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PEOPLE'S Favorite MAGAZINE

THE HEART of the KIMISH

by

G. E. Grinstead

MILITARY Nº 7

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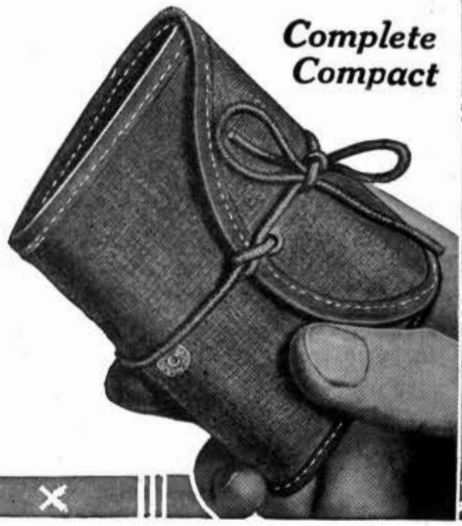

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PEOPLE'S Favorite MAGAZINE

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SEMI-MONTHLY
PEOPLE'S Favorite MAGAZINE

Vol. XXIX FEBRUARY 10, 1919 No. 4

The Heart of the Kimish

By J. E. Grinstead

Author of "The Spider Man"

CHAPTER I.

A PLUNGE INTO THE UNKNOWN.

RUFUS HAILE smoked a very old, exceedingly black, and undoubtedly husky pipe. He sat on the spring seat of a wagon, the lines held loosely in his hand, as the two stanch little ponies that drew the wagon plodded on in a general northeasterly direction over the primitive roads of the Indian country.

Away to the northeast a chain of rugged, pine-clad hills lay blue in the evening sun. Haile was evidently headed for the Kimish, but his purpose lay hidden, along with his thoughts, behind those quiet gray eyes.

The people he met at long intervals, if they hazarded a guess at who or what he was, would have been likely to cover a wide range of conjecture, without any of the guesses coming near enough the mark to make the young man dodge. He might have been almost anything that an active mind could conceive, except what he really was. Most observers would have taken him to be a young farmer who had been prospecting down Texas way, and was now beating back into Kansas, Missouri or Arkansas, all depending on the road he would take after he crossed the Arkansas River.

Humped up on the wagon seat Haile was an ordinary-looking man, but when he got out to camp one realized the mis-

take. He was no Apollo of the sylvan solitudes, yet he was rather good looking. Where the surprise was, lay in the fact that in spite of the slightly worn and none too clean duck trousers, coarse woolen overshirt, floppy hat and strong, heavy boots, one could sense a hidden power beneath. The man was so perfectly formed that he looked to be slightly above medium height, when in reality he was slightly over six feet. When he rolled up his sleeves to wash in the stream near his camp he disclosed, not the knots of bound muscles that one expected to see, on a swarthy arm, but the long, rolling sinews of an athlete, under a skin like ivory.

When Haile spoke to the people he met, making inquiries about the roads, his voice was pleasant and his language that of a man who lived out of doors, and had forgotten some of the conventions, if he ever knew them. He might have been a Texan whose "folks came from Missouri," or a Missourian, who had spent some time in Texas. Whoever, or whatever he was, he was apparently headed for the Kimish, which doubtless meant trouble, either for himself or for some one else.

The Kiamitia country, commonly called by the natives "The Kimish," is an extremely rough, mountainous section of the Indian country, which became noted many years ago. Almost as great a number, and certainly a wider diversity of men as went to the gold fields of California and the Yukon, pilgrimed to the Kirmish. There was never any hidden treasure there in gold or precious stones, guarded by the frowning peaks, or unearthed by the roaring torrents of the mountain streams. Those who went seeking in the Kimish sought one or two things: reasonable safety from the iron hand of the law, or extreme danger to themselves.

This wild spot, apparently created by Nature when she was in one of her tantrums, is not a mythical place. It never was hidden, but stands out boldly to-day, for all the world to see. A railroad runs through it now, and the place where it makes its way down the north side of the mountains is called the winding stair.

This story has nothing to do with the towns that now cling to the mountainsides or nestle in the valleys, the alleged farms, sawmills and tie camps. It is a tale of the time when these were not. A turbulent time, the echoes of which are still heard in the occasional train and bank robberies that are conducted in such a spectacular manner in those mountain passes.

In the late afternoon Rufus Haile stopped his team at the door of a mean little country store that stood by the roadside near the foot of the Kimish.

"Ain't there a right-hand road somewhere here that cuts across over the Kimish and on to Fort Smith?" he asked.

Mr. William Brant, commonly called Bill Brant, stood in the door of his store. He was perhaps five feet seven, round of paunch, had coarse black hair that was inclined to wave, glittering black eyes, long thin mustache and rather thick lips. His teeth were yellow, and the whites of his eyes were also the color of old ivory. His feet were small and neatly shod. The initiated would have said, "Here is a fellow that is mostly white, with a strong dash of Creek nigger." If Rufus Haile was initiated his eyes didn't show it. Rufe's eyes were not "speaking eyes," but rather "listening eyes." Brant walked out to the wagon, put one foot up on the hub and said:

"They aire, podner. She takes right up Hell Roarin' Crick at the next crossin', 'bout a mile from here, and follers the crick clean to the head. Then she goes around the northwest shoulder of Blue Point, strikes the head of Sycamore, and follers that crick right on down to the Arkansaw River."

"Pretty fair road?" asked Rufe.

"Well, she ain't no boolyvyard, podner. I reck'n you are a stranger in this section, so I'll just tell you somethin'. If y'-all ain't got no business in that Kimish country, you better stay out'n it."

"Say the road that goes straight ahead after crossin' Hell Roarin' goes right on to Fort Gibson an' Talequah, an' on to Fort Smith, that-a-way?"

"I didn't say so, but she do, podner. It's twenty miles furder, but Fort Smith

is a danged sight nearder that-a-way than she are through the Kimish."

"Thank you," said Rufus Haile, as he picked up his lines, and drove on. The sun was almost down, and he wanted to camp at the spring on Hell Roarin'.

As the wagon disappeared up the road Brant went out the back door of his store. He entered a cabin and closed the door. A man who lay on a bunk in the corner of the cabin sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"Feller just passed here askin' about the road over the Kimish and on to Fo't Smith, Dave. Better get in ahead of him as soon as it gets dark an' see where he is goin'. He looks harmless, but they ain't no harmless people huntin' the Kimish."

Mr. David Little belied his name in two ways. In the first name, because he relied on no five smooth stones selected from a brook, but carried an ugly-looking and much used six-shooter. In his surname, because he was not little, but of quite formidable proportions. He was not a very bad-looking man, if one just looked at him and went on. He didn't belong in the neighborhood of Brant's store, and he was never seen there in the daytime. On rare occasions he came there at night, and if his business was pressing he spent the following day in the cabin back of the store, and waited for the shades of night to screen his journey home.

Rufe Haile drove on to the first crossing on Hell Roaring Creek, turned up that stream in utter disregard of the friendly advice given him by Bill Brant, and two miles above the crossing made camp for the night.

Haile seemed to have peculiar ideas of personal comfort. The wagon was roomy, and apparently had little in it, yet Rufus took some blankets soon after dark, and made himself a bed on the ground, a considerable distance from the wagon, where he lay down in his clothes, even to his boots, and was soon fast asleep.

The night was uneventful. No one passed the camp, which was at a point where there was a considerable bend in the creek. There was a trail, or bridle path, out across the bend. Late in the night Dave Little rode cautiously along this trail, thus getting above the camp without passing directly by it, and rode on up the stream. Mr. Little certainly had a home of some kind, somewhere. It evidently was not the little cabin back of Brant's store. Perhaps his home was in the Kimish, and he was merely going there, with the best of intentions, but his actions were not above suspicion.

At any rate, Rufus Haile slept soundly, and was innocent of any knowledge of Mr. Little's activities. If that gentleman sought the cheerful gleam of the home light from some rustic lattice in the wild crags, he was at least cautious in his approach to his hidden domicile.

It was quite light before Haile stirred from his bed, and the sun was shining brightly when he finished his breakfast. He seemed to be a leisurely traveler, who figured that the distance between camps was not a matter of serious importance.

All day Haile followed the Hell Roaring Creek, the road crossing and recrossing the stream as it wound its way ever upward into the Kimish. Late in the afternoon he crossed the stream above a roaring fall, that probably lent something to the unusual name of the stream. This was obviously the last crossing, as above the road the cañon was a narrow gorge, with perpendicular bluffs on either side. Here the road climbed away from the creek into the rocks, as if it were bent on scaling the ragged heights of Blue Point out of hand. Just when it seemed that there was nothing ahead but a blank wall of granite, the road turned sharply to the left and climbed out onto the mountainside. Haile found himself in very much the same attitude as a child who has climbed out the "upstairs" window, onto the roof of the L. To his right, and in front of him towered silent, mysterious old Blue Point. To his left, and very near, was a deep gorge, in which roared the waters of the head of Hell Roaring Creek.

The road ran along the very brink of the gorge for more than a mile. It was late October, and the scattering trees and vines, here and there among the dark-green pines, touched by the magic wand of autumn, were transformed into bits

of garnet, amethyst and gold, set in a sea of emerald. Haile was a lover of the beautiful in nature, and as he sat in the wagon, looking out across the gorge, he feasted his eyes on loveliness. He was traveling toward the northeast, and the afternoon sun was to his left and slightly behind him.

The road slanted steadily upward until within a quarter of a mile of the crest of the ridge, and then became a steep, winding way, among gigantic bowlders. Before entering this rough defile, Haile stopped to give his ponies a good rest for the last stretch of the long climb. He put on the brake, but the way was so steep that the wagon kept rolling back, and gave the ponies no chance to rest.

Dismounting from his seat, Rufe, who loved his team, blocked the wheels with rocks, so the ponies could get a good rest. Just above where he stood the gorge ended abruptly, as if it had cut so far into the mountain, and then had given the task up as hopeless. The traveler had passed no cabin, had met no one, and had seen no sign that the country was inhabited, for the last five or six miles. There was a great silence over the scene, except for the distant, muffled roar of the waters at the bottom of the gorge, which broke out of some rock-bound cavern and thundered over their bowlder-strewn path.

It was barely thirty feet from the wagon to the edge of the cliff, and while the team rested Haile walked to the brink to peer over into the deep gorge, with its veiled shadows, where the stream ran far blow. As he stood shading his eyes from the evening sun with his hand, and peering into the cañon, a shot broke the silence of the place, and Haile crumpled forward and rolled over the edge of the cliff.

When he had disappeared a man came stealthily from behind a giant bowlder. It was Dave Little. He quickly unharnessed the team, and threw the harness into the wagon. Looking for a rope with which to lead the horses, he found a coiled lariat in the wagon, and threw it over his shoulder, behind him onto the ground, where a scraggy little cedar grew. He went on examining the contents of the wagon for a minute or two, but finding nothing to interest him especially, and being in a hurry, he turned, picked up the rope at his feet, uncoiled it and attached an end of it to each of the horses.

Then this estimable gentleman cut the tongue of the wagon as far toward the gorge as it would go, removed the rocks from the wheels, then suddenly released the brake and jumped back out of the way. The wagon started slowly back, gained speed as it left the road and rolled down the incline toward the gorge. By the time it reached the edge it had gained such momentum that it plunged out into space, like an airship, in the form of a covered wagon.

The wagon passed over the very spot where Haile had stood a few minutes before, and now it went on, to fall with a distant crash on the stones below, where the spirit of its owner might make mystic camps in the gloomy shadows in the nights to come.

