"I can't marry any one."

"What are you doing in my arms, then?" She tried to disengage herself. He caught her back. "You don't know what you're saying."

"I—I—oh, Bruce, hold me tight while I tell you. We can't be married, darling, because—don't let it hurt you too much—the doctor only told me to-day—because—I'm going to die, dear."

"Quit kidding!"

"It's not a thing to joke about." She hid her face against him.

He held her off and stared at her.

"Grenna, you're crazy! You don't know what you're saying."

"For a crazy person I have a surprising number of normal faculties. No, Bruce; listen—" She pushed him away. Then, circumstantially, she told him.

"I don't believe a word of it."

BUT he did believe. Belief looked out of his stricken eyes, his blanched cheeks. Horror was a man's natural reaction to such an announcement.

At first, that was all she read in his perturbation.

"Grenna, I can't stand it! You—*you!* Tell me that this is a nightmare."

"Let's not talk of it now, dear. If we choose, it needn't make any difference."

"Of course it makes a difference. What are you thinking of?"

"In duration, yes. We haven't much time. But what there is——"

He didn't take her up. Perhaps he hadn't heard her. His mind was still groping for a solution.

"Experts make mistakes. There are other men——"

"I wouldn't count on too much from other men."

"You poor girl!"

From his lips the words touched her ear like endearments. But why didn't he take her in his arms again? Their time was so short, so short.

He raised the head bowed on his hands, and his tortured gaze lifted to her face. She couldn't believe the thought that came into her mind.

"Bruce—" she pleaded.

"There *must* be a way out. Something you could take—something they could do for you—" She was silent, waiting. "Goldsmith's only one. You haven't tried them all."

"Goldsmith's the best. What's the use?"

He was talking, she could see, to stifle the pain that tore at him. Grenna knew where she wanted to stifle her pain.

He slipped to his knees, but he didn't touch her. It almost seemed as though he shrank from touching her.

"It's the end of the world for me. Without you the game's over."

"You think so," she said. "But it isn't. It's going to be a big game, I hope, Bruce, long and full and—satisfying."

What was he delaying for?

"Don't!" said the man. "I—I can't stand it. Tell me what to do. I must do something. Isn't there anything in the world that you want?"

"Something I want?" She stared, bewildered.

"You wanted me." He remembered how she had clung to him. "Do you want me now, as things are, Gren? Take me, if you do."

"I don't think I quite understand."

"If not that house, I'll get another. We can be married right away—no fuss, nothing tiresome. Let me take care of you what time there is, dear."

Weren't these the words she had waited for?

"But—but *why*, Bruce?"

"Wouldn't you like it?"

"Would you?"

"I'd like anything that would please you, that would give you a moment's happiness."

She looked at his face, eager, pitying, and her heart went cold.

"You're too good for me, Bruce. Don't think I'm unappreciative if I say, 'No.'"

"But why?" In his turn, he pressed her. "You love me."

"You don't love me."

"What made me ask you to marry me?"

"Love," she acknowledged, "before I told you. Now—now you're sorry for me. It isn't at all the same thing."

"But, good heavens, I'd be a monster if I wasn't sorry!"

"And I'd like you better," she flashed out.

"I want you to belong to me." His speech was gaining force from its own velocity.

"Because you think I want to belong to you." She forced herself to be gentle. "You've stopped loving me, Bruce. You stopped when I told you." How clearly she saw now all that his instinctive shrinking, his horror had betokened! Had the shadow of putrefaction fallen before his eyes on her satin-smooth fairness? Obstinately the man drove on:

"I don't care what you say. We're engaged."

She shook her head. What irony that she must muster strength to fight him off!

"The arrangement would be too one-sided. What could I give you?"

"I don't want anything, Gren."

"Oh, Bruce, Bruce, don't you see that's just the trouble—that you *don't* want anything? Would you mind calling my car?"

"I'm coming with you."

"No—please! I'm a bit tired."

He frowned.

"Do you call this fair?"

"Nothing is exactly fair, is it?"

"If you'd let me take care of you——"

"Let's be honest." A smile flickered across her white face. "You know you're relieved, tremendously relieved, though you won't acknowledge it. I shouldn't have let you propose, should I? You will have to excuse me if I haven't behaved according to Hoyle. When you meet the right girl, give her my blessing."

"Confound the right girl! Haven't you any heart, Grenna? This isn't good-by—it sha'n't be!"

"Sleep on it." Her voice was even, her hand deathly cold when it touched his. Through every nerve she sensed the iron control that repressed his involuntary recoil. "I—I couldn't stand up to it."

Tight-lipped, he turned from putting her in the motor. So little, so smiling, so exquisite! Had there been a lack of fineness, a shade of flint in her delicacy? Courage was admirable in a woman, but courage requires the softening virtues. Small warmth to her. He had nothing to reproach himself with. It wasn't his fault that she hadn't taken him up. Hadn't he said all he could? Yet, beneath his shocked pity, his flesh knew relief that she had refused his offer.

Horror drove Barnard up-stairs for hat and coat. No longer was he in the mood for dancing. On the stairs he encountered Jack Herron.

"What's wrong, Barnard? You're the second person I've seen to-day who looked haunted."

"Man," growled Barnard, "do you hold by that tom-fool twaddle about the best possible world? It's a rotten world."

"Very likely. What's the proof now?"

"Oh, just a death-sentence. On a soft, dainty little thing that you'd think a beast wouldn't have the heart to hurt. Six months! O my God, Herron!"

Slowly the color drained from the other's face.

"Whom are you talking of?"

"Never mind whom I'm talking of. What does that matter? Lord! And I loved her!"

"Then what are you doing here?"

The words brought the other man to his senses.

"Have I been babbling? Bad news—the thing bowled me over. I say, Herron, you won't give it away, old man? She—she doesn't want anything said. Plucky, you know—plucky as the deuce. Mentioned no names, have I?"

"No; you've mentioned no names. See here—how'd you know?"

"Told me herself. Doctor'd just told *her*. A thing like that ought to have choked him. Say a word for me if they notice I've slipped out."

"Going myself presently. Mightn't there be a mistake, do you think?"

"No such luck! It was Goldsmith."

MISS AMBURY breakfasted in bed the next morning. Not that she meant to make a habit of it. Instinct bade her die as nearly as possible with her boots on. But she was tired, tired ineffably with a weariness that stamped soul and body into the very dust. When he knew that the light in her eye was timed to go out, the bloom on her cheek to fade, so far as Bruce was concerned, *she* was over. Inevitable that with the knowledge his love had passed, finding nothing in the future to feed it. You couldn't blame Bruce. But it hurt.

The fact that there might be a message in the envelope, a thing contained

in the container, could have no particular bearing on the issue, since she saw now that either Bruce had overlooked it all along or had confounded the two, the one being for him bound up inextricably with the other.

But how cruel death was to strip you even before he got you!

"Flowers, Jane? Mercy! Two boxes!"

Cursorily she glanced at Bruce's roses—white already—there would be quantities in six months.

"Put them somewhere down-stairs, Jane."

Ungrateful, perhaps, to banish Bruce's flowers when he had been so kind. Kind! What had kindness to do with love? Her love had been spurned.

The very unconsciousness of the act set it beyond question.

"Greetings from Vik and her master."

They were jolly, the clean, shiny, spring-like things.

But why had Jack Herron just now sent her daffodils?

The slender fingers loitered in their arrangement. Nothing to hurry for; nothing ever to hurry for again. How should she put in her time? Cousin Adeline's step padded through the hall, Cousin Adeline setting forth on that ironic linen-hunt. Would nothing bridge this awful loneliness? She had wanted Bruce—how she had wanted him!—and desire had turned to dust at her touch.

No use pretending that last night's scene had left her anything, even her love, quite what it had been. Why, then, not take what she could get—the half-loaf, if not the whole? That was life—wasn't it?—to force you to compromise. Her youth rejected the thought. She might be tired, but she wasn't tired enough to accept Bruce's compassion. From table, book-case, window-ledge, the bowls of daffodils, set in place by Jane under direction, lifted their trumpets to a valiant note. Through the murk of a lowering midwinter morning, the horns of springtime blew their magic heartening.

Grenna Ambury sat up and brushed the curls out of her eyes.

"You lazy thing," she said, "lying in bed till noon!"

When she had dressed, she wrote her notes. Easier all round not to meet Bruce again except casually. Somehow, she would get through the time. In any case, life wasn't going to be long enough for compromise.

SHE hadn't really cared for him. That was what Bruce made of Grenna's note. It explained her hardness of last night, her lack of warmth. You couldn't blame a girl for being upset by such news, but a woman who turned cold when you asked her to marry you, however her mind might be engrossed, didn't love you. He had loved Grenna, but Grenna had not loved him—Bruce reached the conclusion honestly and with chagrin. He failed to note anything significant in his tenses. Grenna's words were right—grateful, if you liked. But any girl could write notes. And as the days passed there were other things, confirmatory evidence, that came to his notice. She saw enough of Herron, didn't she? People were beginning to talk, as they had formerly talked, he was aware, matching his own name with Grenna's.

Miss Ambury knew they were talking. It troubled her. Not the fact—people must talk, if not of one person, then of another. But its implication—was Jack Herron seeing too much of her—enough to build hopes on? She wasn't even sure that he wanted to hope. There was no sentiment in his manner.

And then, one day, the intercourse she had judged so innocent exploded in her hands. Frankly she had asked him the question. Astonishing how it simplified certain matters to know you had less than half a year to live. In the face of that event, squeamishness and false modesty vanished.

"You're not by any chance thinking of falling in love with me, Jack?"

"Do you wish me to?"

"Oh, no. I'm simply trying to play safe all round."

"As a matter of fact, I'm afraid it's too late," he explained.

"Too late?"

"Been too late for a good while."

"And you never told me! Is it some one I know?"

"Some one you know very well."

"Does she live here?"

"She does."

"Then I don't see——"

"See what?"

"How you have all the time to play round with me that you do play."

He glanced at her oddly.

"She doesn't care—that way—for me, Gren."

"Oh, I'm sorry!" Her hand went out to him.

His sinewy brown fingers closed on it.

"Thought you'd understand. And, understanding, you know how it makes me feel to be able to do anything, the least little thing, for her."

"She must be rather a horrid girl."

"Just how do you make that out?"

"Not to care for you."

"It's not so strange, is it?"

"Any nice girl would adore you."

"I think I'd better discount that statement. How about you?"

"We weren't talking about me." Why did men always think they must drag you in? "Don't forget you said I didn't come into this."

"I don't think I said just that, did I? Perhaps you didn't quite grasp my meaning. I said, I believe, that it was too late for me to think of falling in love with you. And it is, Gren, because—well, you see you're the girl I fell in love with, as I say, long ago."

It was then she perceived the innocent-seeming thing had been dynamite. Not that the explosion could hurt her. She was beyond hurt, wasn't she? But Jack was not. She reproached herself. Self-reproach was new to her emotions.

"I wouldn't have had this happen for anything. Where were my eyes?"

"Absorbed with Barnard. Oh, I saw how things were going."

THE pit widened before Miss Ambury's feet. Blind, she accused herself—fatuously, selfishly, criminally blind. And into that depth Jack had stumbled. In grasping at alleviation, she had flung him down in seeking solace for her long, empty days. A fancy, however violently conceived, with no nourishment must prove fleeting; but a fancy fed on the bread of intercourse, on the almost daily presence of the beloved—better, far better that he had never begun, as it was incredible to think that he had not begun, to hope.

"You needn't be sorry because I'm in love with you." His voice pricked the mazes of her self-reproach. "And you needn't feel any responsibility, either. Next to the war, loving you is the biggest thing that ever happened to me."

"But, Jack, you don't understand. I——"

"I'm not asking for anything you can't give me," he insisted. "Just what you've been giving me in these last weeks, bits of your time, attention, your friendship."

"Nevertheless, there is something that I must tell you."

"You needn't tell me anything, Grenna. Don't you suppose I know what you're going to say?"

"You know——"

"I've known ever since Barnard blurted the thing out to me, without names, on the stairs at the Redingtons' dance."

And she had thought herself beyond hurt! Over the girl fell a great blackness, wave on wave, blotting the last light from her firmament, whipping her spirit before it, a hunted thing, twice stripped and shivering. Jack! Jack, too! Pity had driven him into her presence. Compassion had unlocked his lips. Not her "friendship," as he had been pleased to term it, not, primarily, love of her. Wouldn't he have done as much for a hurt dog?

Chivalry! Oh, the dreadful inequality of that vaunted word!

Her stiff lips stumbled.

"It was—good of you."

"Good!" he scoffed. "Don't impugn my motives. I've been selfish—I'll own to that, if you like. But good—never!"

"Selfish? I don't see it. What I do see I can't quite tell you, my friend." With all the force of her will, she held her voice steady. "Haven't you slaved for me, devised ways to take my thoughts, to keep me busy, spent yourself to give me pleasure?"

"Oh, I say!" he growled. "As you put the thing, it takes all the life out. And you're not putting it right, you know. But if you have had any pleasure——"

"I have indeed!" How tasteless to her memory the feast defiled!

"Then, for heavens' sake don't be grateful! I don't want your gratitude."

What was he so hot about?

"Beg pardon, I'm sure, but 'gratitude' 's the last word for you to use. Anything you may have got out of it isn't a circumstance to what I've had."

"To what you have had?" She lifted the words dully.

"Of course"—painstakingly—"I tried to make things as easy as a man could. What fellow wouldn't? But I'm no angel—precious few of us are, Gren—and a man, when he loves wants something—I wanted a little bit of you, really you, to remember—to—to live on all my life after. And I stole it! Under false pretenses I've been stealing it for weeks."

She raised incredulous eyes. Unbelievable, his voice stumbling through those amazing sentences. She told herself she was dreaming.

"Do you mean—there is something that I—I could give you that—that you want, Jack?"

"Rather! Been trying to get my courage up. Didn't want to spill the whole apple-cart. But if you could see your way to the arrangement, it would regularize the situation, and that's to the good, as things go—give me the right to see you through, you know." His face twisted. "Cousin Adeline's a bit of a stickler, but if we were engaged she wouldn't shut the door in my face. And it wouldn't be poaching on any other fellow's preserves, I take it."

He was honest. That lean, ugly face was incredibly honest.

"But I—oh, I wish I did!—I don't love you."

"I know that. But you like having me round, don't you?"

"Haven't I made it sufficiently plain?"

"That's all right, then. I won't bother you. And I tell you I'm not asking for anything you can't give. Just your friendship, and that you'll use me to the limit. There won't ever be any other woman for me, my dear. And for you it makes the thing look a bit different—doesn't it?—knowing that it isn't for life."

"It would hurt you too much," she said gently.

"Sometimes it hurts worse not to be hurt. That's my affair, isn't it? I wouldn't ask if there were any other man you'd rather have. Is there, Gren?"

"No man I would take, Jack."

COUSIN ADELINE met the announcement of the engagement complacently, though she confessed to some surprise at the identity of the man.

"It's a sure sign, my dear, when a girl says she never intends to marry, that there's something immediate in the wind. But I did think it would be that handsome Bruce Barnard. You saw a good deal of him, Grenna."

"At one time and another, I've seen a good deal of a number of men, Cousin Adeline."

"I expect you've been a sad flirt. Jack will have to keep his eye on you."

"It's what he intends to do, I infer."

"And it isn't, of course," said Cousin Adeline, "as though he didn't have money. After all, I'll give you credit for more sense than I thought you had."

"You aren't implying, I hope, that I've engaged myself to Jack's fortune."

"How you do take one up! I imply nothing. But he certainly didn't capture you with his beauty. And every one could see what was between you and Bruce Barnard. You're planning to reopen the old Herron house, of course."

"We're not making any plans yet."

"It would be a crime to keep that place closed, Grenna. Do it over—but you will enjoy that. And as mistress of such an establishment—I wonder whether that linen I bought was quite good enough."

"There is probably plenty of Herron linen. Don't get any more, Cousin Adeline."

"I trust," said the lady, "I know what is proper for an Ambury to bring to her husband. When you tell me the date——"

"The date," said the girl, "hasn't been spoken of."

"You're not contemplating a long engagement? Long engagements, Grenna——"

"Only a few months"—hastily.

The lorgnette dropped in the silken lap.

"That is better, my dear. And if you will pardon my speaking plainly, since you *have* made up your mind, don't dally. I've never quite understood you, Grenna. I don't understand you now. I confess I'd never dared hope you would have prudence enough to take a man like Jack Herron, but since you have chosen him, *take him* and be done with it."

So that was what people were saying. Gossip was stripping Jack over the teacups, at the clubs, saying that in getting Grenna Ambury he had captured an empty shell. The piquant chin lifted. Couldn't she lay

that wraith, possess Jack, in their world's eyes, of the substance? Cousin Adeline's garrulity could be trusted. But she had never before bared her soul to Cousin Adeline.

"Glad I'm not slopping over. I never, you know, liked sloppy people." She rose to her feet lightly, straightened a book, touched a flower in her passage toward the door, paused before the lady with a clear, deliberate look. The smiling mask slipped for a moment.

"Cousin Adeline," she said quietly, "in my wildest imaginings, I never dreamed a man like Jack Herron."

GRENNA AMBURY was not well. No one knew the exact nature of her indisposition. Tired out—too hot a pace—the season's fag. There were tongues that without hesitation assigned a subtler cause. You couldn't play fast and loose with your heart as Grenna had played and not pay for it. For Grenna, despite her callous taking-on of Jack Herron, had a heart. Didn't her present illness prove it? Sympathy sided with the men. Barnard, according to Miss Ambury's world, had come out of the affair best, had behaved, in fact, better than might have been expected. He, at least, had withstood the temptation to console himself. Jean Chamberlain wouldn't get him—not this year. And Herron, of course, was in luck, if you called it luck. Though when a girl played the thing too fast, you questioned the value of what the man who got her was getting. Herron doubtless knew what he was doing. The women said it with their tongues in their cheeks, though there was an inclination in certain quarters to give credence to the rumor that Mrs. Adeline Ambury had declared Grenna's passion for her *fiancé* genuine. Grenna never had been of the sort normally given to wearing her heart on her sleeve. If Mrs. Adeline Ambury *had* said that— She hadn't brains enough for duplicity. But it was hard to forget how Grenna had glowed in Barnard's presence. There you faced the dilemma. In the main, the men held that Herron was lucky.

"How is she, Herron?"

"Sorry, old chap. Nothing serious, I hope."

"Golly! I'll bet it *is* serious. Did you get his face?"

For Herron couldn't control his face, couldn't keep the lines from graving it, the passion of his suffering from thinning and stamping it. Pain that racked Grenna tore at him also. Beyond nature that his body go scatheless.

And now understanding began to shadow the man and his dog as they tramped the streets. Eyes followed them with curious, shocked sympathy. Grenna Ambury wasn't going to get well. Goldsmith had been there. You didn't call Goldsmith for nothing. Goldsmith had been there more than once. There had been a consultation. But Grenna Ambury—*Grenna!*

Grenna lay oblivious, engrossed. Energetically she was working. With all the skill, all the genuine feeling, all the art at her command she was building a memory. She moved to it under a high, creative enthusiasm. If Jack wanted a memory, he should have one, the best she could make for him, something quite out of the ordinary, as worthy as she could fashion of the shrine he had built. She engaged a maid, the cleverest to be found—no virtue in looking more unpleasant than need be—and a nurse for "off hours." In the main, she tried to keep the off hours to the two of them, but she never made the mistake of shutting him out entirely. Subtly she understood that utterly to withhold from him her pain, could she have done so, would have been to rob him.

She was very busy, so busy it left her scant time or interest for dwelling on finality. After all, that would have to take care of itself, since obviously what happened, if anything, after the event was beyond her manipulation. She couldn't quite see herself ending completely, going out like a snuffed candle. Neither did she see anything else clearly—except Jack. It was he who stood off Cousin Adeline's thick compassion, he who matched or mastered her moods with his, he who must needs now and then be comforted. If it would prove any solace to him to pour out his money like water on metropolitan specialists, he should do it.

But Grenna had no illusions. Yet never had she been more interested in life. And she was happy, for she had an absorbing occupation. Had she been his wife, she would not have made him so utterly her world. Odd, when consummation was set definitely

beyond your reach, how, perhaps as a sort of compensation, it freed you to more intimate understanding. Knowing a man as well as she now knew Jack Herron was almost, Miss Ambury thought whimsically, worth dying for. All the confusing tremors of the flesh, its thrills and throbs, the hectic fever of her feeling for Bruce, had fallen away and left this certainty of interdependence, this clear trust that held between her and Jack.

For all that, illogically perhaps, she was glad Jean Chamberlain hadn't cut her out. Angels might be indifferent to such mundane affairs, but Miss Ambury knew herself no angel yet. She couldn't have contemplated Bruce's marriage, she thought, with an even pulse. Luckily there was for her no question of choice. If it had been a matter of life—but it was not of life. Her soul loved Jack. Clear, serene the bond, spirit to spirit, and strong as though it might hold between the worlds. She wondered—would it hold?

"The doctors, Cousin Adeline? Oh, yes; that superspecialist Jack insisted on importing. They make a lot of fuss over ushering me off this planet. I'm not looking for any such flourish of trumpets on my entrance to another. Tell Jane to bring them up."

A MONTH later, Miss Ambury discovered that she had not changed worlds. Earth, with its choices, still remained her planet. The doctors told her that she would recover.

Her initial sensation was one of loss. Something she had grown used to thinking of had disappeared. Like a room with its furniture removed, time had widened immeasurably. There was no discernible end to it.

At first she hardly knew what to do with so much time. The reprieve, though joyous, required readjustment of her whole outlook. A curtain that had shut down directly in front of her was rolling up, a date that had hard pressed her was indefinitely postponed. She must locate herself once more in a normal world, find her bearings.

The illusion of roominess persisted until Herron came. He was jubilant, like a boy given a holiday.

"I can't credit it," said Grenna.

"I can't do anything else. It's too good *not* to be true. You've given Goldsmith the shock of his life, Gren. Told me he wouldn't have believed it possible."

"Goldsmith's going to have me a semi-invalid."

"Not the New York man. He says you've got the resilience of the ages. And you haven't worried. That's helped."

"I'd not like to be tied down to a chair all my life, Jack."

"I'll not quarrel over the terms—so they aren't too hard for you—if I can keep you."

"A chronic invalid?"

"That looks like heaven to me if I can take care of you. So I've got you, it's all I ask."

The happiness in his face precluded doubt. But it wasn't any life for a man. And even supposing the New York man proved right, where, after all, did Jack come out? Where did she come out? She had been trapped, hadn't she? Marriage had never entered into their scheme. She hadn't thought of loving Jack that way, hadn't raised the question, even in her mind, of wishing to marry him. But if she didn't love Jack in all the kinds of ways possible here and now, he wouldn't be getting his due. And his due, at whatever cost, Jack must have—or nothing. She couldn't contemplate him forced to put up with less than other men. To acquiesce in such a thing was to rob him. Yet the fact that he took their marriage so for granted implied misunderstanding. Couldn't he see that the bottom had dropped out of their engagement, the premise on which they had built? There was Bruce—she corrected herself—there *had been* Bruce. Where was Bruce now? Unthinkable in any case to marry Jack simply because a doctor's mistaken verdict had trapped her into a false position. Some day, looking back in cold blood, he might see it so. And how did she know what she had for any man when, her mind in turmoil, she could feel only the steel jaws of circumstance that ensnared her?

"It's a pretty good world, Gren." He kissed her. It hadn't been his habit to kiss her. He did it now as naturally as he had assumed their marriage. "You're tired. I'll take myself off till to-morrow."

In the morning she knew what she had to do. But it was hard. She hadn't dreamed it would be so hard. And Jack couldn't

Soft hands, reaching from behind, imprisoned his eyes. "Guess who!" Had he dreamed the voice?

understand. She had to be brutally frank for him to see her drift.

"We didn't count on my getting well, you know. And you said—don't you remember?—that our engagement wasn't for life."

"Thank heaven, that's over! It's for life now all right."

"I know you feel so."

"Don't you?"

"I don't know, Jack. I don't know what I feel. I'm in a trap."

"A trap? Do you mean you want to be free? Say it out, Grenna."

"I'd like to start over."

"We can't do that. But I can give you your freedom." She wished his eyes didn't look so amazed, so hurt. "Don't you love me, Grenna?"

"If I married you now," she said, "after a while you'd wonder whether it might have been from gratitude. And I—perhaps I should wonder, too. I can't let any one, not even myself, marry out of gratitude."

"It hasn't meant much to you." He walked to the window and stood unseeing, staring out.

"It wasn't supposed to mean that, was it?"

"It wasn't in the bond. You're right, there. You're a stickler for the bond, Grenna."

"It needn't make any difference with our friendship," she pleaded.

He turned to her almost roughly.

"You don't suppose I can keep on coming here—seeing you—as things are, do you? If it's over, it's over."

"You mean you'll stop loving me?"

"No such luck! Hold on—I didn't put that right. You've knocked me out, you know. I didn't expect it. But it's beyond me to stop loving you. You know that, don't you?"

MISS AMBURY'S conduct was shameless; her world held no two opinions. When a man as good as plucked you out of the jaws of death, you owed him something. Goldsmith undoubtedly knew his business, but beyond a certain point what did the best of men do but chance it? Goldsmith had missed; the metropolitan specialist had guessed right. And Herron was responsible for the New York man; it was Herron's insistence and Herron's money—a pretty penny, if it was a cent. And Grenna Ambury, since she got on her feet, was taking up again with Bruce Barnard. Hadn't she twice been seen driving with him? There was gratitude for you! Herron never went to the house now. He was taking it hard. You could tell it by his face. Where was justice in this world? A conscienceless flirt like Grenna Ambury was just the sort to get well when many a better girl perished.

What was said made little difference to Miss Ambury. She never had steered a path by babbling tongues; less than ever now could talk veer her. She had found out what she wanted to know. There existed only one person in the world whose understanding of her course was imperative.