Where a few minutes before had been a man, a wagon, and a team, there was now no trace. Nothing made tracks on the shoulders of old Blue Point. Dave Little walked away up the winding trail, leading the two ponies. The sun was just setting behind the pine-clad crests across the gorge. As Little climbed the steep, bowlder-strewn road toward the crest of the ridge, he muttered to himself:

"He won't make no more trouble in the Kimish. If they'd make a record of the number of people as passes into the Kimish, and of the number as passes out on yon side, the trip would quit being so pop'lar."

This was not the first time that a man had gone over the brink of Hell Roaring, as Mr. Little knew quite well. If the spirits of those who had gone before still loitered in the dark depths of the gorge, Rufus Haile's wraith would have company for the evening. Blue ghost lights would welcome him to the silent bivouac, as night came down, and the roar of the waters changed to a jumble of ghost voices, as the spirits exchanged tales of the adventures that brought them there.

CHAPTER II.

THE KING OF SYCAMORE COVE.

WHATEVER Mr. David Little may have seemed to be in the cabin at the back of Brant's store, on the trail up Hell Roaring, or even when he took possession of Rufus Haile's team, he was a different man at home.

At the crest, where the road passed over the shoulder of Blue Point, one who had not been that way before would have been filled with wonder. The mountain peaks formed a kind of crater, or cove, perhaps three miles across. The only outlet, other than rough saddle trails across the mountains, was where Sycamore Creek had cut a gorge through the granite mountain to the northeast. The wagon road followed the shallow stream through this gorge, then crossing and recrossing that stream, wound its way down to the low country.

At the moment when Little came over the crest leading the two ponies, the sun had just set. At first glance one would have thought Sycamore Cove was the lake of purple from which nature painted all the mauve tints in the world. As the eyes became more accustomed to the gathering shadows, it became apparent that it was a large circular valley, its sloping, basinlike sides covered with heavy timber. A dark-green ring of pines and cedars showed around the crest. Farther down the slope grew hardwood, the oak and ash predominant, their leaves already turned to red and gold. In the center of the valley was a considerable farm.

Exactly opposite the head of Hell Roaring, Sycamore Creek broke out of the mountainside, a mammoth spring that poured from beneath a black, shelving rock and formed a deep dark pool, then flowed away toward the northeast. The crest between the heads of the two streams was the divide between the Arkansas and the Red River. There was no gorge at the head of Sycamore. The mountainside was steep, and strewn with huge bowlders. Thick timber grew among the stones and around the spring, and for some distance down the stream, a dense thicket of willows grew.

Snuggling close up against the foot of the mountain, and within a few hundred yards of the headspring of the Sycamore, stood an immense house of pine logs. There were some lots and pens about the place, a stable and other outhouses. Mr. Little was a well-to-do farmer, and a horse trader of known shrewdness. Down toward the Arkansas bottom he attended all the camp meetings in summer, and all the dances in winter. In Fort Smith he was well known as a man who evidently lived well, as he bought liberally and paid promptly for his purchases.

Among these sylvan scenes, as he approached his home Mr. Little raised his voice in song. His rendering of "Amazing Grace," must have sent a thrill through the souls of the brethren who conducted the camp meetings. He turned the two ponies into a pen and went on to his house, still singing joyfully.

At the door he was met by his wife, a half-breed Creek Indian, whose black eyes glittered in the dusk.

"Where's Leeny?" asked this King of Sycamore Cove.

"She went out ridin' again," replied the woman.

"She's got no business ridin' around in the night. What did you let her go for?"

"I don't let her do nothin'. She don't ask me. You make her quit." And there was a twisted grin on the woman's lips, as if there were something amusing about making Lena Little do something that she didn't want to do.

Little stalked into the house, filled his pipe and lighted it at the fireplace, his wife standing silently by, like a slave waiting orders, which in reality she was.

"Which way did Leeny go, an' how long's she been gone?"

"She left about the middle of the afternoon. I didn't notice which way she went."

"Better get the habit of noticin' things," snapped Little, as he rose and walked out of the house.

Mrs. Little was much younger than her husband, who appeared to be not more than forty-five. The rounded curves of youth were still present in her form to give the lie to the wise look of age that showed in her face.

As Little approached the yard gate he

heard a horse coming along the trail. A young woman rode out of the shadows, and seeing him standing there with up-raised hand, she stopped.

"Get down," he said, tersely.

The girl disengaged her foot from the stirrup and sprang lightly to the ground.

"What is it, father?" she asked, noticing the odd note in the man's voice.

"Where have you been?"

"Out riding."

"Yes, I understand that. You have been out four or five hours, and a body can't ride that long without goin' somewhere. Where did you go?"

"Why, why, just riding around," replied Lena.

"Well, now, you listen to me real careful, 'cause I don't like to tell people the same thing twice. When I agreed for you to stay here this winter, instead of going back to the convent, where you been for the last ten year, it was with the understanding that you mind me, and have absolutely no company of any kind. I don't mind you ridin' some in the daytime, but don't never fail again to be in the house when the sun goes down. Keep off the mountain trails and the Hell Roarin' road. When you leave the cove ride down the Sycamore road. If you don't remember this I'll find a way to make you remember it."

"I didn't know you cared," said Lena.

"You know it now. Don't forget it. Go in the house, I'll put up your horse."

Mr. David Little didn't seem to notice that his daughter had not committed herself as to whether she would obey him or not. He was so accustomed to being obeyed that he probably thought nothing of it. His expressed wish was usually taken as a command in Sycamore Cove.

While this conversation was going on, Mrs. Little stood in the door straining her ears, but she was unable to catch a word that passed between Little and the girl.

Lena entered the house, passed into her own room, and striking a match lighted a large lamp that stood on a center table. Any one who had seen the face of Dave Little and the cunning countenance of his half-breed wife, must have been shocked at seeing the girl for the first time.

Lena Little would have been a beauty anywhere, at any time. Just now there was a strange sparkle in her deep-blue eyes. Her slightly parted lips were coral red, and a dash of color showed in her cheeks. She had excellent features, was slightly above medium height, and slender, though not frail. She was crowned with a very halo of deep, golden-yellow hair. After the shock of such wonderful beauty one could but be amazed at the caprice of nature that could give such a daughter to such a man and wife. The room where Lena stood, slowly pulling off her gauntlet gloves, was as incongruous in this mountain cove, as the girl was among its people. The floor was richly carpeted. A piano, a writing desk, a case of books, paintings and drawings, were among the adornments of this one room in a large, but otherwise commonplace log house.

This all seemed a mystery, but there was at least no mystery about the surface indications. Many a half-breed Indian woman has married a white man, and borne a daughter whose eyes were light blue, and hair almost white. But, such had not been the case in this instance. Dave Little was a white man, of a sort. He had drifted into the Creek country a dozen years prior to the opening of this story. He represented himself to be a widower at that time, and had this one little daughter with him. He had married the half-breed girl for the double purpose of securing a right to hold land in the country, and at the same time a servant to whom his word was law, and who could keep her mouth shut. About a year after his marriage the girl was placed in a convent, and there she had remained.

Little seemed to have known all about Sycamore Cove, even before he married the Indian woman, and he lost no time in settling there. The Indian law allowed him all the land he wanted, and he took the cove and made it a little kingdom. The farm was a mile from his residence, and several mean tenant houses were scattered about it. The tenants were also white men, of a sort. Little was not on intimate terms with his tenants, and they rarely came to his house.

At last, some red blood, that had lain

dormant in Lena's veins from her childhood, asserted itself, and she refused to remain in the convent longer. Little, now well to do, fitted up a room in his home for the girl, not thinking what it would lead to. He had some plans of his own in regard to the girl.

One result, and the one that was apt to set things in motion quicker than anything else, was that being released from the restraint of convent life Lena, being a red-blooded young woman, was going to love a man. Yes, already loved one, and his kisses were still wet on her lips when her father was talking to her.

Another result was that the half-breed wife, who could have anything she wanted, and did have, only she didn't know enough to want anything worth while, was jealous of Lena. Not in a sensitive human way, but with the rage of a female tiger. Dave Little made no show of affection toward his daughter, but on the day of her arrival he had put his arm around her and kissed her. It had been a long time since Little had kissed his wife, and when she saw the little demonstration of affection the very fires of hell flamed up in her half-savage heart.

Mr. David Little suffered no serious compunctions at ridding his kingdom in the Kimish of inquisitive and undesirable strangers in the most direct and effective manner possible, but, like many another man he was protecting his house from the outside, and fostering a viper at his hearthstone.

Mrs. Little prepared supper, and the three sat down to table. Culture and refinement showed in Lena's every word and movement, even to the extent of apparently not noticing the uncouth manners of her father, and the hideous coarseness of his Indian wife. The girl did not seem to take the trouble to make comparisons, but Mrs. Little had never failed to do so, at every meal since the girl's coming.

Little seemed to take the situation as a matter of course. The house was his. The woman was his, the same as his horses and hounds. The girl was his daughter. He didn't expect her to do any part of the household labor. But the woman didn't see things the same way. Lena made no offer to help with the housework, possibly because she didn't know how, possibly for other reasons, and the woman hated her.

After supper Lena returned to her room, blew out the light, and stood at the window looking to the eastward, out toward where the peak of Blue Point was carved in relief against the starlit sky.

Dave Little mounted his horse and rode away into the night. This was not unusual. He often did that. There was rarely a week that he didn't ride away two or three nights, and sometimes he would not return for several days. The Indian woman had ceased to think anything of it. She was accustomed to being left by herself. She could stand that, but since Lena had come she was not only deserted by her husband, but left in the house with a favored woman that she hated.

As Lena stood at the window she heard her father ride away. She knew that he often went on these night visits. The thought came to her: Why could she not slip out on those nights without his knowledge? Since part of the restraint of her convent days was removed, she could brook no restraint—and then, she loved a man. She knew by woman's intuition that the Indian woman hated her, and wondered if she would watch her and tell her father. Up to that time she had not taken the trouble to even dislike her stepmother, but with that thought she hated her.

While these thoughts were passing through Lena's mind, a strange proceeding was taking place in the kitchen of Dave Little's home. There was a window in the west side of the room. The Indian woman set a lamp on a table in front of the window, lighted it, blew it out, lighted it again, and blew it out again. Then, throwing a shawl over her head, she slipped noiselessly out the back door and disappeared in the darkness.

A rough, winding trail came across the mountains from the west. It was the only entrance to Sycamore Cove from that direction. There was never a time when this trail was unguarded, and only the initiated could pass over it. There was considerable horseback and foot travel over it, but it was all done at night.

This trail led from Sycamore Cove over and through the mountains, down to the settlements on the Arkansas and the Canadians. From time to time the Indians, and other people of that section, secured abundance of ardent and hilarious spirits from some source, but the authorities had been unable to locate any distributing agent in that part of the Kimish. They watched the railroad, and were sure that it was not shipped in by rail. The government men knew where this trail was, and had watched it. One or two of the more adventurous spirits among them had traveled the trail, even, to make explorations. They had not returned.

To-night, when the lamp had flashed its three signals from the kitchen window of Dave Little's house, a man, sitting on his horse out on the trail well toward the top of the mountain, rode forward down the trail. A little farther on he dismounted, left his horse and walked on cautiously, listening as he went. The Indian woman had crossed the head of Sycamore Creek on the stones, and presently she and the man met. There was no surprise. They knew they were going to meet, had probably met before in the same manner.

"Where's Dave to-night?" asked the man.

"He went down Sycamore, I think. If he did there'll be a wagon in to-morrow."

"Time one was coming," said the man. "People are rarin' for some goods. What's makin' Dave so cautious here lately? Acts like he might be goin' to join the church."

"I don't know," said the woman, with a low laugh, in which there was no mirth.

"Kahlita, you know Dave don't care any more for you than he do for one of his hounds. Why don't you quit him and go with me?" said the man.

. The darkness hid the would-be wife stealer. He was an undersized nondescript, who looked burly, and larger than he really was, in the darkness. He was evidently a whisky runner, and quite as evidently in the employ of Little, in some capacity. He was white, or the Indian woman would not have noticed him. His name, in that community at least, was simply Ben Brown. He was part owner of a livery stable in Muskogee, and part owner in a store that stood at the foot of the mountain on the northwest side, where the trail came down. He was as likely to be found at one of these places as at the other, and often was not seen at either of them for weeks at a time.

Brown had told the Indian woman the same thing, and had asked her the same question several times before, and she had always answered steadfastly, no. Sometimes when she had flashed the signal she had met Brown to learn things that she wanted to know. At other times she had met him as a matter of reciprocity, to tell him things that he wanted to know. Whatever Brown's feelings may have been at meeting a woman in this manner, in the night, Mrs. Little had never had any personal feeling for Brown. She had always said "no" and ended the matter, not seeming to think it possible that Brown might have a passion for her, the same as any other animal.

But to-night it was different. She had seen Dave Little put his arm around a beautiful woman, and kiss her. He said the woman was his daughter. Kahlita didn't know. Relationship was a kind of mystery to her. She had never had any children, and, so far as she knew, neither father nor mother. Men were men, and women were women, to her. She knew little about the laws of consanguinity. Any man might love and marry any woman, so far as Kahlita knew.

Seeing Little kiss the beautiful girl had awakened in the heart of the Indian woman a desire to be caressed. She had, since then, tried to win caresses from Little, and had been repulsed. Never before had she permitted Brown to even so much as touch her hand. Indians, as a people, are virtuous and loyal. But to-night she was standing very near him when he asked the old question. She did not answer. Encouraged by her silence, he reached up and laid his hand on her shining black hair. A moment later, with a little smothered cry, she went to his arms. The barrier of her reserve was broken. If she could not have caresses where she was entitled to them,

she would take them where they were to be had.

Brown took the woman in his arms, and his caresses and endearments were real enough, at the time. They were the outward demonstration of that passion without which the thing called love would be an evanescent dream. But in the back of Brown's head was another matter. He coveted the cove, and the thriving business that Little conducted, much more than he coveted Little's wife. If he could win the woman's confidence his battle would be almost won. One or the other of them would kill Little, and the cove and the business would belong to Kahlita. He would marry Kahlita, and would then be the king of Sycamore Cove.

Kahlita raised her head from Brown's shoulder, and with a new and strange light in her eyes, said:

"Dave will kill you when he finds out."

"I could tell the marshals what I know and they would take him, or kill him," said Brown, "but they would take me, too, and besides, the business would be lost."

"No, no!" said Kahlita, clinging to him, "you must not tell. I could not live now, if they took you. No one else loves me. I will kill him, and the girl too."

"No," said Brown, "just let things go on as they are for a while. Some time I will see Dave out on the mountains and he will not come back. Then we can decide about the girl. Is she pretty, Kahlita?"

"No, she is not pretty," lied Kahlita. "You must not see her. When you have killed Dave, let me know, and then I will kill the girl. I hate her. I must not stay longer now. Watch for the light every night, and when you see it I will come."

With a last, lingering kiss, the Indian woman tore herself from Brown's arms and disappeared down the trail. Brown returned to his horse. Absence from the woman cooled his passion, there were other women, of a sort, but the demon of greed was awake in his mind. The hope of possessing all of Little's wealth, by the simple expedient of murdering him, and afterward marrying his wife, had its allurements. Why not? Little killed without compunction, and Brown knew it.

CHAPTER III.

WHERE WAS DAVE LITTLE?

THERE was never yet a monarch who ruled his realm by fear and frightfulness, that did not sooner or later come to grief. For more than ten years Little had ruled the kingdom of Sycamore Cove with a strong and ruthless hand. Now, by the weakest, and as he thought, the most thoroughly cowed of his subjects, one who was his abject slave, his throne was being undermined.

At the moment when Kahlita was saying that she would kill Little, he was searching his brains for a safe, sure and plausible means of disposing of his wife. He could not kill her and throw her body into a gorge, as he had done with Rufus Haile. He was not supposed to know where other people were, but even in that wild country a man must know what became of his wife when she disappeared. At least, so Little thought. He thought he knew where his wife was at that moment. He pictured her sitting by the smoldering fire in his house, patiently waiting for his return, as an obedient slave should. His surmise was wide of the mark, but no matter. Just now, his wife was in his mind. He was studying plans that concerned her very much.

Mrs. Little was under the impression that Dave had taken the trail that led into the wild and trackless country to the east of the cove, where he sometimes went, but she was mistaken. That trail was a blind trail, and when Little started out on it, he was using it for a blind. It lost itself in a labyrinth of mountain peaks and cañons. No horseman would undertake to follow it, and only an expert woodsman would undertake to find his way across the mountains to the sawmill that lay ten miles to the eastward, in a little valley. There was one intrepid hunter who knew the way quite well, and he had learned it in the last few days. Dave Little knew nothing of this stalwart young man, but Lena knew him. She had ridden the Blue Point trail that very after-

noon, and had met the hunter at a point where she dared go no farther. She had kissed him good-by as he stood beside her pony.

But Dave Little was seeking no wandering hunter. He had no fears from that side of his realm, and thought there was no danger there. The crest of the mountain was the edge of the world in that direction, to him. A little way from home he struck the road that led down Sycamore, and followed it. At the lower end of the gorge through the mountain that Sycamore Creek had cut by ages of patient toil, he came to a deep gorge on his right, and turning into it rode along its bed.

The night was dark, and the gloom in the cañon impenetrable, but Little seemed to find his way without difficulty. True, this was out of his realm, but there were certain duchies and baronies adjoining, upon which he levied tribute. He was approaching one of them.

Far up the cañon the rider dismounted, and, leaving the horse, scaled the rocky side of the gulch. After a short walk he turned abruptly around the shoulder of a crag and came to a rough door. Light was streaming through a chink near the ground. Little gave a peculiar knock, and the door was cautiously opened. Little entered, and it closed again.

The interior was a cavelike place, partly natural and partly excavated. The only occupant was an old man, whose long gray hair and beard showed that they had not known shears for many a day.

"Do you think I have changed much, Dave?"

"Not a particle," said Little, "you look just like you did twenty years ago."

This question was invariably asked by the older man as soon as Little entered the place, no matter how often he came, and the reply was always the same. Then the old man would say:

"No change. I had hoped that my hair would turn grayer, and my face get wrinkled so no one would know me. Then I could go back and find out some things that I have always wanted to know. Isn't my hair a little grayer?"

"No more than it was that night when you left the drug store in Poplar Bluff."

"Don't!" cried the old man, in terror, "You must never mention that place. Some one might be listening."

"All right, Mr. Sarkey. I want to talk a little business to-night."

"Don't call me by that name," pleaded the old man, "call me Prell."

"Sure, Mr. Prell! Anything to oblige," said Little, with a demoniacal grin. "Now, Mr. Sar—Prell, I mean, I've been pretty clean with you. I found you this quiet little place, here in the sylvan mountains, away from cares and troubles, where you can prosecute your studies of chemistry without being disturbed. You have been here ten years. The man who was tried and convicted for the crime you committed, died in the penitentiary. True, they never secured sufficient evidence to give him the death sentence, but he died. His drug store closed up. His wife died suddenly, too, I believe. He left a child or two, didn't he, Mr. Prell, or did they get some of the same medicine?"

"My God, David! Don't! Please don't! Tell me what you want done, and I'll do it—if it ain't too bad," said the cringing Prell.

"Oh! If it ain't too bad," jeered Little. "Now, about what would you call too bad, my dear Mr. Sar—beg pardon again, I mean my dear Mr. Prell?"

"Don't make me commit murder," begged the old man.

"Have you made the powders I asked you to make?"

"Yes, yes. If you use the powders as directed you can make forty barrels of whisky from one, and none but an expert chemist can tell the difference. No one will ever suspect the presence of this drug in this out-of-the-way place. I have made it from apparently harmless chemicals, and the result would be a credit to the most expert manufacturing chemist," said Prell, with pride in his work.

"Good work," said Little. "You do appreciate my kindness in finding this quiet retreat for you, where you can go ahead with your experiments. You have saved some money, too. Let's see. It is ten years last May since you came up the gulch, and you have never been out. I

have brought you all your supplies, and food, and have done you a number of small favors. Now, about this other matter. I don't sleep very well nights. Couldn't you fix me up a powder that just a tiny bit, in my coffee, say, would make me sleep? I would be careful not to take too much, because an overdose would make me die—naturallike. 'Sleep medicine,' they used to call it. A white powder. That was what you fixed up once in Poplar—pardon me, Mr. Prell. I keep forgetting that the name of that place is distasteful to you."

The old hermit was writhing in agony, but he was in the clutches of this fiend, and knew no way out.

"You can have it ready by to-morrow night," continued Little, "if you know how to make it. Of course, if you don't know, that will be evidence that you had nothing to do with mixing the medicine that killed those people, and it will be useless for me to keep you hid here any longer."

Soon after this conversation Little took his package of whisky powders, the base of which was a drug akin to cocaine, and departed down the gulch.

When Little was gone the old hermit sat before his fire in the cavern, trembling with agony and fright. "I will not do it!" he muttered. "I do not believe I murdered those people. I did mix the drug that would make them sleep, but if they were given an overdose it was not my fault. But they are still seeking me. If they find me this fiend will appear against me. He has me bound and gagged. I must do it. Oh, my God!" and the old man rocked himself in an agony of fear.

Little returned home and found his house quiet, though he was sure that he had heard some one close the yard gate as he rode up.

Lena Little had stood at the window looking eastward, a long time after the footfalls of her father's horse had died out in the distance, as he left the house earlier in the evening. She heard no movements about the house, and supposed that the Indian woman had retired for the night. Why had she not thought of this before? If he knew it, her lover could come down the mountain to a point near the house, and she could easily slip out the window and meet him. Why could she not entertain him in her own home as other girls did? When she had first come home from the convent her father had told her that she must have absolutely no company. She had thought nothing of it, then, because she knew of no company that she wanted. The woods and the streams were wonderful to her, and she reveled in the freedom to roam over the cove and on the mountainsides. Now, it was all different. She had been thinking of asking her father to remove the restriction, and telling him openly of the young man. Then when he spoke to her, there was such an odd note in his voice that she said nothing.

While informal, there was nothing irregular or wrong about Lena's meeting with Chester Harrington. He was a young lawyer from Texas, a graduate from the university law department and had made creditable success in the practice of his profession. Notwithstanding he was now twenty-eight years old, and still unmarried, his love for a good gun and a stroll in the wild woods was still as strong as it had been in his boyhood.

It chanced that the owner of the sawmill, ten miles east of Blue Point, had been Harrington's client in a suit with a machinery company in a Texas city. The case had been handled in a very satisfactory manner, and Harrington had been invited to come to the Kimish on a hunt. He had come, and in a short time was familiar with the country for miles around. The Blue Point had a fascination for him.