"Drop me here, Bruce," she said. "Isn't that Jean Chamberlain at the corner? I happen to know she is spending the night at Green Acres. They'll send in for her, of course, if somebody doesn't drive her out. Thanks for the spin. Good luck!"

In the outer office, she dispensed cursorily with the services of the curious stenographer.

"Is Mr. Herron alone, Miss Blair? Don't trouble to announce me. I'll go in."

Herron, affecting a business he had no heart for—would he ever feel keenly again?—heard the door open. Miss Blair with letters to sign. For weeks he had done nothing more thrilling than sign Miss Blair's letters.

"You're through early," he said, not looking up.

Soft hands, reaching from behind, imprisoned his eyes. A child's game. He sat quite still. Was he going daffy? It couldn't, of course, be true. But not for worlds would he break the illusion.

"Guess who!"

Had he dreamed the voice? His hands lifted to the firm supple wrists. They were real enough.

"Grenna!"

"If you ask me, I'll sit down," she said. "I'm not very good yet at standing up long." Rounding his chair, the little figure brought into view a face warm, blushing, radiant. 'I couldn't let you get me from a trap, Jack. I had to make sure there was nobody in this world—as well as any other—except you."

If You Enjoy Adventure, You'll Find It Here

The Witch *of* Gondar

Sevier Faces the Decision of the Momentous Issue That Brought Him to Abyssinia and, That Settled, He Embarks on an Adventure Still More Wonderful

By William Ashley Anderson

Illustration by J. M. Clement

Begin this serial with any instalment. The story is here up to this issue.

THE beginning of the battle brought to Sevier relief from the almost intolerable nervous strain of the period of waiting and suspense. Now, indeed, he faced the decision of the issue that had hung in the balance ever since he had set out from Aden to play his part in inuring Africa and the Allies from the almost incalculable results of a holy war involving the great power of Abyssinia.

Now intrigue was done; the issue lay with sword and gun in the clash of armies. The battle of wits was over; everything now depended on the outcome of the fight.

Sevier had done his part. The woman, Miriam, who had sought to betray him in Aden before he knew her as the Witch of Gondar, the fanatical inspirer of the *jehad*, had come within a moment of causing his death two nights before; she was a prisoner now—his prisoner—in Addis Abeba. No longer could she influence men.

But all about him was the evidence of her accomplishment. It was owing to her that the Negus Mikael had brought down this frantic horde of warriors from the north, which the army of Ras Taffari, the Abyssinian regent, was now opposing almost within sight of the capital itself.

If Mikael won! But Sevier banished the thought, with its implications of massacre, of the green flag of the Prophet raised again, as the Mahdi had raised it, to threaten the peace of all of northern Africa. *His* side must win. They knew the Negus Mikael's plans; the mysterious French agent had warned them.

One thought still disturbed Sevier. The Witch of Gondar was caught—true. If anything happened to him, the old eunuch, Maukara—the incorruptible power behind the Abyssinian throne—would deal with her. But her ally, the Arab hunchback, had escaped. He laughed bitterly. Arab! Cohusac—a renegade Frenchman, a traitor! His friend in Aden—his friend, whom he had trusted, whom he had pitied because of his affliction! The friend who had betrayed him into the trap laid by Miriam, the witch! No wonder they had known that he was not the American trader the world believed him to be but the agent of Great Britain!

He could feel now about his throat the noose of the rope with which Miriam had bidden her Arabs hang him. How she must have laughed at the strange passion she had evoked in him—that fantastic love that had weakened him, made him, almost, her tool!

But Miriam mattered no longer. Here

was battle surging about him. Drums, rolling, roaring; the crash of firing, the flight of spears. He was, with Schiedel, who had forgotten his German father, and, remembering his Abyssinian mother, had joined Sevier, close to Ras Taffari, the regent, who, with his body-guard, was behind the battle.

The guard thinned out as couriers rode away, and gradually Sevier realized that his companions were looking eastward, as though the greatest danger threatened from that quarter.

Messengers arrived from that direction, wheezing for breath, spitting cotton, bloody, haggard with fatigue. Small groups of utterly spent warriors dribbled past them. Suddenly an eddy of dark figures like swirling smoke in the night, close at hand, grunting, shrieking, gasping, sent a shock through Sevier. Instantly he felt the impulse to get into action—to strike.

A body of horsemen, whirling past, fell upon the group, slashing and lunging, and in the dark the phantom mêlée seemed to dissolve into the night. The confusion and tumult swelled about them. It seemed as though the air were growing warm with conflict and humid with blood. In the dark he could now see men struggling in the wet grass, stabbing, slashing, giving up the ghost in long-drawn, wheezing sighs or sudden, frightened grunts.

A figure, staggering out of the shadows, seized Ras Taffari's stirrup. Instantly horses swirled about the regent. A dozen lances darted toward the rash warrior, but he was already cut to pieces. Falling, he cried faintly:

"*Allah magidl Deen Mohammed! Deen Mohammed!*"

The words sent a shock through the body-guard, for they seemed to prove that the brave Haile Georgios, in spite of all his terrible efforts, was being overcome.

The left flank, having been heavily reenforced, seemed for the present to be holding its own, and for one sickening instant it appeared possible that the *negus* had tricked them after all by throwing his strength on the correspondingly weakened flank commanded by Ras Haile Georgios.

The conflict now eddied about them. The sky began to gray in the east. Large milling masses could be dimly discerned struggling near the center.

The right flank, fighting with frenzied desperation, was bending back almost at a right angle to the front, and it seemed likely that at any moment Ras Omar's horsemen would come circling in the rear.

AT THIS anxious and critical moment the appalling fact became apparent that the Negus Mikael's frontal attack was succeeding.

Ras Tadela, his lieutenant, advancing straight against the Shoans' front with the bulk of the invading forces, had thrown himself with such determination upon the camp of Ras Demissie that the shock and impetus of the attack had sent the minister of War, acting as commander-in-chief, reeling back.

The success of this whirlwind assault depended upon the complete overthrow and virtual annihilation of about fifty thousand men by a force of thirty-five thousand fighting hand-to-hand. And yet it was succeeding!

As this terrible realization swept Ras Taffari, it seemed too late to avert disaster. Nevertheless, he immediately divided his supports, sending some slight succor to Ras Haile Georgios, and throwing the remainder of his force straight into action in the center. Every last warrior was now engaged.

Ras Demissie's shattered warriors, squatting in the grass, were gasping and wheezing for breath before throwing themselves into the struggle once more.

At this moment their indomitable leader conceived the idea of occupying a small hill that lay forward of the base of the right flank and would have been the key to the position in a European conflict. The *shums* of this *ras*, inspired by their wounded but resourceful chieftain, gathered several *mitrailleuses* with a small force of unwounded warriors and attempted the diversion.

The movement was made almost by instinct, swiftly and with determination, and before Sevier and Schiedel were aware of what was happening, they were caught and swept forward.

In that rush Sevier lost his last tremor of nervousness and fought with mob-mad ferocity.

The company forced its way through seething masses, bristling with razor-edged

steel and hailed upon with bullets, avoiding conflict as much as possible, but drawn irresistibly into a senseless confusion of destruction, where Sevier, to preserve himself, struck at any man that faced him.

Struggling mobs, shrieking for help from Christ, the saints and Mohammed, stabbed, slashed, struggled and blazed pointblank into each other's faces, or went down whimpering or sighing plaintive prayers as their souls slipped forth. The air was foul and humid with the smell of blood and sweating horses and men.

Ras Demissie, refusing to yield, involved in a churning crowd, over which spears and simitars flashed, already wounded, was again knocked from his horse. He was captured and retaken twice, yet fought on, frothing at the mouth. In a flash of rifle-fire Sevier caught a glimpse of Ras Apte Georgios, the minister of War, as he flung away his rifle and hurled his great bulk upon the enemy with a naked simitar.

Sevier could never recall any of the phases of the fight for the hill. For him, it was like a drowning man struggling through dark depths to escape from under a great soaked sail. They lost their horses at the very beginning of the struggle. Both Sevier and Schiedel were struck and beaten, the former cut in the left forearm, and the latter grazed with a lance on the shoulder.

Twice the little force reached the hill, only to find that Ras Tadela's warriors had also determined upon its possession. Twice they were thrown down again. The dead littered the ground. The grass was wet and slippery with blood. Their throats seemed powdered with resin. Their muscles fluttered with fatigue. The smell of the humid atmosphere and exhaustion filled them with nausea. Striking to blind panic-fury, they succeeded at last in setting up a gun just as the pale dawn began to cut horizontally across the blood-and-dew-drenched fields. By eight o'clock they had established themselves.

No great advantage had been gained by the maneuver.

The combatants were now so closely engaged at all points that it was impossible to direct fire into the struggling masses. Ras Demissie's possession of the hill, nevertheless, gave a moral support to Ras Haile Georgios's right wing and a corresponding sense of insecurity to his assailants that enabled his warriors to hold on while assistance came up from other parts of the field.

Sevier, however, found himself in a position of advantage. From the slight eminence upon which he was placed, he was able at last to obtain a just idea of the progress of events. Almost in a state of exhaustion, squatting with his head between his knees, he realized, nevertheless, that his position was as perilous as ever, and lifted his head from time to time to study the field as his breath and strength gradually came back to him.

WITH increasing daylight it seemed as though the struggle had become even fiercer. It was now impossible for either side to withdraw. Body to body, hacking and stabbing, with hot rifles squibbing in the crowds, the warriors struggled in thinning masses.

Scattered across the broad field, the extended armies appeared to resolve themselves into detached groups. The dead, lying in inert clumps, had the appearance in the distance of little bunches of mushrooms sprung up overnight, their whiteness stained with pink and splashed with mud. Horses, slimy with blood and froth, heaved their masters up the gentle slopes, their parched lungs wheezing, and lunged into the nearest turmoil. Footmen, tearing at each others' throats, rolled over and over in the crushed grass.

There was no doubt, however, that the army of the *negus* had gained the ascendency.

Despite the confusion, whole companies, apparently moved by the same unvoiced impulse that seems to govern *siafu*, the fighting ants, would suddenly detach themselves, wheel to a point of weakness and fling their weight against the staggering Shoans. The right flank had almost been rolled up.

The line presented the appearance of a great comma about which a parenthesis is being drawn, the warriors in the Shoans' center finding it impossible to withdraw sufficiently to form a new extension of the right flank. It seemed that complete disaster to this flank was being averted only by the desperate courage of small groups of horsemen and meager lines of men on foot against whom the Mussulmans pressed with cries of: "*Deen Mohammed! Allah*

Llallahi!" while the Shoans, with flaming throats, sustained themselves to the end, hoarsely screaming: "St. Michael! St. George! Christ with us! Death to the infidel!"

Throughout the tumult, the great-bellied drums never ceased to snarl and roar, and the deep-throated trumpets bellowed like bulls.

AS SEVIER followed the line anxiously westward, all at once he received the startling impression that in that quarter the left flank was actually swaying forward. At first he hesitated to accept the impression. The undulations of the terrain, the smoke of conflict and the dust raised by men and horses along the bare trails made it difficult to judge exactly. Following the circuit of the horizon to the northward, he discovered upon a slight eminence a body of horsemen, probably a hundred in all, which seemed at first thought to be some sort of reserve.

All at once it flashed upon him that this was the body-guard of the *negus* himself.

In an instant he made out the grim commander-in-chief, the Negus Mikael, seated upon his famous white horse, Roll Them Up, overlooking a field which at that moment seemed to promise him the glory of an empire greater than even his ambitious mind could then conceive.

The day was his.

Far to the westward, however, beyond the tip of the Shoans' left wing, and on a line northward and well behind the forces of the invaders, a high, puffy cloud of dust was becoming visible. Sevier's attention was drawn to it by the peculiar conduct of the Negus Mikael's body-guard.

The entire troop had all at once lost interest in the victorious field below them and were concentrating their attention upon this new point of interest. The *negus* made a gesture, and the body-guard, with the commander-in-chief leading, began to move slowly and hesitatingly toward the west. Couriers detached themselves, their horses bounding like startled antelopes.

They had not gone far, however, when they brought their mounts up to a plunging halt.

An agitated flurry seemed to shake the body-guard.

They began to churn about the *negus*. Several of his warriors laid hands upon Roll Them Up, as though urging their leader away. Many wheeled their horses and pirouetted uncertainly. The *negus* sat Roll Them Up, apparently lost in thought, as immobile as a statue.

Sevier could now see, streaming rapidly over the hills and pouring like a flood down upon the *negus* and his body-guard, a long column of horsemen.

His heart began pounding suffocatingly. Until this moment the tumult and confusion of battle, the stress of actual struggle and the continual imminence of violent death had kept his thoughts upon his immediate surroundings. For one horrible moment he was in doubt whether he saw in that charging column salvation or complete destruction to the Shoan army—and death to himself.

The excitement gave Sevier new life. He leaped to his feet, shouting. Schiedel and those about him also sprang up and, following his direction, gazed westward.