One evening, as he sat smoking his pipe on a point of the northeast shoulder of the mountain, and resting, preparatory to beginning the ten-mile tramp back to the sawmill, he saw a woman riding about in a labyrinth of deep cañons, across a great draw. Finally, he decided that the woman had lost her way, and was seeking a way out.

Hastily crossing the draw, Harrington rounded a little rocky ledge, and came face to face with Lena Little. She realized that she had lost her way, but did not know that she was trying to go away

from home, instead of toward it. She had taken her hat off and hung it on the horn of her saddle. The October sun turned her hair to a heap of ruddy gold. The color was in lip and cheek, and altogether the girl would have been wonderfully beautiful, anywhere. But to come upon such a beautiful woman, suddenly, here in the heart of the Kimish, was almost too much for Harrington. He raised his hat and said:

"Good evening. I have noticed you riding about here in the cañons for some time, and thought perhaps you had lost your way. Can I be of service in any way?"

"Why, thank you," said Lena, "I have missed the trail in some manner. I live in Sycamore Cove."

"What direction is that from Blue Point?" asked Harrington.

"Northwest," replied Lena.

"But, you are trying to go southeast. Let me pilot you back onto the ridge, and perhaps you will be able to get your bearings."

Harrington walked beside her horse, and each time she spoke he experienced a new thrill. He had not supposed there were any such people as this wonderfully cultured young woman to be found in this wild country, and yet, here she was, and she had said that she lived there. They came out on a broad, plain trail.

"Oh, stop! Now I know the way. I am almost home. You must go back!" cried Lena.

"Why, may I not see you safely home?" asked Harrington, in astonishment.

"Oh, no!" and then Lena bit her lip in chagrin. "I—I can't explain. To-morrow I will tell you," and without another word she rode away.

Harrington stood looking after her until she disappeared down the mountainside. In his own home town Chester Harrington was looked upon as a good match for any girl in the city, but so far he had never met the girl of his dreams. As he plodded back over the rough, mountain trail toward the sawmill he kept thinking of Lena Little. She had told him her name quite frankly, and he had told her his name. One minute he would be telling himself that he should never see her again, and the next he would be saying: "But, she said she would explain to-morrow."

The next evening had found Harrington out on the broad trail on the shoulder of old Blue Point. He had not waited long until he heard the footfalls of Lena's pony. When they had exchanged greetings, she said:

"Let's go farther on, over the crest."

Without a word Harrington walked beside her, until they came to where the trail turned down into the cañon. Here Lena dismounted, and said:

"Now then, tie my pony, and we'll sit right here on this big rock and I'll tell you."

She did tell him all she knew of her life, and wound up by telling him that her father had forbidden her to entertain company. Then Harrington told her of himself, and his life. What he was doing there in the Kimish, and what his hopes were in regard to becoming better acquainted with her. After that they just talked, there beneath God's blue skies.

Murder and violence might run rampant in the Kimish, but such violence did not frighten Cupid, who always goes armed with his bow and arrows. Before they parted he had fired the first tiny dart into their hearts. They agreed to meet again at the same old rock, and they did meet again. The first meeting had been more than a week before this night when Lena stood looking out the window. Since that time they had spent every afternoon together.

Lena knew it was a clandestine love affair, but she had been forbidden to have company at home. She loved this man, and no one should keep her from him. No one had a right to rob her of her happiness. Thus she had reasoned, and on this last afternoon Harrington had gone beside himself with the lure of her wonderful loveliness, had taken her in his arms, kissed her, and told her over and over that nothing on earth should keep them apart. That he would find a way, must find a way, to satisfy her father. It did not occur to Harrington at the time that this was, perhaps, very

much the largest case he had taken since he was admitted to the bar.

Harrington came of a proud family, but like other impetuous young men, he let love get the better of his judgment, and made declarations that might irk him later on. He could not conceive such a thing possible as the father of this wonderful girl being a man of Dave Little's class. How would he feel when he learned the facts, which could not be much longer hidden? For Lena had already decided to tell her father, and Harrington had insisted that that was the proper course to pursue.

Harrington was not dreaming of such possibilities as he swung his athletic body from bowlder to bowlder on the way back to the sawmill that night. Nor had Lena thought of an insurmountable difficulty, until she rode up to the gate with Harrington's kiss still wet on lip and cheek, and was told by her father that she must be in the house by sundown thereafter.

As she stood looking toward their trysting place to-night, she knew Harrington was gone, but so complete had been the surrender of her heart, and so thoroughly had love for Harrington driven every other thought from her mind, that she found happiness even in looking toward where she had seen him last.

Lena was not asleep when Little rode into the lot, and she noted that it was some time afterward that he came into the house.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LIFE LINE.

WHILE Mr. Little, the King of Sycamore Cove, his estimable queen consort, Kahlita, Mr. Ben Brown, Mr. Sarkey, or Prell, as he preferred to be called, Miss Lena Little, and Mr. Chester Harrington, were each going their respective ways, and indulging in their respective thoughts and activities, certain events that have a direct bearing on this narrative were taking place in another quarter.

When Dave Little fired his rifle at Rufus Haile he was shooting directly against the sun. Mr. Little was an excellent marksman, and would have almost sworn that his bullet was safely lodged in the base of the young man's brain. But he would have been mistaken. Little had been at his victim's back. Indeed, shooting from the rear, when no one was looking, was Mr. Little's preference. The sun, as stated, was in his face when he fired the shot, and the bullet went a few inches to the left and a trifle low. But, no matter. It was full two hundred feet to the bottom of the gorge, and Haile had fallen to those sharp rocks below. But had he?

As a matter of fact, the wound in the tender muscles at the top of the shoulder was not serious. The bullet struck a sensitive spot which caused Haile to fall and roll over the edge. Fifteen feet below a shelving rock projected out and up. Rufus Haile fell on this rock. His head struck the bluff, and he was knocked senseless. He was in a precarious condition. If he was not actually dead, it would be very dangerous for him to regain consciousness and move, as he would undoubtedly fall to certain death below.

A few minutes after Little's departure from the scene of his crime, and just as the sun was disappearing behind the peaks in the west, a cap and the toe of a moccasined foot peeped from behind a big bowlder a little way up the slope. Presently a lithe, slender form, clad in buckskin, swung down the slope, and approaching the edge of the bluff got down on hands and knees and peered over. Only a glance, and the mountaineer saw the white, upturned face of the man on the rock below. His actions were now very deliberate. He got up and walked to the little cedar bush that stood near where Haile's wagon was when Little examined it. He had noticed from his hiding place that when Little threw what he thought was one rope over his shoulder, there had been two of them. One had gone over behind the cedar, and had been left there.

The mountaineer picked the rope up and uncoiled it. Haile was generous with his horses, and the lariat was full fifty feet long. Near the edge of the bluff grew a little, stunted pine sapling. Tying one end of the rope around his waist, the slender mountaineer passed it around the sap-

ling and let himself down over the edge of the bluff.

A moment later he was standing gingerly on the edge of the jutting stone, having made the rope fast in his belt, so he could swing in it in the event he should lose his footing and slip from the rock. Then he proceeded to tie the other end of the rope around under Haile's arms. This done, he set about trying to revive the wounded man, but his efforts were vain. The body was warm and there was a faint pulse, but he could not be roused.

At last, giving up hope of saving the man alone, the mountaineer decided to leave one end of the rope fast around Haile's body, ascend to the top, tie the rope to the sapling in order to keep him from falling in the event he should become conscious and move. He would then go for assistance, which would take some time, as there was no house near except the house of the man who had shot Haile, and he would probably not take kindly to the work of rescue.

Just as the young mountaineer reached the top of the bluff he took hold of a bush and released the rope. The bush gave way, and he fell back the fifteen feet, missing the rock. His momentum was such that, in spite of the fact that Haile was far heavier, when the rope jerked taut it lifted the wounded man from the stone, and for a moment they hung suspended, one on each side of the jutting rock.

The mountaineer saw the danger of the double weight on the pine sapling, which was growing in thin soil, on top of a solid granite bluff, and scrambled for the stone. He was too late. The roots of the little tree gave way under the strain, and the two men fell. The rope caught on the rock and broke the fall, but just for a moment. It slipped off and they fell again. The rope caught on another point of rock just in time to save them from the sharp stones at the base of the cliff.

The mountaineer could now get his feet firmly on a large bowlder at the base of the cliff. He untied the rope from his own waist and let it pay out cautiously until he could ease Haile's body, which still hung limp in the rope, down between two big rocks.

The slender hunter worked his way quickly across the stones, and pulling the rope down, untied it from Haile's body. With remarkable strength for one so slight of build, he carried the wounded man down the dangerous slope to the stream at the bottom of the gorge. By the time he reached the water with his lifeless burden it was quite dark in the cañon.

The mountaineer had matches, but a light just then might prove dangerous. Mr. Little might happen that way. He laid the wounded man on his back on a gravel bar and examined him carefully. The wound in the shoulder was not dangerous, and was scarcely bleeding at all. He ran his fingers deftly over Haile's head, found the protuberance caused by the fall, and nodded his head in the darkness.

Within thirty feet of him he could see the dim outlines of Haile's wagon, which had "lit standin' " in a clump of willows. He went over and made a survey of the wagon and found that while it was smashed pretty badly, most of its contents were intact. He found a water bucket and a towel. Then he got out the bedding, and finding a level place near by he spread a bed. After that he set himself to the task of bringing Haile around, by the wet-towel route.

"What the hell's the idea?" asked Haile, as he struggled to sit up.

"How you coming, old scout?" came back the boyish voice of the rescuer.

Haile told the mountaineer where to find his first-aid kit, in the wagon. The wound was dressed the best that it could be done in the darkness, and Haile wondered at the deftness and skill of the mountaineer, and was still wondering when he lay down on the bed, and, after a time, went to sleep. He knew when his rescuer got the rest of the bedding out of the wagon and made another bed near by. What he didn't know was that this strange mountaineer of the Kimish heard every move he made throughout the night.

A few hours' sleep relieved the grogginess he had felt from the crack on his

head. The wound in his shoulder was little more than a scratch for a strong man. When he woke the next morning he was right as could be. When he had asked how they came there the night before, his companion had said:

"Better not talk now. I'll tell you in the morning."

It was morning now, and Haile was anxious to know a few things, but the mountaineer was asleep. He slipped out of his blankets, discovered that he was in the bottom of the gorge, and decided to take a look down the stream for a way out. Then he would come back, wake his friend and rustle some breakfast. The way downstream was clear enough for a quarter of a mile, and then Haile struck a real knot. There was a fall, where the water scooted down a smooth inclined plane for a hundred feet or more, into a deep, blue hole of water, with perpendicular cliffs rising from the water's edge on each side. The rushing water coming down the chute caused a whirlpool that no living swimmer could exist in.

"Nothing doing. I can swim a whole lot, but not through there," mused Haile, and he turned back toward the camp at the head of the gorge.

When Haile reached the beds the mountaineer was up and gone. He heard some one splashing water just around a big bowlder, and stepped that way to greet his companion. When he rounded the stone the fellow was squatting on the edge of the water washing his face, while a wealth of wavy brown hair rippled down the back of his buckskin coat.

"What the hell and damn—oh! I beg your pardon. It was dark last night when I saw you, and I didn't know it was a lady that helped me out."

The mountaineer rose and faced him. It was, indeed, a young girl. The front of the buckskin coat was now open, showing a loose-fitting shirt of some soft goods that displayed the firm curves of a wonderfully modeled woman. She was well above medium height, athletic of build, with rich brown hair and clear hazel eyes.

"If you are disappointed I am sorry, but it can't be helped now," she said.