The Negus Mikael and his horse seemed frozen into marble and bronze. All at once, however, when the approaching horsemen had come near enough to be individually recognizable, Roll Them Up leaped forward.

Alone—a lost emperor spurning the shame of surrender—the *negus* charged at the advancing host, emptying his revolver at the leader. An instant later he was engulfed by the wave of horsemen, and the remnants of his body-guard, scattered like leaves, were flying for their lives.

It seemed as though the entire field instantly became aware of the capture of the *negus*. The roaring of the drums, the vibrant blare of the trumpets could not drown the great shout that swept like a shrieking, gasping wind across the field.

Ras Omar's Mussulmans, recoiling at last from Haile Georgios's thin line like a wave against the edging of a black reef, receded like scattered spume and streaked away to the northward.

As for the rest of that invading host, almost on the pinnacle of victory a moment before, now taken in rear by a large, fresh force of the enemy and hopelessly surrounded, their spirit of victory flickered out. The weary, despairing warriors streamed aimlessly across the field, though the victims continued to fall beneath the swords of the conquerors.

Ras Apte Georgios had indeed perfected the plan of a flank attack, for Ras Kassa, mobilizing to the westward at a point beyond the ranging of the invaders' scouts, had appeared on time with seven thousand horsemen who had cut behind the unsupported army of invaders. By a curious trick of fate, the *negus* himself had become the first prisoner.

There was an extraordinary circumstance connected with this maneuver that Sevier learned as he made his way back with Schiedel to rejoin Ras Taffari's *cortège*. It appeared that Ras Gebri-Christos, commanding the *negus's* left wing, had not pressed the attack—had appeared to weaken, in fact, at the critical moment, and upon the appearance of Ras Kassa's force joined with him and turned back upon his leader.

It was the appearance of his son-in-law leading the flanking host that infuriated the *negus* and sent him charging blindly against the head of the column, determined, if all else were lost, at least to wreak vengeance upon the traitor.

An insignificant Arab hunchback knocked him from his horse with a staff!

A moment later this Arab lay alone on the field, crushed beneath horses' hoofs, dying.

WHEN the disorder of battle was gradually giving place to the melancholy dreariness of a stricken field, the vanquished who were able to escape having already fled while their brothers remained to be slain or taken into rough captivity, and the victors spread about plundering the fallen for trophies or leaving the battlefield to return with victory to their homes, Sevier and Schiedel, mounted on horses which they had captured as they grazed beside their dead masters, slowly crossed the field to the spot where the *negus* had been captured.

They made a détour to the northward to avoid the scenes of carnage which could not escape their haggard eyes. Weary with the night's struggle, their spirits grown apathetic, their minds torpid after the long strain of anxiety, they paid little attention to the field of victory, to the figures that threaded their way among the litter of slain or to the clear dome of blue above them mottled with circling birds. Even their thoughts had become vague and shallow.

A low, weak cry that reached their ears therefore hardly roused them from their mood of listlessness. Shrieks and grunts and the painful sighs of dying men already filled them.

Sevier looked dully aside and his gaze fell upon—the figure of Cohusac propped against a tuft of grass, his head on his shoulder, turbanless, his stained and dusty robe torn from his shrunken chest.

Sevier halted his horse and stared for an instant, a sensation of numbness like a slow chill creeping over him, his eyes filled with an expression of cruel satisfaction.

Dismounting, he walked slowly over to the prostrate figure, with Schiedel and the attendant looking after him with dull interest. The day before, he would gladly have seized that small body in his hands and crushed it.

The treachery of the miserable little creature had spread so far, had threatened so much, had caused, in fact, so great an amount of actual suffering and destruction that the bare thought of him had roused the same sense of violent revulsion that a black *mamba* sinuously swaying above the fragrant grasses of the veld might have roused—an instinctive impulse to strike, to strike instantly and beat down with the utmost violence, to crush underfoot until not a flicker of life remained.

His cold fury at the thought of Cohusac had seemed implacable.

During the struggle of the night, however, when death, like the figure in a nightmare, breathed against his throat, and now, with blood-stained humans below him like brown, ill-smelling ants profaning with petty violence the grandeur that overshadowed them, the last trace of arrogance had been purged from him. Scanning the field with a slightly melancholic cynicism, he seemed to understand better the puniness of human judgment. To what high purpose would victory lead?

He saw that extinction in itself meant nothing more than the sudden exhaustion of breath. But death with shame and dishonor, in agony, on a stricken field, abandoned, without the consolation of faith—that, he felt, as he looked down at Cohusac with pity beginning to swell up in his heart, was really hard.

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Bending forward awkwardly, he touched the sagging head and turned the face up to his gaze, muttering half aloud,

"The poor, miserable little blighter!"

The next instant he started back with an exclamation; for Cohusac's eyelids lifted slowly as though weights were hung to them. As the darkening vision enabled him to recognize the American, a faint, almost imperceptible smile passed like a reflection of light over his sallow countenance, and Cohusac murmured, so that Sevier faintly caught the words:

"It's Sevier! The good—God—is humorous—and—good——"

He made a slight effort to continue, but the head, released from Sevier's sustaining hand, sagged suddenly, and only a froth of blood came bubbling to the lips; while Sevier, astounded, touched insensibly by the assurance in the dying man's tone and the glimmer of happiness that had passed over his countenance at the sight of his old friend, stood up very straight and passed the back of his hand across his lips with a gesture that indicated uncertainty and unhappiness.

Schiedel, not recognizing in the huddled figure of the dead man the active Arab whom Sevier had vainly pursued on the night of his capture, and unaware of the words that had passed between them with Cohusac's last breath, asked in an expressionless voice:

"What's up? Who is he?"

"He's dead," said Sevier dully, and instantly recalled the night when the two had sung, out of homesick hearts, of France and hopeless love.

"Well?" exclaimed Schiedel, shrugging his shoulder slightly.

But Sevier, actuated by an impulse, the secret springs of which he could not analyze, refused to abandon the remains. He would not leave the body on that merciless field.

Wrapping a cloak about it, therefore, they placed it upon the attendant's horse and set out for Addis Abeba.

At sunset they reached Entoto, which surmounts the hill to the north of the capital, whence they could overlook the lower hills of the scattered town already drenched in the shadows of approaching night. There was a church here, and to the priests Sevier confided Cohusac's remains, which, upon Schiedel's representations, were accorded all the respect due a distinguished *ras*.

News of the victory had already reached the anxious capital. From the distance the two men, aching with fatigue, could hear the thin snap of rifles and the hammering salvo of guns from the Guebi, announcing the victory to the populace.

Touched with the melancholy of the hour, Sevier halted his horse for a moment and stared down and across the darkening vale. Weary horsemen were moving across it in single file, so slowly that their progress could hardly be noted.

The calmness of the evening seemed to belie the din and horror of the night before; and the American found his sardonic thoughts gradually softening as they turned back to other memories. He thought of Miss Whittington; of El Fetnah, his "prisoner," waiting for him, and, last of all, by an association of ideas, of the Dedjatch Maukara, watching in silence, "like a black spider," the course of the events with which he moved.

Taking a deep, tremulous breath of the scented night air, he faced the edge of the slope and began moodily the long, racking scramble down into the town.

IT WAS late in the morning when Sevier wakened after a profound sleep of almost complete exhaustion. Before proceeding to dress, shivering with the chill of the dark room, he immediately sat down and wrote two letters.

The first of these supplemented a note he had despatched to the French legation upon his arrival the night before, in which he had laconically reported bringing back the remains of the Frenchman, Cohusac, killed on the field at Silti, and requested that the remains be taken to the legation quarters for burial. The second was to the British legation, with a brief report on the results of the battle.

These duties having been fulfilled, he dressed at leisure, ate a refreshing luncheon, and strolled out into the garden aglow with color and humming with the insect activity that gives life to summer days.

Sevier felt revivified. The blood poured smoothly through his veins. His eyes sparkled. He felt light, strong and eager, experiencing an ill-restrained desire for movement. With a passing pang he thought

of Cohusac. Then his mind turned to El Fetnah—and bounded at the thought of her. He recalled Maukara's threat and his own hastily spoken words to Whitcomb, declaring indifference to the woman's fate.

ON THE impulse of the moment he determined to proceed immediately to the French legation. Hastening back to the hotel, he found Schiedel still in bed. The proprietor, bubbling with gossip, handed him a note that had been delivered that morning from Deschenel, who had again returned from Djibouti, the railway line having been reopened.

Sevier ordered his horse and rode rapidly through the stirring town, alive and seething with warriors still streaming in from the battle-field, to Deschenel's cottage.

He found the political director at home, and about to ride out to the French legation himself. After exchanging the heartiest greetings and mutual congratulations, Sevier turned about and rode with him.

He felt a certain unhappy reticence about Cohusac's fate that prevented him from bringing up the subject until they reached the legation. But with El Fetnah he was more at ease. He told the whole story with a fierce garrulity that kept Deschenel fairly silent until the end, when the Frenchman declared solemnly,

"There are things you don't know about that woman, *m'sieu.*"

"Of that there's not the slightest doubt," said Sevier. "But I know enough. I believe she ought to be hanged; though I'll tell you frankly the thought of it is horrible to me."

"She will certainly hang if Maukara lays hands on her."

"That's what I'm afraid of. She's safe, though, so long as she is kept within the sanctuary of the legation."

"Has it occurred to you, *m'sieu*, that there may be excellent political reasons why Castigny should not wish to give her sanctuary?"

Sevier's lips tightened, and a moment later he urged his horse to a faster pace.

"On the other hand," continued the political director, with a slow smile, "I have heard remarkable things about her—that, though she is a fanatic, she is a fanatic of a different sort, and there is much in her that is admirable. My agents have been gathering information for me, you see, and the reports from all places where she has been are extraordinary. For one thing, she seems to have ideals."

"Yes? You should have heard the beautiful way in which she said, 'Strangle the obscene dog!'—and the charming manner with which she observed her servants carrying out her tender request——"

"But what, then, is the foundation of the rumor that she saved your life?" asked Deschenel, with surprise.

"What!" cried Sevier incredulously. "Saved my life? She flung herself upon me with a jambeer and would have cut my throat."

"*Tiens!*" exclaimed Deschenel, with a touch of exasperation. "Have you decided for yourself who it was cut the rope from your neck?"

"Not she!" cried Sevier sharply, pulling up his horse.

"It was none other, *m'sieu.*"

For a moment the two looked at each other in silence, Sevier with uncomprehending amazement, the phlegmatic political director with the dawning conviction that the American was in almost total ignorance of the concluding events of that night's adventure.

"It was none other," the Frenchman repeated. "I have been told she threw everything away to save you. Some of her bodyguard had recognized you, you know. There was no escape. Death in some form was certain. A wink of her eye, and your head would have flown. It would have been madness for her to order them to turn you loose, since, of course, they would immediately have suspected her. On the other hand, if she had shown weakness or hesitancy, they would have taken the matter into their own hands and finished you off themselves. The only possible chance of saving you, then, was to make a pretense at hanging you——"

"But it's absurd!" said Sevier in a low, incredulous voice. "The whole thing's absolutely absurd! Why, in God's world, should she have wanted to save *me?*"

"Why? Who knows? A woman's ambition is different from a man's. Just when success is before her, she is likely to throw it away for what we would consider no reason at all, *m'sieu.*"

As he made this observation, Deschenel turned his eyes up to the clear blue sky with a faintly ironical smile that caused a flush

to mount to Sevier's face. As the implication of the words sank in, he dared not venture a reply. They continued, therefore, in an awkward silence that seemed charged with inexpressible ideas until they approached the hedged lane that led to the pretty little cottage where the French minister and his wife made their home.

A funeral *cortège* was issuing from the lane.

The legation guard had turned out, and Monsieur and Madame Castigny, in mourning, were walking on foot by the coffin. Deschenel and Sevier, startled and perplexed, removed their topis and dismounted. Madame Castigny smiled faintly but did not pause. Monsieur Castigny came forward with a solemn countenance and shook hands gravely.

"*M'sieu,*" he said, retaining Sevier's hand, "I can, at least, congratulate *you.* I do so with all my heart. But you will understand it is a melancholy victory for us. This sort of an end is empty glory for such a boy."

"Yes," said Sevier quietly, understanding, as he thought, the delicate sentiment of the Frenchman.

"Nevertheless, I told you the truth. It is exactly what he anticipated and wished for. He is dead. That is true. But he has added something to the glory of France, eh? All that he planned was realized in the end. He served his country excellently well, and died at last on the battle-field."

"Why, this, then, is your agent?" murmured Sevier, surprised, having believed the remains were those of his traitorous friend. "That is truly very sad, *m'sieu.*"

"Certainly it is our agent. It is Cohusac."

"Cohusac?"

"Certainly," repeated Castigny, with surprised emphasis. "Hillot de Cohusac—the very best of our young diplomatists—one who would adventure anything—a youth of genius, with a touch, I expect, of divine madness——"

THEN the truth burst upon Sevier. A feeling of nausea crept through him. Memories rushed in like a torrent upon him, and only a strong effort prevented him from leaning weakly against his saddle and bursting into tears of shame and contrition and an agony of sorrow.