"Oh, give me a chance, please," pleaded Haile. "It was just the surprise. I never would have believed that a woman could have done what you did. Er—by the way, I don't believe I know what it was you did. You said last night you would tell me this morning," and Haile's face flushed as the girl stood measuring him with a steady, level gaze.

"I think I did tell you that, in order to get you to go to sleep," she said, "but I never can talk when I'm hungry. What are we going to do for something to eat?"

"Why, there ought to be plenty of grub in that wagon," said Haile, as he made a dive for the willows.

When he returned he announced that they could not have eggs for breakfast, unless the young lady liked her eggs scrambled with cottonseed and sawdust. Otherwise, the menu would include bacon, toast, coffee, cereal, condensed milk and a variety of canned fruits.

A small fire was kindled in a sheltered nook, and breakfast was soon ready. Two healthy, and extremely hungry, young people were quite ready for it to be ready. They finished breakfast. Haile stuffed his old pipe full of tobacco and stretched out on the ground for a smoke. He was a philisopher. He was feeling quite comfortable just now, and had no desire to rush into the next step until he had finished this one. The girl sat on a rock, contemplating him gravely, as he smoked in silence.

"What did that man shoot you for?" she asked.

"Thank goodness, that's off my mind, at last," said Haile. "I've been thinking all the time you shot me, and was afraid to ask you what for. I didn't see the gentleman that shot me, and didn't have a chance to ask him about it. Did you see him?"

"Yes, I saw him."

"Why didn't you ask him?"

It was the girl's time to stammer now.

"Oh, well, it don't matter, now," said Haile. "He probably had his own reasons. If I ever see him I'm going to ask him, and I'll tell you what he says. Now, since we are on this picnic together, let's get acquainted. My name is

Rufus Haile. You can call me Rufe, while the picnic lasts."

"My name is Harriet Hedwick, and you may call me Hattie, while the picnic lasts, since it is likely to be the last one either of us will ever attend," said the girl, calmly.

"Why the last one?"

"There is said to be no way into, or out of this place, except by the top. We came in that way, but there seems little chance that we will go out that way. We might kindle a big fire, or arrange some kind of signal, but there is little chance that we would attract the attention of any one except the man who shot you."

"Do you know that gentleman?" asked Haile.

"Yes, I know him when I see him. His name is Dave Little," said the girl, observing Haile narrowly.

"Not on my visiting list," said Rufus Haile, "but when we get out of here, I shall make an effort to get acquainted with him. Now please tell me as much as you can about what happened to me. The last I remember I was standing at the top of the bluff trying to make out what the 'wild waves were saying' or something like that. I heard a shot, and after that things are not quite clear."

Harriet Hedwick told Haile that she did not see Little when he fired the shot, so she was unable to prevent it. She did see him unharness the horses and run the wagon over the bluff. She went on to tell of her attempt to save him, of their spectacular trip down the face of the bluff, and the various stages of his rescue up to the time he regained consciousness.

"Well, Hattie, you are one more game sport. You saved my life, all right, and I am going to get you out of here and back to—where do you live?"

"About eight miles from here, over the southeast side of Blue Point."

"Is that a mountain or an oyster?"

"A mountain, in this instance," said Harriet.

"Won't your folks be terribly uneasy about you?"

"I have no one but my father. He may be uneasy about me after a while, when he misses me, but he knows that I am fairly capable of taking care of myself."

They washed up the breakfast dishes and started out to explore the gorge. On the rocks along the base of the cliff they found several skeletons of men, remnants of old saddles, the wreckage of a wagon or two, and general indications that it had been used for the same purpose for some time.

"This place seems to be a kind of depository for Mr. Little's cast-off friends," said Haile. "I am glad to find that he had no special dislike for me, and that he was treating me no worse than he had treated others. I hate partiality and discrimination. We are all on a democratic level down here. None of us can say we came by a superior route, or came over in the *Mayflower,* or anything like that."

"Oh, don't talk that way about this gruesome place! If we have to spend another night here I shan't be able to sleep for fright."

"They are not nearly so dangerous as the live people in the Kimish, if half I have heard is true," said Haile.

"The people in the Kimish are very much like the people elsewhere," said Harriet, "except that they are a bit more extreme. This Sycamore Cove outfit, with Dave Little at the head of it, comprises all the really bad people in this part of the country. Some of the others I know are as extremely good as that gang is extremely bad."

"I've seen one sample of badness and one of goodness," said Haile, "and the good deed outshines in its goodness the bad deed in its badness. So we'll let it go at that."

They made a careful survey of the situation. There was no possibility of escape down the stream. Even if they could pass the whirlpool by swimming, it was remembered that there was a worse one just above the last crossing on the stream, a few miles below. At noon they ate dinner and sat for some time afterward talking over the situation.

"Now, Miss Hedwick," said Haile soberly, "you got into this place in an effort to save my life. You undoubtedly did save it, and I have never been a quitter.

That is why I am in this country now. I am not going to quit now. I am going to get out of this place alive, and am going to take you out with me. By the way, how long have you lived in this country?"

"About three years."

"You know a great many of the people here, then."

"I have seen a good many of them. I know, personally, very few."

Haile drew a pocketbook from a receptacle somewhere inside his clothing. Taking a photograph from the book he handed it to the girl and said:

"Do you know that man?"

"Why, that is Dave Little!" exclaimed Harriet.

"I was beginning to suspect as much, said Haile, dryly, "I am afraid Mr. Little is going to be sorry he made such a poor shot, before this little adventure is ended." He returned the picture to his pocket. "I shall tell you some things about Mr. Little one of these days. Just now he is too far above us to be spoken of lightly. Besides, I must think about a means of getting out of this place."

They went up to the head of the stream, a hundred yards or more above their camp. The water broke over a fall about twenty-five feet high. Above the fall, as well as they could make out, the water came from beneath shelving rocks in the head of the gorge. There was a passageway up the rocks by the side of the fall, but it was slippery and dangerous.

Haile went back to the camp and got the rope and the ax. He cut some willow poles and made a kind of ladder. Late in the afternoon they climbed up above the fall and found themselves on a broad, level surface of stone, at the mouth of a great cavern from which the water poured. The opening to the cavern was as high as a man's head and extended entirely across the gorge. They stepped a little way inside, and found that the water poured up through a crevice in the stone floor of the cave and beyond that it was quite dry.

"Let's bring the camp things up here and stay to-night. It is not quite so close to those horrible things in the gorge," begged Harriet.

Haile agreed, and he worked until it was quite dark moving as much of the camp supplies as he could, including the bedding and food, and a considerable quantity of dry wood, together with some pieces of the wagon body. On the last trip he brought the mashed and battered lantern, and the gallon can of kerosene that by some miracle had come through the wreck untouched. The lantern globe was broken, but the bowl and wick were intact, and would make a sort of light when there was no wind.

Rufe Haile had an idea of his own, but he didn't mention it to the girl, because he didn't want to raise false hopes. As they ate supper in the falling darkness, by a scanty camp fire, there was very little talking. Haile had to admit to himself that the outlook for escape from the gorge was anything but encouraging. Had he known the route they would eventually take he would have been afraid on account of the girl.

CHAPTER V.

BOILING BENEATH THE SURFACE.

ON the morning after Dave Little's visit to the hermit's cave the world seemed disposed to smile. At an early hour, about the time that Rufus Haile and Harriet Hedwick were eating their belated breakfast in the bottom of the gorge, Mr. Little was going about his home with a merry heart. He was singing, "Let the Lower Lights Be Burning," in a manner that would have assured the unsophisticated that all was quite well with his soul.

Lena had slept little, and was haggard and listless at the breakfast table. She had spent the night thinking and wondering about things that were becoming more and more a puzzle to her.

The Indian woman went about her housework as usual. Her face, always a mask, was more inscrutable than ever. No one could fathom the thoughts that were busy behind those glittering eyes.

When Dave Little had finished certain chores about the place he put his own horse and Lena's pony in the stable and

fed them. Then he turned the other horses out and drove them away.

After that, still singing sacred songs in a soulful manner, the King of Sycamore Cove went to the house, shaved, trimmed his tawny mustache, pulling a few gray hairs therefrom, and dressed himself in a neat-fitting suit of modest pattern, with a white shirt, collar and necktie. He put on a pair of new boots, combed his hair carefully, and emerged from his room quite a personable fellow, indeed. He would have easily passed for forty or less. Then Mr. Little did a thing that he had never done before. He entered Lena's room and asked her for a book to read.

The girl was almost speechless with astonishment at the change in her father's appearance. But the thing that puzzled her most was the expression in his eyes that she could not fathom. She only knew that it was not good to see.

She gave him the book, but he did not leave the room. He sat down and glanced about him.

"I've done pretty well by you, Leeny. You are educated. You ain't never worked none, and you won't never have to work. You stay by me, and I'll do my part. I'm going to tell you something in a few days that will open your eyes. We'll make this old place gay, yet, or else we'll go where we can be gay."

The girl was so surprised at the actions of her father, about whom she really knew very little, that she attempted no reply. Presently Little rose to leave the room, and walking over to where Lena sat he placed his hand on her head and bent it back, then stooped over and kissed her full on the lips. Lena was an unsophisticated convent girl, but she had felt the hot breath of passion on her face when Harrington had kissed her the evening before. Like a flash she interpreted the lustful light in the man's eyes, and fear gripped her heart. What could it mean? Was her father a brute?

At the dinner table Little was unusually cheerful and talkative. His wife was unusually glum and silent. Lena ate sparingly, in a kind of frozen horror. Kahlita interpreted the glitter in Little's eyes when he looked at the girl, readily enough, and her hands clenched beneath the table. She had given herself to Ben Brown, but still Little was her husband, and he had no right to look at any other woman in that manner in her presence. Especially, he had no right to bend such an ardent look of desire on a beautiful woman like Lena, even if she were his daughter. When the meal was finished Little rose from the table and said:

"I'm going to ride down Sycamore this evening, Leeny. If you want to go with me I'll saddle yo' pony."

"Why, I—I don't believe I feel like riding this evening," stammered the girl, taken completely by surprise.

There was a fiendish grin on the face of the Indian woman, who had her back to them at the time.

"Very well," said Little, "you can go some other time."

Lena went to her room to wait until her father was out of the way. Then she would saddle her pony and go to meet Harrington, as usual. Peering out a back window, Kahlita saw Little saddle his own horse, and then turn Lena's pony out and drive it away.

Half an hour later, when Lena went to get her pony, she was panic-stricken to find that it was gone. She must see Harrington. Heretofore she had wanted to see him because she loved him, and was not happy except when she was with him. Now she wanted to see him because she wanted him to save her from some hideous thing that she felt was impending, and that she could not express or even understand.

Returning to the house she hastily put on a pair of strong shoes and a short walking skirt. She then set out to walk to the trysting place. As she went along she kept thinking of the mystery that surrounded her, and of being a prisoner here in the mountains. In the stress of her excitement she ran. As she gained the place where the trail climbed out on to the mountain she was out of breath and stopped to rest. Quite naturally, in her fear, she looked back down the mountain to see if she was being pursued. There was no one in sight, but she could see the window of her own room quite plainly, and it gave her an idea.

Just after she passed on over the crest she met Harrington, and was in his arms before she spoke.

"Why, darling, have you walked all the way up here to see me?" asked Harrington.

"Yes. I had to walk. They have taken my pony away from me. I am a prisoner! Oh, it is too horrible! I can't explain! I can't understand!"