He saw with sharpened vision the beauty that had elevated the blithe, reckless spirit. He remembered the songs and laughter that had sprung so naturally to Cohusac's lips—the musical voice that spoke so lovingly of France. Above all, he recalled the moods of wistfulness when he seemed to be dreaming of longings he could never express.

He felt all at once that he could have borne to see a thousand souls extinguished with hardly a passing qualm, while now the extinction of this joyous, courageous youth filled him with a sense of infinite pathos.

Staring with grim wistfulness after the *cortège,* he seemed to hear again echoes of the voice of his old friend, filled with melancholy irony:

"Oh, qui me rendra mon Hélène,
Et la montagne, et la grand chêne?
. . . . . .
Mon pays sera mes amours
Toujours!" . . . .

The remains were placed in a grave by a clump of juniper trees, whence, facing westward, a broad view of the vale and the distant hills opened before them, rousing sentiments of beauty and tranquillity. As the coffin was lowered, it was smothered in fragrant flowers.

A little gnomelike missionary priest, preternaturally grave, with a broad black beard sweeping down over his chest, recited the prayers with the convincing sincerity of one who already had given twenty years of exile to the service of God.

At the end, just as the sun was sinking behind the dim hills, filling the valleys with deep funereal shades of purple and saffron, the buglers of the Guard sounded the long-drawn-out notes of "Lights Out." The echoes were still calling from hill to hill in dying whispers that seemed to fade into the shadows of evening as the *cortège* broke up and scattered.

Deschenel and Sevier walked in silence with Monsieur and Madame Castigny, until Sevier, struck by the irony of coincidence, all at once exclaimed,

"Have you told El Fetnah anything of this?"

For a moment no one ventured to reply, and Sevier, observing the look of abstraction on the French minister's face, believed that the question had not been understood. He therefore repeated it.

The Frenchman, throwing out his hands, began to stammer volubly:

"Ah, Monsieur Sevier, after your message through Monsieur Whitcomb, we were perplexed. We did not comprehend. But when officials came to us—came from the Guebi, you understand—it was a request from the Dedjatch Maukara himself——"

Sevier stood still and looked at the speaker with an expression of horror. Castigny, beginning to find his voice, hurried on:

"From the Dedjatch Maukara. He declared it was a matter involving the peace of the world. I was amazed. I could hardly have believed it. But Monsieur Whitcomb had said that you wished her handed over to the *dedjatch* if you did not return. Yesterday evening they took her away——"

"*Scélératesse!*" exclaimed the political director.

"No, no; you are unjust, *m'sieu*—you are too hasty! Maukara gave us the most solemn assurance that no harm was intended her. She would be entirely safe in his hands."

Sevier, not trusting himself to speak, strangled an exclamation of rage.

"*M'sieu*," said Madame Castigny, with sad dignity, "you do not give us much credit for understanding. You forget that it was *m'sieu* my husband who brought her to our house that night when she saved you. Well, I welcomed her. I found her lovable. Our little cottage seemed a revelation to her. She came to me in the afternoon when I was sitting by a window with my sewing, and said all at once: 'Oh, *madame*, *this* is heaven! This peacefulness is heaven!' And she put her head in my lap and burst into tears. Are we monsters, then, *m'sieu?* Do you think it possible we could abandon her? I assure you I love her with all my heart, and I know that she is safe."

Sevier could only murmur,

"*Pardon, madame—pardon——*"

But he mounted his horse without saying another word and began to ride back over the road along which they had come. Tears welled up in Madame Castigny's eyes as she looked after him.

A PREY to the gloomiest reflections, Sevier continued slowly along the eucalyptus-bordered lane. As he recalled the memory of Maukara in the darkness of his room at Harrar, and the cowering form of El Fetnah bending beneath the blows of the *dedjatch's* staff, with a sharp oath he turned his horse into the lane that led toward the Guebi, determined, despite the hour, to assure himself of her safety.

In the courtyard near the iron-roofed building where the *dedjatch* had taken up his temporary quarters, he was recognized by servants of Maukara and therefore met with no difficulty in getting about. The yard was filled with *rases* of all grades of importance. The attendants, coming and going with reports, informed him that preparations were being made for a triumphal review to stage the imperial dignity of the new empress.

The room in which Sevier finally found himself was square, bare and dark. The walls were whitewashed; the roof was of corrugated iron. On the floor were scattered rare Arabian rugs, whose magnificence was hidden beneath stains and dust. The gloom of the interior was relieved by one spluttering lamp which disclosed to Sevier's searching gaze a rough, heavy armchair in one corner, upon which was seated, like a figure of Death, bent forward upon his staff but looking at him with steadfast intentness, the thin, terrible form of Maukara.

Sevier, advancing slowly to the center of the room, on guard but unafraid, with expressionless eyes fixed upon the *dedjatch* as though he waited the Abyssinian's first move to determine his own actions, felt a tremor along his spine. With startling suddenness, however, the *dedjatch* rose to his feet and stalked toward the American with hand extended in welcome.

"Your Excellency," said Sevier, holding the hand for an instant, as though by his grip he might retain a better hold upon the spirit, "this is the second time I am in your presence with good news. You have won. Abyssinia is safe. May I congratulate you? And wish great prosperity to your country?"

"Thank you," said Maukara in mincing accents that promised nothing.

"Your victory is complete," continued Sevier, trying to suppress the agitation of doubt and exasperation that was roused within him. "You have won everything——"

"Nevertheless, many thousands of our fairest sons lie dead," exclaimed Maukara sharply, "and there is unnecessary misery in Abyssinian *tokhuls* as a result of wanton

butchery. We have won—yes. But there has been suffering for which atonement is required."

Sevier realized instantly that the *dedjatch* had read his thoughts. This knowledge shook his judgment but roused his rage. He became slightly pale, and his hands trembled to strike. He dared not, however, betray himself in such a way that all hope of saving El Fetnah would be lost. He said, therefore, with an appearance of calm,

"Do you expect this atonement from El Fetnah?"

"Partly."

"You have imposed a penalty?"

"Yes."

SEVIER could contain himself no longer. Fury blazed suddenly in his eyes. He would have flung himself on Maukara, but the apparently nerveless eunuch, stepping quickly back, flung up his hand with a gesture that checked the impulse. He said rapidly in thin, sharp tones:

"Friend, beware of yourself! Your passion is too strong—your heart is turbulent—your mind disordered——"

"What have you done?" demanded Sevier advancing. "What have you done? Is she still alive?"

Maukara retreated no further, but tapped sharply on the floor with his staff, and almost instantly the sentries darted into the room like serpents. Realizing the utter hopelessness of the situation, Sevier dropped his hands to his side with an air of dejection, though he faced the spears of the sentries without betraying a tremor. Maukara, in a high, thin voice, said a few words in Amharic, and the two immediately withdrew.

"You see," said Maukara, with a flitting smile like the wan sunset of a winter's day, "the uselessness of passion. One piping little squeal from me, and your strong and trembling body would be of less use than a slaughtered sheep."

Sevier, folding his arms to master himself, said in a trembling voice,

"For the love of God, your Excellency, what have you done with her?"

Maukara, lifting his head, looked down over his withered cheeks with a steady glance that pierced the American's heart, and yet at the instant left no pain.

"Listen," said Maukara. "First, I must ask you, do you know what prize this woman has been seeking—what high ambition has led her from one violence to another—what overmastering purpose has spurred her to her end?"

"*Dedjatch*," murmured Sevier, with hopeful patience, "I know only what you have told me."

"Well then, I will tell you more. She is no witch. Her mother was a Georgian, her father an Arab, Hussein bin Ayoub, an officer of the Turkish army in the Caucasus. His eyes fell upon the Georgian maid and he was stirred to madness. One night he entered her home and carried her away on his horse with bullets flying about him. She became his only wife, but she never again saw her parents. She retained only a memory of them, and when Hussein returned to Al Yemen and the child was born to his wife in a storm while crossing the mountains of the Hadramaut, this memory, even, faded away, for the memory of man, you see, is preserved only in the senses, and beyond the mountain it fades. The Arabs called her El Fetnah, The Storm; but the mother, clinging to shreds of her faith, baptized her secretly, and named her Miriam, after the Virgin."

"Do you mean El Fetnah is a Christian?" exclaimed Sevier incredulously.

"That is a theological question I cannot answer," said Maukara mincingly, his lids drooping like leathery films, only to open wide again as his beady eyes flashed with reviving interest. "Her mother died when she was a child, and she remembered only that all men are evil jinn, devils to be treated with utter contempt and no consideration whatever, beasts who had forced women into their power and despised them. No doubt she was right. However, her father was killed by the French in Lebanon, and she was brought up by an old Armenian woman in the household of her uncle—a woman who, as a maid, had been torn from the arms of her family, carried off and then abandoned.

"This Armenian woman cultivated in her the faculty Armenians have of reading the mind through the lines of the face, movements of the body and intonations of the voice. In the end, she even learned to throw convenient fits, and they said she was possessed of a devil. It brought her fame, and her advice was sought everywhere.

"Knowledge of her wisdom eventually reached the ears of the men through the women of the harems, and when the European war broke out, her name was known in many places. All at once, then, she became inspired with an idea. In her heart was an ambition that only her mother could have implanted. Certainly it could never have been inspired by the soulless chattels of the harem, pink-tongued little lumps of flesh given to tempt the soul of man and rob it of its will—fascinating serpents that embrace to destroy! Wau! *M'sieu*, I find a soulless woman vile."

"But, then—" said Sevier.

"Ah!" said Maukara, raising his hand and recalling himself with a startled gesture. "She caught fire then, with ambition. She went first to Stamboul, to offer her assistance, to prove by her fierce endeavors for Islam that she did possess in truth what all Mussulmans had denied her—a soul."

"A soul!" exclaimed Sevier in amazement.

"Yes!" cried Maukara shrilly. "Amid flame and murder, misery and destruction, she sought only one thing—a soul! Yes! Employing every human faculty, exercising to its limit every last power of her amazing mind and splendid body, she was ruthless, far-sighted, daring, scorning all yet employing all, unswervable, sincere to herself, absolutely determined, and in the end she would perhaps have actually conquered everything, only to lose the prize she was after. But, *m'sieu*, she saved her soul when she saved you."

'Me?"

"Exactly. It was her first act of self-abnegation. Her purpose was not exactly ecclesiastical, and had you been another man, it might have ended otherwise. But, friend of the world, this maid Miriam has learned that above all things is love, and above all love is the love of God. By renunciation only can she gain everything."

"I do not understand you," said Sevier.

"I mean," said the *dedjatch*, his voice cool and distant once more, as though he had worn himself out with his uncalculated excitement, "that she has promised to renounce the world in order to save her soul. She will devote her mind and emotions to Christ. That is the penalty I have imposed for the destruction she has wrought. It is also the reward for the high purpose that led her on."

"Do you mean that she must give up the world forever? That she is destined to stifle her superb spirit in the walls of some gloomy convent? It is impossible!"

"Sometimes, my friend," interposed Maukara sourly, "I think you are a fool. Action! Action! Flame! Passion! Agitations of neurotic people! A touch of sciatica will soon put a heel-rope on that lust for action; indigestion will soon enough subdue the flame, or the corrosion of old age—while as for passion, how easily it is dissolved in a little malarial fever."

"You damned cynic!" said Sevier in English, bluntly and solemnly, feeling the hot enthusiasm of his heart extinguished as though by a cool wind.

AT THAT moment a figure came and stood in the doorway.

Sevier perceived it instantly, and was for the moment transfixed. It was El Fetnah, framed in a shadowy arch that emphasized the rich beauty of the woman, restrained but not subdued, seeming to give life to the atmosphere that enveloped her. Her attitude, however, was ingenuous, innocent, gentle, stripped of the merciless dominance that had characterized her ambitious nature. Her eyes, after one comprehensive look about the room, were lowered, and her arms hung reposefully by her sides. Sevier stared at her breathlessly, while Maukara, apparently unaware of the woman's presence, continued in his thin, incisive tones:

"Do you think I have not observed the force of your own passion? You felt at times that you loved El Fetnah beyond your power of control; and El Fetnah was certain she loved you. Pr-r-r-r! It was impossible. Two flames leap toward each other the more quickly to destroy. Your passion would have blazed, perhaps, but only to end in acrid smoke—and ashes—and desolation."

A faint exclamation caused the *dedjatch* to turn his head just as El Fetnah, roused by his words, lifted her gaze to meet that of Sevier. There was a brooding quality in the look that had something of tenderness in it, as though a gleam had lighted at the sight of him alive and safe; but beyond this there was nothing of surrender, nothing weak or abject in the confession of her eyes.

"Miriam!" exclaimed the *dedjatch* in a sharp, shrill tone.

"I have come, Excellency," she replied in

a restrained voice, "to say that her Highness, Zeoditou, wishes to see you."

"In that case," said Maukara, with a prim air of relief, presenting his bony hand abruptly to Sevier, "we must end this interview. You see how she has accepted the wisdom of the penalty I have imposed?"

"He sees," said Miriam, suddenly raising her voice and advancing into the room, "what is entirely beyond the range of your warped vision. What you have said of me is true. I have sought to establish the existence of my soul. I have found it. But I surrender nothing. The breath of the soul is liberty. Am I, then, to be the handmaid of a eunuch or the servant of a little old woman? I understand that I am Miriam. I see and feel and understand the beauty of peace. For tranquil souls a harbor is necessary; but I am of the storm—and I *am* The Storm.

"O you, my lord," she added, turning toward Sevier with a gentle gesture, "you have let me feel something of the sweetness of the breath of love; but it is only a breath, like the faint fragrance of a rose on the bosom of a thunder-cloud. I took it. I blow it back to you. You are not for me. I must dominate! And were I to dominate you, I should come to despise you—which—which God forbid!"

"You fool!" interposed Maukara in a hissing tone, his long black body tense and rigid, his sharp-featured head tilted back so that his beady eyes, touched with light, gleamed horribly over the arch of his acquisitive nose. "Silence! Silence before it is too late! I will destroy——"

"Destroy? *You* will destroy?"

"By the blood of the Redeemer, you implacable demon——"

"Ha!" breathed El Fetnah softly, drifting toward the eunuch, her eyes fixed upon him with a soft, beaming expression, her hands pressed to her bosom as though to still a tumult that began to stir within. Sevier stared at the two in fascinated silence. The appearance of El Fetnah in the doorway had caused his heart to beat heavily. He felt suffocated; but a moment later her casual gesture, the friendly but indifferent glance of her eye telling him that, despite the brief influence he had unconsciously exercised upon her, he had already passed as an incident in her life, and the curt words that dismissed him with a breath all at once sent a chill into his veins. He knew that he had lost her.

The realization was at first horrible; but as he continued to look at her and saw her indomitable spirit whip her body into submission, then shake the imperturbable Maukara with a tremor, a flood of relief suddenly swept over him.

As though emerging from a plunge in cold water, refreshed, alert, calm and self-possessed once more, filled with an amazing, exuberant sense of freedom, he watched with lively impersonal interest as El Fetnah continued to walk toward Maukara, her lips parted in a strange smile.

PUZZLED by her steady advance, the *dedjatch* let a doubt steal into his mind, and his eyelids flickered as though a bright light had suddenly flashed before them. He lifted his staff uncertainly as though to summon the guard. The next instant he recoiled sharply, for El Fetnah, still smiling, had slipped a thin blade from her bosom and presented it toward him on a line with his throat.

"You see," she said softly, in syllables that were like a confession of love, "it is I who may destroy you! Do not dare to call out, you withered eunuch, you shriveled man——"

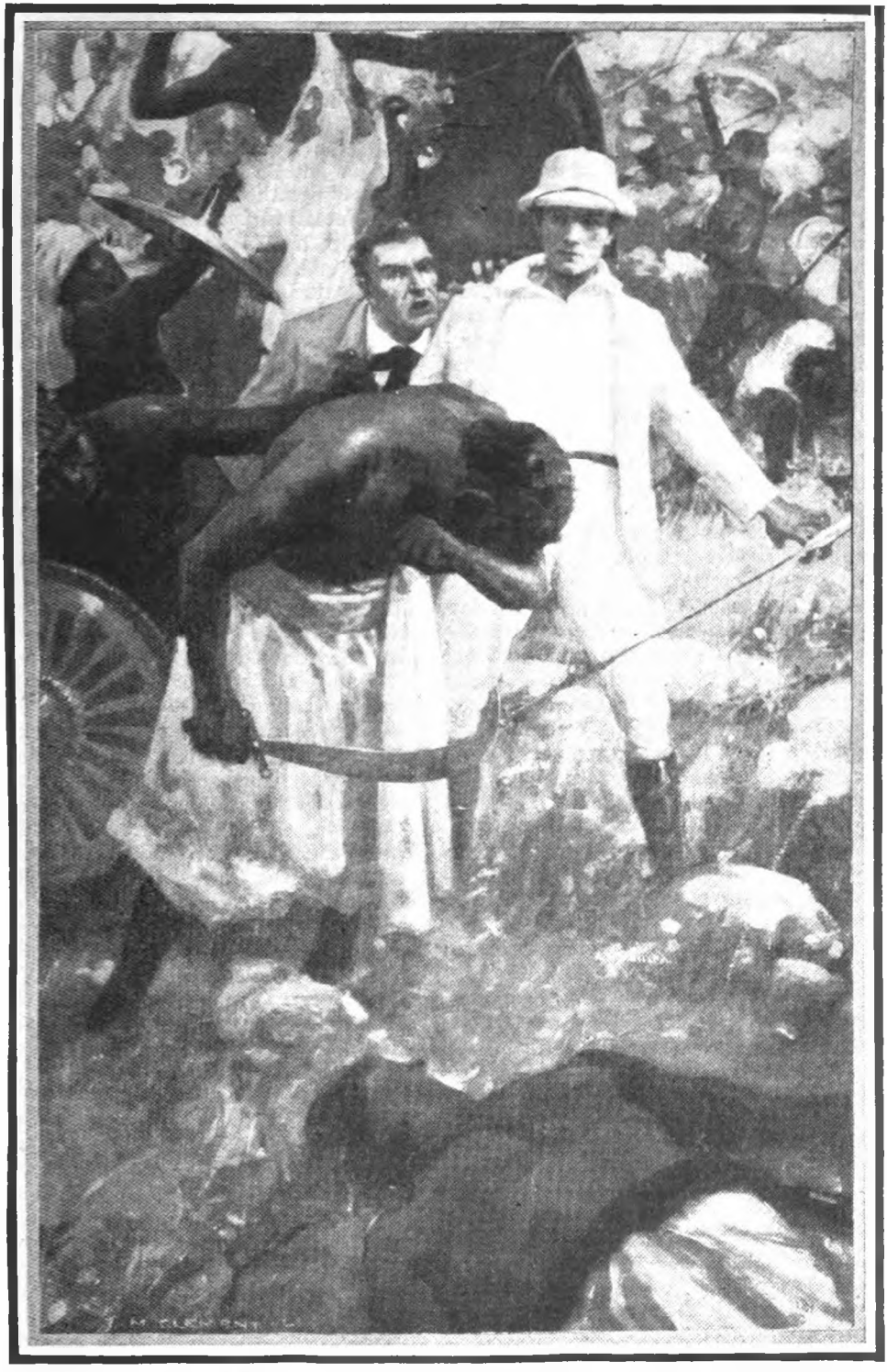
Regaining his self-possession, Maukara now held his ground, a contemptuous sneer drawing his countenance into hard lines. He showed convincingly that the threat of death left him unmoved.

"Ah," said El Fetnah sweetly, "you are not frightened!"

"Little fool," said Maukara in his thin voice, "either strike or put down the knife! It is all one to me. Death is no enemy of mine."

"Maukara, I did not say I would kill you. I said 'destroy.' The ants would treat your dead and worthless body with contempt. But I said 'destroy.' Do you understand? See—the end of this knife is tipped with a button. It would penetrate no deeper than the width of your finger-nail. But there is venom on that point that would make you witless before your guards could lay a hand on me. Look at me!

"Look into my eyes, eunuch, and remember you are looking into the eyes of the Witch of Gondar. Have I not choked the Nile with a weed? How many creaking



But Miriam mattered no longer. Here was battle surging about him. He was, with Schiedel, close to Ras Taffari, the regent.

ravens were once my enemies? Do you wish to join your cry to the moan of the hyena? Cry out, then! Cry out! A lizard to crawl on your cold belly through the rank dampness of cellars—an hyena laughing in the darkness at his own misery—a soulless carrion-crow—eater of human flesh——"

All at once her eyes flamed. Her voice thickened with terrible emotion.

"You know me, eunuch! You know my power! No threat of yours can move me; but my touch can blast you like a thunderbolt——"

The flash of the knife had startled Sevier, but the words that accompanied the threat astounded him, leaving him, for the moment, speechless. Instinctively he backed quietly against the wall, and, slipping his hand into his pocket, took hold of his revolver. This was his first direct experience with witchcraft, and an intense, burning curiosity swept over him.

As El Fetnah bent forward, the flickering light playing on the thin blade of the knife, her burning eyes seemed to sear Maukara. He winced. He shuddered. He seemed to contract in his clinging garment. His beady eyes dropped to the point of the blade, and were held there, lusterless with fear. Suddenly the implacable *dedjatch*, tyrant in a land of warriors, was transformed. At last he proved he was a eunuch. His courage deserted him. He appeared to crumple up. Whimpering slightly, with a fluttering gesture of his clawlike hands, he recoiled against his chair, murmuring over and over in the shrill accents of a frightened child:

"Oh, don't! Don't! Don't touch me!"

"Ah!" faltered El Fetnah, after a moment's silence, during which she remained immovable. "He fears me!"

ALL at once she threw the knife on the floor, and, burying her face in her hands, shuddered. Maukara, cowering in his chair, dared not move. Lifting her face again, with a gesture that was almost of despair, El Fetnah said wearily:

"Oh, Maukara, you have failed me! Less than a man in body, I believed you above all men in spirit. I thought you, at least, were beyond fear. All men, then, are cowards. Your greatest god is Fear. Poor simpleton, do you know as little of the quality of a man's soul—you who would teach me how to save mine? The soul knows no conqueror save itself! God Himself cannot destroy that divine essence. You should have known that—and yet you cringed before an angry eye, a few gibbered phrases and—a stained kitchen-knife——"

"Ah!" breathed Sevier.

El Fetnah turned her head and looked at him with a wan smile. A revolver hung limply in his hand. An expression of intense shame and chagrin was on his face.

"You, too," she said. "It is best for you, my lord, to go back to the world you know, where emotions are set within limits and the elements of fear are analyzed by doctors. As for me—as for me—O my God," she murmured pitifully, "my God, I am Miriam, Thy handmaid—but I am El Fetnah, The Storm! I have learned enough of the evil in life. Give me power to teach the good. By storm or calm let me prevail against the viciousness and cowardliness and superstition of mankind. In the desert, on the sea, in the bazaars, give me the power and the will to fight the littleness of man—to teach that there should be no fear but the fear of God and that nothing should conquer—nothing save love——"

With hands clasped tightly against her bosom, rising and falling with emotion as the prayer seemed to burst from her heart, Miriam stood in the center of the room, like one of those figures of medieval saints in ebony and marble which stand with their searching eyes turned eternally upward as though seeking one glimpse of God. By her side, Maukara, like a gargoyle, crouched.

Sevier saw that the eunuch's self-possession was returning, now that the threat of danger had passed, and on his countenance was a terrible expression.

"Miriam," he cried hoarsely, "what can I do? What do you wish?"

"My lord," she said, smiling but aloof, "I want, first, only to find the peace of God in the deserts. After that——"

"Go!" cried Sevier sharply.

A shot filled the close room with a sharp crash. The light guttered out. The room was plunged in thick darkness.

There was no cry from Maukara, but the guards rushed in, shouting. Lanterns were brought, and the room again filled with light. Maukara, his face convulsed in an effort at self-control, waved the newcomers out of the room. Then, falling on his knees,

he buried his face in his hands, moaning:

"O God, I have been shamed! A woman has shamed me! O Christos, Christos, forgive the weakness of this poor, weak soul——"

Sevier, without another word, looking back over his shoulder with an expression of compassion at the stricken abbot, slipped noiselessly from the room and walked solemnly past the guards without opening his lips. None knew that El Fetnah had disappeared.

SEVIER passed through the crowded courtyard in a confused and puzzled state of mind. He felt shaken, unhappy, and yet tremendously relieved, like one who, with an overwhelming responsibility imposed upon him, has just escaped a catastrophe. His self-confidence was badly weakened; his thoughts of El Fetnah were disjointed and tinged with shame.

The peculiar fact that all his direct encounters with her had been within the shadows of night and that violence had entered upon every single scene now filled him with a sort of awed timidity. He was confident that he would never lay eyes upon her again; but the thought, instead of bringing a pang, restored something of his equanimity. The recollections of violence, passion and fleeting moments of tenderness were like the dreams of a fevered man, a jumbling of ecstasy and despair.

He thought of the austere, unshakable Maukara, bent in anguish, calling on God to restore the strength that El Fetnah had shaken with a word. He wondered how long he himself could have controlled that ardent flame.

Suddenly he felt very tired. A tremendous longing for a peaceful, strengthening happiness surged over him. Turning down the dim lane that led from the Guebi, lined by eucalyptus trees through which the early-waning moon scattered its light like flakes of silver, he rode thoughtfully, oppressed with loneliness, until he came to the crossroads.

Here he halted for a moment, looking up at the sky unconsciously to gage the hour. He knew it was not late, but as he continued to gaze at the moon, hypnotized by its effulgent glory, he became aware of a faint, luminous halo that seemed to float hazily about it.

After staring for an appreciable time, he brought himself back to earth with a startling laugh in which exasperation, doubt, relief and irony seemed to mingle strangely.

The next moment he turned his mount into the road that led to the British legation, and broke into an easy canter. As he rode, his heart once more beat normally; but the slight, sharp pain of the wound in his arm acted like a tingling stimulant, and the rush of the cool air about his head washed away the phantasmagoria of morbid recollections.