"There, there," said Harrington, soothingly, "you are excited, little girl. It can't be so bad as that. In a day or two you will find an opportunity to tell your father all about me. He cannot possibly have any objection to me. Then I can come to the house to see you, and everything will be lovely."

"Oh, no, no! It can't be! I fear him most of all. Oh, I can't tell you! I don't know what to say, or what to do!"

"Well, never mind. We'll talk of other things, and plan for the day when I am to take you to my own home in Texas, where you will always be happy, and my happiness will consist in making you happy."

They tried, but the effort was not a success. Lena's mind constantly reverted to her fears, and to the mystery that surrounded her. They were sitting on a fallen tree, in the shelter of some young pines.

"I must go now," said Lena, as she stood up.

Harrington took her into his arms for a last embrace, and looking up into his eyes she said:

"Promise me that, no matter what comes, you will not forsake me, dearest: I feel that some dreadful thing is about to befall. That you and I are about to be separated."

"I promise, darling, but there is nothing that can keep us apart. I will come boldly to the house and claim you."

"You cannot do that, yet. I will be here to meet you again to-morrow afternoon. If I should not come, then wait here until after dark. Go to that large tree that stands on the point. From there you can see the window of my room plainly. The curtain will expose the lower half of the window, in which there are four panes of glass. If the window is all light, I shall be all right, and you need not come. I will meet you the next day if I can. If it is all dark, or if two of the panes of glass are darkened, come at once, but be careful, for it will be dangerous."

With a last kiss Lena darted away down the mountainside. Harrington turned to tramp back across the mountains to his friend's home. As he went along he pondered the strange situation that he found himself in. That he, an honorable man, every act of whose life was an open book, was daily meeting a girl in this clandestine manner, seemed incredible. Yet it was true, and it was also true that he loved her with a love that would not be denied. He called the whispering old pines and the night winds, that were gossiping in their waving branches, to witness that his attitude toward Lena was as honorable as that of any man who told his love in the parlor of the most conventional home in all America. He would stand no more of this. He would go to the girl's father, as man to man, and tell him of his love for Lena.

Had he but known the things that were to happen before he saw Lena again Harrington would have taken her with him then, without the consent of any man. Had Lena dreamed of but half the ordeal before her, she would have run after him, clung to him, and begged him to take her.

Lena hurried home, but there was no need for haste. There was no one there when she got there, nor for some time afterward. The Indian woman slipped in from somewhere soon after sunset, and was busy preparing supper before Lena knew she had returned.

Dave Little's ride down Sycamore that afternoon seemed an aimless trip. He met two or three men. To one of them he said:

"Don't bring any more stuff up here until I give you notice. It may be a month before I can handle any more."

To another he said:

"Pass the word that there is no stock, and I am going to be out of business for a month or two, maybe longer."

None of his conversations were long,

and it was little past the middle of the afternoon when he started back up Sycamore toward his home. He rode leisurely along, apparently in deep study. When he came to the mouth of the gulch that led to the hermit's place he stopped, looked cautiously along the road in both directions, and then turned into the gulch.

"Just as well get it now, and save a trip to-night," he said to himself.

At the dugout Little knocked boldly, and entered.

"My God! David, what brings you here in the daytime?" asked the old man in startled tones.

"Oh, don't be alarmed," said Little. "I wanted that sleep medicine. I might not be able to come to-night, so I thought I'd come by and get it. You don't know what a terrible thing it is not to be able to sleep."

The old chemist's hands trembled as he produced the white powder and gave it to Little in a small package.

"Better give me some directions. I might take too much, or not enough, or something like that. Mistakes with medicine are mighty bad sometimes. You know that, don't you?"

"It is put up in separate papers. One powder will produce sleep that will last from eight to ten hours. If you should take two of them the result would be fatal, nine times out of ten."

"Oh, well, if I take more than one dose I will take the first and the tenth," said Little, facetiously. "Nice to know all about those things Mr. Sar—I mean Mr. Prell. This is a delightfully quiet place you have here. I have a very nervous friend that I may have to bring here for a rest, some time."

"Oh, David! You can't mean that! Please don't bring any one here!" pleaded the hermit. "Your coming here in the daytime is dangerous, but to bring any one else here, at any time, would be suicidal."

"Well, don't worry about it. I shall probably never bring any one here, but if I should I am sure you would not turn them away, on account of your kindly feeling for me."

Little left the old man writhing in terror. "He is losing his senses," muttered the hermit. "I cannot imagine what has taken possession of him. And the way he is shaved and dressed to-day. If any one saw him who knew him fifteen years ago he would be recognized instantly."

Little rode back down the gorge and entered the Sycamore cañon cautiously. A little farther on he set spurs to his horse and cantered gayly homeward, arriving at the house about dark. He tied his horse at the gate and went in. At supper he was quite pleasant and talkative, and the glances that he bent on Lena renewed the fires of hatred in the heart of his half-breed wife.

"I may not be back here to-night. I hope you will not be afraid, or lonesome here with Kahlita. Stay in the house. It is naughty for little girls, especially pretty girls, to go out at night," Little said to Lena, as he rose from the table.

Mounting his horse the King of Sycamore Cove rode eastward, toward Blue Point, with a great clatter of hoofs. A quarter of a mile from the house he stopped, dismounted, and tied his horse to a tree. Then he stole back to a point between the house and the stables, where he could command the entrance to the house without being seen.

The house was in total darkness. Suddenly a light flashed from the kitchen window, disappeared, flashed again, and disappeared.

"That was a strange performance," was Little's mental comment. Had the light come from Lena's window he would not have been surprised. He was watching her. He had become suspicious of her, and had decided to bring his plans concerning her to a speedy consummation. But if there was a hanger-on he wanted to get him first. Mr. Little took no chances. He never had taken any. That was the sole reason for his being here now. He wondered if it were possible that his wife was in league with the girl, against him.

Then he saw the kitchen door open and a woman steal softly away from the house. That was Kahlita, he knew her walk. No white woman could walk like that. He would follow her, and see where

she was going, and what she was up to. He had no intention of doing anything worse to Kahlita than administering two, or at most three, of the little white powders in her coffee the next morning. Still, she was his wife, and he should see to it that her behavior was not unbecoming the consort of a king.

He followed her across Sycamore at a distance, and up the trail toward the crest of the ridge. He saw her meet Ben Brown, and saw Brown take her in his arms. This was too much. The feelings of an outraged husband could not stand such wantonness in a wife, even though he did intend to poison her in the morning. He was very near them. The woman stood between him and Brown, with her head on the man's shoulder. There was a shot. The bullet passed through both of them.

It was a gruesome scene. Too much for Mr. Little's tender heart. He went back home. Went on and got his horse, and mounting rode boldly up to his own front gate, dismounted and entered the house. There was a light in Lena's room. She had not yet retired.

The King of Sycamore Cove entered his own castle with lordly tread. He knocked on Lena's door, and she opened it.

"May I come in a while?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Lena dutifully, but tremblingly.

"You know, Leeny, I told you to-day that I would tell you something before long that would surprise you. Well, I have decided to tell you to-night, and have it off my mind," said Little, as he sat down on a chair quite near the girl.

"You have always thought," he continued, "that you were my daughter, and I wanted you to think that until recently. But since you came here to live I have changed my mind. You are not my daughter, nor are you any kin to me, whatever. When you came here, and I saw how wonderfully lovely you were, I fell in love with you. I want you to be my wife. I must have you."

"But, father!" cried the girl, in wide-eyed horror.

"Don't call me father. I tell you, before Heaven, I am not your father, nor am I any kin to you. I took you when you were an orphan, a baby almost. I have done much for you. I had no thought, then, of course, of ever wanting to marry you. But you have developed into a wonderful woman. No man has a better right to you than I have. I have never been married, except to Kahlita, and you know how much of a wife she was. I have been cheated all these years of the love of a beautiful woman. I have not had the soft, yielding white body of a real woman to caress, nor rosy, girlish lips to kiss. Now I will have them, and no man shall say no."

"But, Mr. Little! I do not love you, cannot love you!" faltered Lena.

"It has never been my custom to beg," said Little, in cold tones. "I have usually taken what I wanted. I had hoped that you might care for me, but if you do not, that will not change matters. There is nowhere else for you to go. No one else shall have you," and Little reached a hand toward her.

Like a flash she darted from her chair and out the door, but halfway to the gate he caught her. One wild scream of terror rang out across the night, before he placed his hand over her mouth. The hand that less than an hour before had taken the life of his own lawful wife.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAST MATCH.

WHEN Rufus Haile and Harriet Hedwick had finished supper, after moving their camp from the gruesome neighborhood below the falls, they sat some time in silence, each busy with thoughts that did not admit of expression to a stranger.

Hattie Hedwick was an athlete, and was also an independent thinker. The same freedom that had developed her physical strength to a remarkable degree, had developed her mind in a like manner. She had been hedged about by none of the conventions that make so many young women supersensitive of their physical limitations.

And yet, Hattie was very much a woman, with all the finer instincts fully developed. The thought of being im-

prisoned there in the gorge, with its unscalable walls, with a man whom she had never seen before, came to her with as much force as it would have come to the most conventional prude in the world. But, it came tempered with reason and common sense. The situation was the result of a combination of circumstances that were beyond human control. Worrying, and giving way to sadness and repining, or to senseless fear, could not mend matters. Haile's behavior indicated that he was a clean-minded gentleman. Further than that, she had discovered that he had some great purpose in the Kimish, which was occupying his mind to the exclusion of all else. The solving of the problem of escaping from the gorge, as the next step in that great purpose, was evidently occupying his mind fully just then.

While these thoughts were running in Hattie's mind, she was silently watching Haile, who was working at something on the other side of the fire. He seemed to be an ingenious fellow, with a quick mind. From somewhere he had produced a large cork, such as are used to stop jugs. With the small blade of his knife he cut a hole through the middle of the cork. Then he unraveled two lengths of small cotton rope that he had cut from his wagon sheet, and twisting them together drew them through the hole in the cork. He then removed the cap from the kerosene can, dropped the rope into it, and screwed the cork firmly into the mouth of the can, thus making a very creditable torch. The cork bound the wick tightly, and would prevent the flame from running down into the can. Cork would burn, of course, but it would burn very slowly. The point of his knife was driven through the tin near the top of the can, forming a vent for any gas that might be created by the heat, and the torch was ready for business.

When his labors were finished Haile took the torch a little way inside the cave and set a match to it. It proved a splendid success. Returning to the camp fire he said:

"I am going to have a look at the inside of the cave. You will be perfectly safe here, if you do not wish to go. I will divide the matches with you, leave one of my pistols, and all the food. If I should not return you must do the best you can."

Harriet Hedwick stood up and flexed the muscles of his sinewy arms.

"No, Mr. Haile, I am going with you. I am not a quitter. Then, if either of us gets back, we'll both get back."

Hattie was brave and self-reliant enough, but the fact that she would be horribly lonesome by herself, with the moaning fall below her, and knowledge that skeletons lay strewn on the rocks of the gorge, had much to do with her decision. Then, too, she had been noticing the slant of Hale's mighty shoulders, and making mental comment on the strength of them. Somehow the man looked reliable and comforting. After all, Hattie was a woman.

"Good," said Haile. "I'll carry this end board from the wagon and the torch. I can carry the ax in my belt. You carry this little bucket of food, the short pole and our old life line. A rope comes handy sometimes."