Maukara and El Fetnah all at once became unreal, vague, unbelievable, and he dismissed them with a sigh as though they were characters in an entertaining book of improbable romance and the last chapter was ended.

They dined late at the legation; so, when Sevier drew up on the terrace, he found all his friends still about—some playing bridge, others gathered round the piano, laughing, ragging, and murdering old songs. He was made welcome with great enthusiasm.

Beveridge's injury had not proved serious, and for diplomatic reasons he had concealed its nature. The whole incident of the fight on the Entoto road had, in fact, been glossed over officially; but as all were keenly interested, Sevier was obliged briefly to review the subsequent events—the battle and the return to Addis Abeba. He told the story absent-mindedly, because, as he went over the happenings of the preceding days, he thought with increasing intensity of the part Miss Whittington had taken in his rescue, and Whitcomb's remark as to the impression his intimacy with El Fetnah had made upon her.

As he talked, he looked at her with increasing frequency, as though anxious to know her mind. He was relieved to find nothing in her manner that indicated resentment, though his sharpened interest made it possible for him to realize that she had drawn a veil over her emotions. Her eyes were bright, but they sparkled without meaning. Then Sevier discovered, with a sudden throbbing of his heart, that the brightness of her interest covered a mood of unhappy distraction. The more obvious this became to Sevier the more difficult it was for him to continue a coherent narrative. His heart sank within him. He brought his story to a sharp conclusion.

"Well then, that's about all. There's not likely to be any more trouble. Now the

line's open to Djibouti again, I expect things will be absolutely normal in a couple of weeks——"

"What about the French chap, Cohusac? Did you know him before?"

"Yes. He was my chum."

Miss Whittington, who had been tearing the petals of a rose, looked up quickly with a changed expression. Her eyes suddenly brimmed. Sevier, surprised and very deeply moved, felt a slight choking sensation. As soon as the opportunity offered, he escaped from the room and went out on the terrace.

HE STOOD there for a moment, lost in thought, elevated yet disturbed by the brilliance that seemed to shower about him, covering the dew-drenched grass that rose above his ankles with a filament of silver. The moon was sinking behind the hills. Out beyond the hedge he could hear the snort and champing of the horse he had ridden being led up and down by an indifferent hostler. The momentary isolation emphasized once more the loneliness that had been oppressing him. Stern, hard, adventurous, alone, bathed in ethereal glory, he felt almost as if he were dissolving in the beauty of the night.

He became aware that Miss Whittington was approaching. Her presence had a peculiarly reassuring effect on him.

It seemed all at once that only her presence could excuse the emotion he felt was softening and weakening him, while at the same time it brought him renewed strength and confidence. It seemed almost as though she had become vitally necessary to him. When she drew near, before she could utter a word, Sevier said in a low voice,

"You don't really despise me, Miss Whittington?"

"I? Despise you? How foolish! What made you think that?"

"Well, that night on the Entoto road, you know—Whitcomb seemed to think your impression— The woman, El Fetnah, you see——"

"But I know all about her! Madame Castigny has told me. If you loved her, no one could blame you. Madame Castigny loved her, too. What is to become of her? Is she safe?"

"As safe as she will ever want to be. She has gone—free—no one knows where."

"Oh!"

There was something in the syllable that made Sevier forget the beauties of the night.

"You know," he said uneasily, "I'm not going to miss her—not if I continue to feel as I do now."

Miss Whittington laughed nervously, catching her breath slightly, as though embarrassed and a little frightened.

"Do you remember," Sevier continued abruptly, "that night in Aden when we stood on the terrace of the club and I tried to prove there was romance on those barren shores?"

"I haven't forgotten it."

"I took hold of your hand—you remember? And just then your father——"

Miss Whittington's lips parted in a tremulous smile. She drew a deep breath, as though intoxicated by the perfume of the night. Once more she felt by the even, slightly bantering tones of Sevier's voice which did not, however, quite conceal the deeper feeling that trembled behind the words.

"It seems to me," he continued, "that life is always like that. We feel beauty, but we can't penetrate into its mystery. We know there is happiness, and yet we cannot absorb it. We tremble on the edge of love and don't half realize it. Romance is like that, too. It colors everything about us, but when we try to grasp it—there is a thorn——"

"Oh, no! I don't believe that!"

"What! Why, you were the perfect cynic in Aden. It was *you*, *then*, who refused to believe in romance——"

"But you see," she said softly, "I didn't know you very well then."

"Oh!" said Sevier. He stretched out his hand and took hers. She returned a slightly convulsive pressure, as though uncertain of him and yet unable to restrain the impulse. Pain stabbed Sevier's forearm. With a wince, he released her hand, exclaiming, with a short laugh:

"There it is! I told you! The thorn!"

But before she could quite understand, forgetting his wound and casting all doubts aside as Barbara gave a slight, smothered exclamation of sympathy and anxiety, he put his arms about her.

THE END

Everybody's Chimney Corner

Where Reader, Author and Editor Gather to Talk Things Over

A REAL-ESTATE man of Topeka, Kansas, writes:

A great magazine like EVERYBODY'S has so fine an opportunity for uplifting the ideals of young people, and you print so many really good stories, that it hurts me when I read those in which the heroes and heroines drop to a lower scale. I should like to see it assume so high a standard that a minister or a Presbyterian elder could place it in the hands of his daughter with the sentiment:

"Here is a magazine which will entertain you, and one which will place before you such high ideals that you will be better for having read it."

THE writer of this letter raises a question that constantly confronts any decent person engaged in supplying entertainment to the public.

A fiction magazine, you may rightly say, as a purveyor of entertainment should not debauch; it should uplift.

At least, the entertainment it supplies should be harmless. But with this policy adopted, the question then arises: "What is harmful and what is not? If John Jones is not harmed by what he reads in your magazine, is it not possible that John Smith may be harmed by reading the same thing?"

In his book of reminiscences, a newspaper publisher said recently that he made it a rule never to print anything that a young girl could not read without embarrassment to the members of her family.

This does not seem to us to solve the problem. It is conceivable that very respectable and pure-minded young girls may differ as to what they can read to the members of their families without embarrassment. Due to education, more rapid development or a different point of view, one young woman might be able to read something to her family without embarrassment, while a girl friend round the corner could not read the same thing to her family without blushing. A lot depends upon the individual—also the family.

OUR Topeka friend fixes another test. He wants a magazine to "assume so high a standard that a minister or a Presbyterian elder could" recommend it to his daughter.

Now, if a fiction magazine depended upon the recommendation of a minister, much would depend upon the minister. It hasn't been so long since many ministers objected to all fiction. My grandfather, who was a minister, constantly warned against fiction. The father of Charles Evans Hughes, secretary of State, who was a minister, forbade his son to read novels. But even if all ministers were interested in fiction and agreed to act as censors, would this solve the problem? Is it not possible that what passed the Topeka minister might be roundly condemned by the St. Paul minister? Ministers vary in intellectual qualifications and differ in politics and tastes just as other mortals do. They disagree as to the sinfulness of various forms of social entertainment—dancing, for example. Might they not disagree as to the various types of fiction?

THE Topeka critic, general in his prescription as to the standard of a magazine, is specific in what he finds objectionable:

It is possible that the people of New York have reached a stage where the young ladies of best character smoke cigarettes, but I am thankful that it is still a shock to most of our people in this city (Topeka) to see a lady (?) smoking. It is very uncommon here except by lewd women. When you realize that this is the case, you will understand why I am disgusted when your heroines in some of your best stories are fond of their cigarettes. Now, I wish to say that I do not want an editor who would pass out that kind of stuff to choose the stories which I place before my young people as the sort of reading that meets my approval. I trust that you are not guilty, and that you will be able to offer some acceptable apology for EVERYBODY'S having printed such a story. If you are not able, or not so inclined, then you may discontinue my subscription.

WE HAVE no apology to make, no excuse to offer; so we lose a subscriber. We make no apology because we do not concede that smoking cigarettes makes a women lewd simply because lewd women do smoke. We admit that we dislike smoking among the young—either male or female. That is because we believe that smoking, if carried to excess, is likely to impair the health. But high heels might do the same for women, yet high-heeled boots do not make a woman immoral.

It is unfortunate that a magazine editor never hears from his supposed victims themselves. No young woman ever trips into an editorial room and chirps, "Curses on you, Mr. Editor, I have read your stories with their cigarette-smoking and flask-equipped heroines, and now I am on the road to ruin, tra-la!" No wild-eyed young man ever comes in to announce that he had just held up John D. Rockefeller because he had read in your magazine a story about a highwayman.

But we do hear from the guardians of our supposedly possible victims. The censor-minded we have with us always.

TWO readers of Boone, North Carolina, writing jointly, say:

We have just read a story by Mr. Stanley Olmsted, entitled "Granny Hooper." In the introduction of this story we noticed that this was a tale of "the quaint folk who live in the North Carolina mountains." We are natives of Watauga County, high up in the Blue Ridge Mountains. We are well acquainted with the people of this open-air country and wish to tell you that the quaint mountain-folk are relics of the past. There has never been any such people as Mr. Olmsted pictures in this and other stories he has written.

If he wishes to see a race of pure Anglo-Saxons, he should visit the glory-crowned, sun-kissed mountains of western North Carolina.

We boast the purest air, the best water, the healthiest climate and the purest religion of any place on the globe.

How, then, could a people with all these advantages be "quaint?"

And on top of all this, we have one of the finest systems of public and high schools in the South. We have some of the finest mountain roads found anywhere.

Most story-writers and other city-bred guys prefer to ridicule the mountains and their people, but where, oh, where, do they go when city life becomes tiresome? Of course, some go to the sea, but he who loves real sport will be found in the mountains dearest to his heart.

A READER of Murphy, North Carolina, sends the following endorsement of one of Mr. Olmsted's mountain stories:

Never-tiring glimpses of jeweled minds and *quaint* ways of North Carolina mountaineers are uniquely depicted in this story by Stanley Olmsted, written at his cabin on Snow Bird Mountain during the summer of 1920. The story is of these mountains of ours and so is the author. His brilliant mother is a native here; her parents and his father were highly respected citizens of this community. Personally, I accept "Mountain Farmers" as one of the gem products of this blessed mountain region.

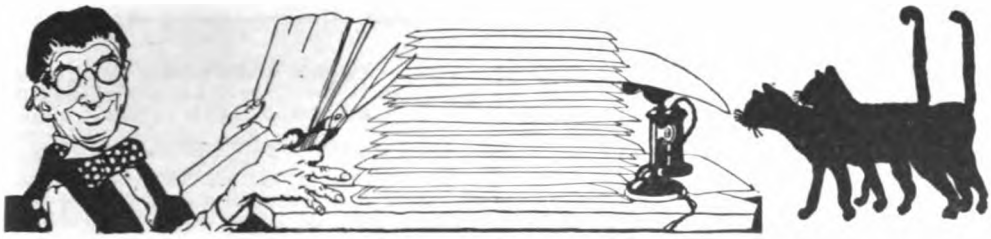
To be quaint or not to be—take your choice.

WOULD not the future manhood of the world be vastly improved if every boy at the age of twelve could be persuaded to pledge himself to do his duty to God and country, to help other people at all times, to keep himself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight? To be sure, persuading the boy to take this pledge does not complete the job. You must assist him, teach him, spur him on when he falters, develop in him a real desire to keep his pledge. That is called character-building. Efficiently carried out, it will result in the boy "being prepared"—"always in a state of readiness in mind and body to do his duty." Such training will give us:

Men to be trusted, who won't lie or cheat.
Men who will be loyal to home and country.
Men who will help the injured, save life.
Men who will be kindly to children, the old, the helpless, to animals.
Men who will smile, who will not shirk and grumble.
Men with courage to face danger in spite of fear.
Men who keep clean in body, thought and speech, reverent toward God.
Men who are tolerant, who respect the convictions of others in matters of custom and religion.

THE foregoing is a summary of the pledge and the laws, written and unwritten, of the Boy Scouts of America, which in the week beginning February eighth celebrates its thirteenth anniversary. With this birthday, the boy membership passes the half-million mark, and there are one hundred and twenty thousand adult members who look after them in various ways. According to James E. West, the chief scout executive, there are in this country six million boys from twelve to eighteen years of age. Every one of these boys should be a scout.

SEWELL HAGGARD.



Prose *and* Worse, *by* Gridley Adams

DO YOU BELIEVE IN SIGNS?

In Brooklyn, N. Y.: "*Lizzie Einstein, Dyeing Help Wanted.*"
On Theatre in Brooklyn: "'*Give Me My Son.*' *With a Special Cast.*"
In Philadelphia: "*Dr. L. G. Swearing, Baptist Minister. Mrs. Hester Crimp, Hair Culturist. A. L. Fozzle, School Supt.*" (G. C.)
Head-line in Phila. Inquirer: "*Woman Drowns Hanging Up Wet Clothes.*" (G. C.)
On Chicago tailor shop: "*M. Workunoff.*"
In Denver paper: "*I. M. Free is Suing Wife for Divorce.*" (H. H.)
On menu of Stueck's Café, Middletown, Conn.: "*Schrimp Salad.*"
Hotel at Becket, Mass.: "*Wade Inn, Center Lake.*"
In Stroudsburg, Neb.: "*John Tongue, Lawyer.*" (H. E. H.)

(*Martinton, Ill., Sun*)

NOTICE—What was heard and repeated about Eldea Marguis is false.—R. V. COTE.

A CORRECTION—What I said about Isaac Arsneau and Eldea Marguis was a mistake on my part.—WESLEY CHENORE.

NOTICE—What Mr. Chenore and Mrs. Cote said are two different stories. Mrs. Sylvanus Cote is the only one to blame for what she said.—ELDEA MARGUIS.

And I bet that'll start it all over again.

(*Leland, Ill., Times*)

Miss Marie Munch was a Sandwich caller Saturday.

Tastes a little moldy, hain't it?

(*Union, Iowa, Star*)

Mr. Lepley has had more than his share of trouble the past year. Mrs. Howe is keeping house for him just now.

Yes; this is the *Star* office. . . . No; we have no idea when the editor will come back.

(*In a church paper*)

After remaining vacant for nearly five months, the Rev. Thomas G. Shaw, of Charleston, Mo., has accepted a call to Panora, Ia.

Accepted? I bet he ran all the way.

(*Athens, O., Messenger*)

Middle-aged lady with all her teeth wanted; one who will patch my pants and help me find my pipe. P. B. LIGHTFRITZ, Mineral, Ohio. (D. H. L.)

Why the teeth?

Married at Springfield, Ill.—Rev. H. Irving Parrott and Miss Bessie Fowler.

A bird in the hand, etc.

(*Oak Park, Ill., Oak Leaves*)

MISFORTUNE ENDS SECOND HONEYMOON.

Mrs. E. C. Platter is in the Swedish Hospital in Seattle, Wash. She slipped and broke an angle.

Acute?

(*Three Rivers, Mich., Daily Commercial*)

Directions for washing children: Don't soak overnight, just add a little Blue Devil to the water.

Not for mine. They're got anuff of *him* innum now.

(*Cambridge, Ohio, Jeffersonian*)

"Pinafore" was heard by a crowd that extended to the outside of the enclosure of the tent. The S. O. S. sign could have been hung out soon after the gate opened. (D. G. S.)

I've heard it sung that way, too.

(*Lake County, Ill., Bee*)

NOTICE—If the person who picked up the silver pencil in Abbott's yard, where I had placed it next the crate, will call, I will give him an extra lead that goes with it. J. LYON.

Pipe?

(*Head-line in Chicago Tribune*)

THE WOMEN WE MARRY AND OTHER FICTION.

That just about hits it.

(*Holland, Mich., Sentinel*)

FOR SALE—Cheap if taken at once. Modern house, full basement—HARRY A. KLOMPARENSE.

S—s—sh!

(*St. Paul Daily News*)

"Is this St. Paul?" asked Mary Garden. "And why didn't you wake me?"

Not waiting for an answer, she stepped from the train and faced the photographer. (MRS. E. C.)

Let's *hope* it was a day-coach.

(*Cleburne, Tex., Morning Review*)

FOR SALE—Good incubator, hatched every egg twice, $18. Call at 309 Oran avenue.

(MR. AND MRS. G. C. S.)

Aw, shucks! I don't believe it.

(*From book in New Orleans Public Library*)

She went out to see how the land lay, and came back with her apron full of eggs. (MRS. J. C. B.)

Waiter, just eliminate the eggs.

(*Columbia, Mo., paper*)

Dolph Granger was seriously injured and accidentally killed falling from his barn loft.

(MRS. J. C. B.)

Lucky he wasn't hurt, also.

(*Galesburg, Ill., Republican-Register*)

GALVA, ILL.—There was considerable excitement on the north end of Heaven Street, at the Congregational parsonage where resides Rev. William J. Spire, on Thursday night, at 10 o'clock, when the janitor of the Congregational church drove up for the parson, informing him that seated on the church steps was a group of young people in which was one young couple that desired his services to unite them as husband and wife, and they desired that this service should be performed in the house of the Lord. Rev. Spire had removed his collar and tie as well as his shoes, but these articles of wearing-apparel were hastily replaced in their respective places, and for the church he started.

An aspiring couple all right, and a rev. that arose equally to the occasion.

(*Stamford, Conn., Advocate*)

His friends could give no reason why he should have committed suicide. He is single.

You just never can convince some people.

(*Nebraska State Journal*)

FOR SALE OR EXCHANGE—The Riverside Cemetery at Grete, Neb. On account of old age, I have decided to sell or exchange the Riverside Cemetery, in operation since 1879. The cemetery is very nicely located and is the main cemetery in Crete. For particulars inquire of THEO. HADEN, Owner, Grete, Neb.

A live proposition for some one looking for a business that's dead easy.

(*Traverse City, Mich., Eagle-Record*)

BEG YOUR PARDON—Complaint is made by a member of the family against an item in Friday night's *Eagle-Record* to the effect that Herman Dafoe was sentenced to sixty days in the county jail for assault and battery on his mother, the item alleging that Dafoe struck his mother in the face, knocking out some of her teeth. The complaint is that he did not knock out some of her teeth. According to officers, this is quite true, and we apologize. What he did do, according to officers, was to strike her in the face, knocking out her false teeth, breaking several of them.

I just knew they got that story all gummed up.

(*Viroqua, Wis., Censor*)

I hereby give notice that my wife, Clara Walling, has left me without just cause, and this is to notify the public that I will pay no debts of her contracting.

LUTHER WALLING.

Please excuse my husband for making such a big mistake. It was he that left his wife and darling baby, instead of his wife leaving him. We have been married two years and three months, and he has bought me one dress that cost 89 cents and one pair of stockings for 25. That is what I call good support. And also I will not pay any debts contracted by him. MRS. LUTHER WALLING.

What does a wife expect, anyhow?

(*Waukesha, Wis., Daily Freeman*)

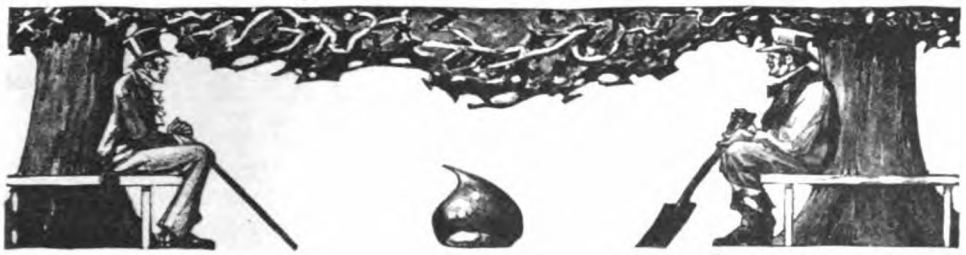
The W. C. T. U. will meet at the home of Mrs. Stephen Terwilliger, 726 East Avenue, Thursday afternoon, at 3 o'clock. The Bible word will be "Benefit," and the theme, "What Is in Our Soft Drinks?"

I should say none, if there isn't.

(*Lorain, Ohio, Times-Herald*)

Born, to Roy Kenyon and wife, a baby girl; to Earl Kennedy and wife, a girl; to William Dunn, a girl.

Boy, telegraph Mrs. Dunn to come home quick!



Everybody's Chestnut Tree

EDITOR'S NOTE: Though the sign is the Chestnut Tree, no story is barred by its youth. We will gladly pay for available ones. Address all manuscripts to "The Chestnut Tree," enclosing stamped addressed envelope.

LITTLE JACKIE COOGAN, the juvenile cinema wonder, is only a wee bit of a youngster, just at present trying to solve the intricacies of Franklin's "First Reader."

Recently he complained that the big Cooper-Hewitt lights used on the motion-picture sets hurt his eyes, and an alarmed father took him to an oculist.

As usual, the eye-specialist hung up the test-card and then asked Jackie to read the top line, the letters of which were T V Z U E, etc.

There was silence for several moments, and then the specialist exclaimed in surprise,

"Why, my little man, you don't mean to tell me you can't even read those large letters on the top line?"

"Sure I can read 'em," retorted Jackie; "but I can't pronounce it."

AN IDEA of some of the difficulties under which people throughout the country labor in any attempt to reap profit from judgment and opinion in matters artistic will be gained from the following experience of the late Creston Clarke, the actor.

While playing in a good-sized city, he was approached one day on the street by an eager young man, who said:

"How do you do, Mr. Clarke? I saw your performance last night. I'm on the *Star*."

"Oh!" said Mr. Clarke. "And how do you like newspaper work?"

"I think it's fine," replied the youth. "I'm just starting in at it. I'm only dramatic critic now, but if I do well they're going to give me police work."

OLD BILL SANDERSON was an inveterate and enthusiastic New Jersey hunter, in this respect quite unlike his otherwise congenial pal, Jake.

"Huh!" Jake would growl. "Grown men shootin' little birds with big guns!"

This always threw Bill into a fine rage.

"Come out an' see what you can do with a big gun against one o' them little birds," was his usual retort. "When one o' them poor little birds sees you coming, he'll laugh hisself so sick you won't have to shoot him. That's the only way you'll ever bring home a bird."

This challenge was so often repeated that Jake finally accepted it. Before starting, Bill undertook to expound the huntsman's code as he saw it, putting great stress upon the theorem that, if the sportsman played according to rules, the advantage was sure to be on the side of the bird.

Bill was leading the way toward a likely spot, giving due consideration to the wind and its direction, when Jake, totally oblivious of these elements in the problem, sighted a big pheasant scuttling along through a hedge. Instantly he brought his gun into position, and was taking aim, when the horrified Bill stepped forward and knocked the barrel of the weapon upward.

"Jake," he cried, "surely you wasn't goin' to shoot that bird while he was runnin' on the ground, was you?"

Jake, the picture of disgust, watched the pheasant disappear in a clump of brush.

"No, you blamed old fool," he finally managed to ejaculate; "I was goin' to wait for him to stop."

"SO ON her account you gave up smoking?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you don't drink now because she doesn't like you drinking?"

"Yes, sir."

"And for the same reason you no longer swear?"

"That's it, sir."

"And you no longer go to dances or play billiards or bet?

"Because she didn't like me to."

"Then why on earth didn't you marry her?"

"Because I was so reformed that I saw I could do better."

SANDY was not feeling well and consulted a physician of the village for advice.

"Do you drink, Sandy?" the latter asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Give it up. Do you smoke?"

"Yes, sir."

"You must give that up, too."

This was too much, and Sandy was making for the door when the doctor called after him,

"You have not paid me for my advice, Sandy."

"I'm not taking it," was the reply.

CLAYTON HAMILTON, upon his recent return to New York after two years in Los Angeles, said that while he knew nothing about moving pictures when he went out there, he soon began to learn some of the dogmas of picture-making.

For instance, Mr. Hamilton said, when a producer sets about to make a picture-play, he must consider that it is intended to appeal to the classes who attend movie theatres. That is, it must interest five million servant-girls, ten million shop-girls and so forth.

Mr. Hamilton told his wife about this.

"Did you know, dear," he said, "that a successful moving picture must appeal to ten million shop-girls and five million servant-girls?"

"Really!" exclaimed Mrs. Hamilton, who had her own domestic problem. "But where are these five million servant-girls?"

Which was rather a puzzling rejoinder to Mr. Hamilton until he hit upon the logical answer:

"Why, they are at the movies, of course."

AT A dinner, Sir James M. Barrie was seated next an individual who, at a loss for something to say, remarked,

"I suppose, Sir James, that some of your plays do better than others.

"Yes," replied the famous man. "Some peter out and some pan out."

A VERY small boy was standing in the middle of a country road with a large shotgun when a stranger came along, stopped, and asked,

"What are you hunting, little man?"

"I dunno," answered the little fellow; "I ain't seen it yet."

AFTER giving the new stable-boy directions for treating a sick horse, the master returned in a little while to see if all had gone well.

He found the stable-boy choking and spluttering, his face various hues of red, blue and green.

"What's wrong?" said the boss.

"Well, you said to put a tube in his mouth and blow the powder down."

"Yes."

"Well, he blew first."

OWEN McGARTY, a recent arrival from the Emerald Isle, had spent a torturing day with a toothache. After he had finished his work toward evening, he beat his way to the nearest dentist and impatiently inquired of the extractor of molars,

"How much does yez charge fer pullin' out wan tooth?"

"Fifty cents; seventy-five cents with gas."

"Sivinty-five cints with gas!" gasped Owen. "Bedad, thin, I'll come round agin early in the mornin' when it's daylight."

AN OLD negro from the Southern rural districts had gone to the city seeking employment. Everywhere he went, references were asked for. Finally he gave the names of former employers and in due time returned for a decision. Some of the letters were read to him, in which he was praised very highly and his work and loyalty greatly lauded. The old man's eyes opened wide with surprise and pleasure as he remarked,

"Well, I declair, if I had 'a' known I was such a good niggah as dat, I sho would 'a' got mo' pay."