Thus equipped they advanced into the cave. The board was laid across the fissure where the water came up, and they crossed over dry-shod. Here the floor of the cave was smooth and dry. Overhead, at a distance of ten feet or so, was a rough granite ceiling, with none of the disagreeable dripping water common in such places. The air in the cave was pure and fine, indicating a draft through it. They advanced for a hundred yards or more, and then they were confronted by a solid stone wall running square across the cavern in front of them. All their elaborate preparation for exploration had seemingly been wasted.

After their eyes had become accustomed to the place they saw a sharp angle in the wall, far to their right, and almost out of the circle of light from the torch. They approached the angle, and turning the sharp corner found a fissure in the stone, not more than two feet wide by seven or eight feet high. Haile held the torch above his head and peered into the tunnel. The walls and floor were smooth and dry, so far as he could see, but the other end of the passage was shrouded

in gloom. He looked over his shoulder at the girl.

"Are you game for this?" he asked.

"Go ahead, I'll follow you," she replied.

The passage was fully fifty yards long, and opened into a roomy compartment, with broken, irregular walls. As they emerged into this room Haile put his hand in his coat pocket and drawing it out sprinkled a small quantity of sawdust with bits of eggshell in it, on the floor of the cave.

"We might want to find this place again," he said.

They went forward, and passed through several large rooms, with more or less clearly defined doors and passages, Haile marking the entrances from time to time as a matter of precaution. At last they approached a narrow passage and a sudden gust of wind extinguished the torch. It had gone out once before, on account of a sudden movement. Haile was using a short wick to conserve the oil. He now put his hand in his pocket for the matchbox. It was gone! Here they were, far in the very bowels of the earth, with no light. Strong man as Haile was, his voice trembled as he asked:

"Have you a match?"

Harriet felt in the pocket of her coat.

"Just one," she replied, feeling for Haile's hand in the darkness.

Groping his way back from the draft Haile pulled up the wick in the torch, and praying for success struck the last match, and lighted it.

"Miss Hedwick, I have lost all my matches. This is our last light. If we don't find them, and our torch goes out, we can never find our way back to the gorge. I am sure that this draft comes from the outside, and am anxious to try the passage, yet I am afraid the wind will blow the torch out again. I am going to leave the decision to you."

"I am following you, and am willing to trust your judgment," said Hattie.

Haile sat pondering the situation for a full minute, then he removed the cork from the mouth of the can, drew out the wick and cut off a strand of the oily rope. When he had replaced the wick he split up half of the end board and made a fire directly in front of the gusty passage.

"Now," he said, "that fire will burn for ten minutes. We'll wrap this piece of wick on a stick and light it for a torch to hold in front of us, hold our torch behind us to protect it from the draft, and try to get through the passage. If the wind blows out the torches we can come back to the fire."

So equipped they pushed forward into the passage. The small torch held in front of them flickered and wavered in the strong draft, but the wood, saturated with oil, kept it alight. Presently they came out into a large room. To their right, the floor of the compartment slanted up for fifty feet or more, and seemed to join the ceiling like the point of a wedge.

They had brought along the balance of the board, and seeking a sheltered corner, where there was no draft, they kindled another fire. After a careful survey of the room, it became apparent that the only outlet from it was the one by which they had entered, and yet, where did that wind come from?

"Stay here by the fire, and don't let it go out," said Haile. "I am going to make some explorations." A moment later he was crawling up the steep, sloping side of the cave, with the draft coming strong in his face. It was quite obvious that there was an opening somewhere for that wind to get in.

He had reached a place where there was hardly more than a crevice between roof and ceiling, when suddenly he stopped. He had heard something and had seen something. He was peering down into a room where there was a dim light. He could see no one, but he could hear movements that seemed to come from some distance.

The crevice through which he was looking was only a few inches wide. He was simply lying on the face of a gigantic wedge-shaped rock, one side of which formed the sloping floor of the room he was in, while the head of the wedge formed one wall of the next room. It was a sheer drop of twenty feet through the crevice to the floor below. Haile approximated the width of the opening. It

lacked fully two inches of being large enough for his body to pass through. It was even doubtful if the slender body of the girl could get through it. There was no hope of escape through it.

The crevice was about ten feet long, and at the end where he was looking through it was widest. At either end it ran to a point. He noted that the floor of the room below was smooth. With a sigh of disappointment Haile scrambled back down the slope and joined the girl by the fire. Time has little to do with the acquaintance of people who meet under such circumstances as those which had thrown these two young people together. Haile spoke to the girl gently, almost tenderly, as if he had known her for years:

"Hattie, can you bear to be almost in reach of a great hope, and yet unable to attain it? We are now confronted with such a situation." Then he told her what he had seen.

"Did you try to put your head through the crevice?" asked Hattie. "You know, your body will go through any place your head will go through."

"Yes," said Haile, "that is a theory that I have often put to the test, but the crack was in a fence, and I could get both feet on the ground while trying it. This is a place that if I go through I should prefer to go feet first."

They sat talking almost in whispers, and suddenly the draft through the room died away.

"The wind must have quit blowing outside. I'm going to have another look at that place," said Haile.

When he reached the crevice again there was no light in the room below, and no sound could be heard. Returning to the fire he split up the remaining pieces of the board, and taking up the torch, said:

"Watch the fire for your life, now. Be saving with the wood, but don't let the fire go out." Then he moved slowly up the incline, the ax in one hand and the torch in the other.

Haile knew that breaking two inches from that granite bowlder, with nothing but an ax, and less than two feet of striking space, was well-nigh impossible. It might be done in days, if the ax held out, but without food and water it would be doubtful even then. He would cheerfully make the gamble, as far as he was personally concerned. It was a cold gamble, with the odds all against him, but then he had gambled on long chances before. There was another element to be considered in this case—the girl. Had he a right to stake her life, like so many blue chips, on the green felt table of chance? Oh, well! He would play one hand, anyway. It was early yet. Men have said that before in the gambling rooms of the world, and they were still playing when it was not early, and all hope of winning was past. So, Haile labored up the slope, fixed the torch and began pecking away on the granite with the poll of the ax.

Nature is always getting some fellow into a tight place and holding him until he wiggles himself nearly to death, and then laughing at him. Haile pecked away at the granite, occasionally breaking a small flake of the stone away. It reminded him of the "constant dropping" adage. He raged that he could not swing the ax and give that rock what was coming to it. He had never worked in a quarry, and did not know that those steady, gentle taps were perhaps doing more good than so many smashing blows would do. He was so eager, and the change was so gradual that he did not notice that the blows, which had a sharp ringing sound when he first began, now gave out a dull, hollow thud. Suddenly a section of the stone about four feet long began to slip. Moving hastily back Haile saw it slip forward and fall with a crash into the other room. There had been a seam in the rock that ages had not healed. The constant light blows had loosened a great sliver of the stone, which giving way had made a hole almost large enough for a horse to pass through.

Exhilarated at the thought of escape from the underground prison, Haile climbed back down the slope, taking the torch with him. When he reached the level he saw that the fire was out and the girl not in sight. His heart gave a great bound. He had looked at his watch just before going up to try the experiment

of breaking the stone, and it was three o'clock. He looked at it now, and it was five. For two hours he had hammered on that stone, and he thought it but a few minutes. His hands were blistered and his knuckles bleeding, where he had struck them against the rough granite. He raised the torch above his head and peered into the shadows where the fire had been. There on the ground, just beyond the little heap of ashes, lay Hattie Hedwick, on the ground.

Fear gripped Haile's heart, as he protected the torch with his hand and stole softly forward. What if she were dead, after all she had done for him! As he approached her he saw that she lay with her head pillowed on one arm, her bosom rising and falling in the long, even respiration of one in sound sleep.

With a sigh of relief Haile gathered up the remaining splinters and pieces of wood and started the fire again. Then he uncoiled the rope, and taking it and the short pole went back to the crevice. He tied the rope around the pole and laid the pole across the opening. Then knotting the rope at close intervals he dropped it into the room below. All was now ready for their escape into the next compartment of the cave. After that, he knew not what.

When he returned to where Hattie still slept he had not the heart to wake her. As she lay on the hard stone floor, her long lashes resting on her oval cheeks, she did not look the same as when she was awake.

Then he stooped over, and touching her lightly on the shoulder, called her name. She sprang up and stared about her for an instant, then said, quite calmly:

"I must have slept for a minute."

"Yes, just a minute," said Haile, gently, "and now we are going to try to get out of here." He told her then of enlarging the crevice, and gathering up the ax, the torch, and the little bucket of food, they climbed to the top of the slope. Haile explained the knotted rope, and said:

"Will you go first, or shall I?"

"You go first, but don't leave the rope when you get to the bottom. I want to come right down, before something happens to separate us."

A few minutes later they stood in the lower room of the cave, with the torch, the battered old ax, and the little bucket, but no sign of an opening to the outer world in sight.

"I'll jerk the rope down now. We may need it again," said Hattie, and taking hold of it began swinging it.

"No, no!" said Haile, catching her arm, "We may have to go back that way."

At the same instant they heard a chain rattling at the other end of the room, and low, muffled voices came to them. Haile blew out the torch, drew a pistol with his right hand, and unconsciously put his left arm around the girl's waist and drew her back against the wall beside him. There was a terrible stillness in the cave, and they could hear their hearts beating.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. PRELL HAS A GUEST.

THE King of Sycamore Cove, the gentleman who had boasted that it was his custom to take what he wanted in this little old world, even to the matter of wives, made a startling discovery when he undertook to use violence with Lena. The same latent will that had sustained her in walking six miles in order to meet her lover earlier in the evening, now came to her aid. That will was reënforced by the superhuman strength and frenzy of a great fear.

Little had undertaken the fight of his life. Lena turned on him with the ferocity of a tigress. She scratched his face, bit and kicked like some vicious, captured animal. She knew nothing about firearms, but she succeeded in drawing Little's pistol from the holster, and in another moment would have shot either him or herself with it had he not wrenched it from her hand.

The pistol fell to the ground, and as Little stooped to pick it up the girl broke away and ran screaming out of the gate. Fear lent wings to her feet, and she started east. She had no clearly defined purpose, perhaps, but instinctively she ran toward where she had last seen Har-

rington. Her freedom was short-lived. Within a hundred yards from the gate Little overtook her. Smarting with the scratches Lena had inflicted on his face, rage supplanted every other passion in his breast.

Worn out with the unequal struggle, Lena could do nothing but scream. Deftly knotting a heavy silk handkerchief around the girl's neck, after drawing it through her mouth, he effectually gagged her. With another handkerchief he then bound her hands and led her back to the horse.

"Now, young lady," he snarled, "you are going with me. You can go quietly and without trouble, or you can keep on raising hell, but you are going."

Lena could make no reply for the gag, but the fire of rage and defiance blazed in her eyes. As Little was untying his horse she made another dash for liberty. This time he tripped her with his foot, and as she fell he grabbed her and choked her almost to insensibility. Then picking her up he set her on the powerful horse in front of him and thundered away down Sycamore and up the gulch to Prell's dugout.

The old recluse was roused, and trembled with apprehension as he heard irregular footsteps without. At Little's knock the door opened, and he staggered in with his burden.

"Oh, David, you should never have brought a woman here," cried the old man.

"No, I reck'n not," snapped Little. "Ought to have just let the cat run wild in the woods. That would put you and me and some more people I know in a pretty bad mess. I ought to put her where the balance of her tribe went, and at the same time. But I didn't. She knows too much now to be turned loose. Besides, I want her, and will have her when I am ready."

"Who is she?" whined the older man.

"That is none of your business," snapped Little. "I could kill her, but I don't want her dead. I want her alive. I am going to leave her here with you, and if I don't find her here when I return, you know what I'll do. I am going now. The only thing for you to remember is that she must be here, must be alive and uninjured when I get back."

"When are you coming back?"

"That is not important. Attend to your business as if you expected me any hour, and then you will not be caught off your guard. Things are breaking pretty fast for me right now, and I have my hands full. The country is full of marshals, and you want to keep close. When I come back I shall take this girl away and marry her. There is now nothing to prevent our lawful marriage." With that Little passed out the door, and on to his horse in the gulch.

Dave Little's remark about marshals in the country was made purely for the purpose of keeping Prell close. So far as he knew there were no marshals in that part of the country, except the skeletons of three that lay in the head of Hell Roaring Gorge. He knew where they were, but he was not afraid of them. When he said there was now no legal bar to his marriage to Lena, Prell thought of the white powders, and shuddered. Then he had an idea.

Lena lay moaning and struggling to get her breath through the gag. Prell approached her and removed the handkerchief from her face.

"Give me some water, please," she begged.

The old chemist went to another part of the cave to get the water, and Lena got up and stole to the door. A heavy chain had been passed through a hole in the door, around the door post, and locked with a padlock on the inside. There was no hope of escape. She had just returned to the rough bunk on which she had been thrown, and had assumed her former position, when the old man returned with the water. As she drank it he noticed the blue finger marks on her white throat, and his gorge rose at the sight.

"Let me bring you a pan of cold water, and you can bathe your face and hands. That will make you feel better," said Prell.

She assented, and soon her hands were untied. She bathed her face and hands, and rubbed them with a coarse, but clean towel.

"Now," said Prell, "you had better lie down and try to rest and sleep."

"Sleep! In this terrible place?"

"Yes, you are perfectly safe with me. I would never harm a hair of your head."

"But, but—he—might—come—back," yawned Lena, and then she closed her eyes and slept, whether she would or not.

Mercifully, the old chemist had administered a powerful narcotic in the water he had given her. He now removed her shoes, loosed her clothing, and throwing a blanket over her, stood contemplating his prisoner.

"I wonder who she is, and where he could have found her? Oh, my God, how is it possible for a human being to do the things that man does! Other men had died a thousand deaths for less than half the evil that he has brought into the world," murmured the old man.

This seemed destined to be a night of unusual experiences for Mr. Little. Things were, indeed, breaking with amazing rapidity for him. It was near midnight when he reached home again. He had forgotten to put the light out in Lena's room, and he saw it through the window. A hundred yards from the house a man stepped from behind a tree. Little jerked his pistol from the scabbard, as the man said:

"Never mind, Dave, you may need me. There are plenty of other people to kill that would do you a lot more harm than I ever will."

"Hello! That you, Bill?"

"Yes," replied Bill Brant, the man who had warned Rufe Haile to stay out of the Kimish, at the little store near the mouth of Hell Roaring Creek.

"What are you doing snoopin' around my house in the night?"

"I had some business with you that won't keep. We can't talk about it here, because they ain't but one safe place in the Kimish, to-night, and that ain't here."

"Which way'd you come?"

"Up Hell Roarin', an' I got scared danged night to death, as I come along, too."

"What skeered you?"

"They's a fiery eye gleamin' out of the head of Hell Roarin' Gulch."

"Aw, cut that kind of stuff. You been hittin' the jug too hard. There is nothing with fiery eyes, or any other kind of eyes, in that gorge."

"Maybe not," said Brent, doubtfully, "but they's things with eyes and ears both, outside of that gorge, and they are asking questions that are hard to answer. Let's go where it's safe, and I'll tell you some things."

Little dismounted and tied his horse. He then went into the house and blew out the light that he had left burning in Lena's room. When he returned he and Brant disappeared in the thick grove of willows at the head of Sycamore Creek. The darkness was impenetrable in the thicket, but Little led the way, and Brant followed at his heels. At last they entered a passage between two giant bowlders. At the end of the passage a key grated in a lock. They entered and closed the door. A match flared and a candle was lighted, and set on a projecting stone in the wall of the cave.

The men sat down on rough stools. The feeble rays of the flickering candle struggled in a hopeless attempt to penetrate the gloom of the place. It picked out grotesque shadows for a little way, and then gave up the effort. Beyond was a wall of darkness. Somewhere in the distance could be heard the swish and gurgle of running water.

"Now we are safe, go ahead and talk," said Little.

"Dave, ain't you never afraid I'll kill you?" asked Brant.

"No. There is the same reason why you don't kill me, that there is why I don't kill you. We need each other. If you killed me you would lose a chance to make a lot of money. If I killed you I would lose the best help I have at the business I'm in. We both know something, and each one is afraid all the time somebody will kill the other one before he finds out. But go ahead and tell what's on yo' mind. We've talked about that before."

"Yes," said Brant, "but it happens to be that very fear that brings me here to-night. You have a secret about making

whisky, and you have never let me in on it. I have a secret about selling it and not getting caught, and I have never let you in on that. What I propose is that we fix it some way that the one that is left gets the whole works."

"Oh, we've talked about all that before. We both know that if it was fixed that way, the first one that turned his back would get killed. If that's all you have to talk about we may as well get out of here."

"No, that is not all. The other thing is what made me think of this. Did you get that fellow I told you about, that passed my store the other evening?"

"You bet I did!"

"Where is he?"

"In Hell Roarin' Gorge, and his wagon is in there with him. He won't make anybody any trouble."

"Yes, and I saw a light——"

"I told you to cut that fool stuff out. When a man goes over that bluff, no matter whether he is dead or not, he'll be dead when he strikes the rocks at the bottom. That man went over, and besides that, he had a bullet right where his head joins his neck, when he went. Of all the cinches in the world, that is the deadest one."

"Well, of course it's uh cinch, if it was that-a-way, but still, the most money I ever lost in my life was lost on a cinch."

"You won't lose any on that one. Come on and get the load off'n yo' stomach. What's pesterin' you?"

"Well, it's like this. I forgot to tell you that this feller looks to me like he might be some right smart he-hawss. He had a plumb cold poker face, and he didn't look like he was much afraid of the Kimish, or of anything else on earth, for that matter? Did you look at him any?"

"No. He was standing on the edge of the bluff with his back to me when I shot, and he just tumbled in. I was some piece off and the sun was in my face. 'Bout all I know is that he was the same fellow, and that he has gone where he won't come back."

"Well, what I want to tell you is this," said Brant. "Yesterday morning two fellers comes to my place and asks particular about that fellow in the wagon. In the afternoon one fellow come by, and asks me a whole lot more of the same thing. Of course I ain't seen him, and I tells 'em that, but they don't seem satisfied. Then this morning two more fellows comes to the store and asks about this same traveler, plumb persistent."

"I don't see no booger in that," said Little. "He's safe out of the way, and they didn't nobody see him go. Let 'em question all they want to."

"Yes, that sounds all right, but it won't work. They are going to comb the Kimish this time, and they'll find everything that's on top of the ground, and maybe they'll do some diggin'. As I come up Hell Roarin' they's a camp at the second crossin'. I slipped by, and they didn't see me, but they's six men in the party, and they are packin' guns like a huntin' party—which they ain't, by a whole lot. Who's on the north trail tonight?"

"Nobody—that's workin'," said Little, absently. He was thinking that perhaps he should have left Brown to guard the trail, instead of killing him.

"Where's Ben?"

"Dead."

"Where's Kahlita?"

"Dead."

"Why, Dave, the first you know you won't have no next of kin, or close friends to inherit yo' estate when you die."

"I ain't aimin' to die right soon and sudden," said Little, "but this stuff you are telling don't sound very good to me. If it comes to a show-down, we can stay in here in the daytime. Plenty of water——"

"And not a blamed thing to eat," broke in Brant.

"Which suggests that we can carry a lot of grub from the house, and get some bedding, and be plumb comfortable here as long as we want to stay."

For more than an hour the men were busy bringing food, bedding, candles and the like from the house to the cave.

"Now, let's go turn our horses loose and hide our saddles. It's apt to be foot work for us for the next few days. Then we'll shut up the house and make it look like they ain't nobody at home, which is not a crime under them Arkansas statutes

that governs this country. Just before daylight we'll slip back here and lie low through the day. We both need some sleep anyway."

They were out more than two hours that time, and when they returned Little said:

"Wish we had taken time to go up and move those folks off the trail. If the marshals really are goin' to make a raid, they'll get plumb suspicious the minute they see a man and a woman layin' dead by the side of the trail, that-a-way," said Little.

"Yes, it would have been better," said Brant, "but it's too late now. It is already coming daylight, and we may have been seen as it was if they are close around here. They don't need anything to make 'em suspicious. That fellow in the wagon disappearing that-a-way was plenty, and too much for them."

"Well, let 'em rave. They won't find anything else but the two dead ones, and somebody has to bury them, anyway. Here's where I get a good night's sleep in the daytime, and to-night I'll sneak out. I'm about due to leave this country anyway."

Then entered the cave, and Little drew the chain around the post at the side of the door and locked it.

"Don't rattle that chain so blamed loud," said Brant. "I've got the jumps now. Dig out a bottle of somethin' that ain't poison, and let's take a drink. Then we can eat some breakfast and go to bed."

A match flared and went out.

"What the devil is that I smell in here," said Little. "Did we leave a candle burning when we went out?"

"No," growled Brant, "you are always accusing me of seeing things. Now you are smelling things."

"Yes, I'm smellin' things good and plain, right now. If you let somebody know where this place is, and have smuggled 'em in here, you are going to be sorry of it, right now."

"Aw, cut out the baby talk. There is no one in here but you and me. Why should I bring anybody here? I couldn't have done it, anyway. You have been right with me all the time, and you have the key."

"That's so," said Little, with a low laugh, "Reck'n I am getting nervous, but I shore smelt something, Bill, and I smell it yet. Smells just like somebody had blowed out an old brass lamp with no chimbley, and the wick was burnin'. Listen——"

CHAPTER VIII.

A BATTLE IN THE DARK.

THERE was a slight rustling at the other side of the cave, and Little drew his pistol and fired in that direction. There was the thud of the bullet, and a smothered gasp.

The peculiar odor in the cave was caused by the smothered wick of Haile's torch, and it was a slight brushing of Harriet's buckskin coat against the wall that Little had heard. His first shot struck Haile in the left side, and glancing around the ribs, tore an ugly flesh wound.

"Lie down," whispered Haile in the girl's ear, and she instantly obeyed him.

Picking up a small fragment of rock at his feet, Haile tossed it across the cave, but not in the direction of the two men. The instant the rock struck Little's pistol flashed again, as he shot at the noise, but this time he had been tricked. As his gun flashed there was a spurt of flame from the opposite wall, and Little grabbed at his breast and fell forward onto the floor of the cave.

"Are you hit, Dave?" asked Brant, as he bent forward over his fallen companion.

"He's got me, Bill. Look out for yourself," gasped Little.

As he spoke another flash ripped the gloom of the cave, and Brant fell forward across his companion's body, with a bullet through his head.

There was silence in the cave for several minutes, and then Harriet stood up and put out her hand to feel for her friend, in the darkness. She touched his side, and it was warm and wet and sticky. Too well she knew the feel of fresh blood.

"You are wounded," she whispered.

"Yes, but not seriously, I think," he replied, in the same tone. "Stay where you are, and let me investigate."

Haile tried his old ruse, and threw

rocks all over the cave. He even threw them in the direction the voices had come from, but there were no more shots or answer of any kind. At last he crept cautiously toward where he had last heard the men.

Left alone in the darkness, knowing her companion was wounded, and not even knowing where he was, Harriet's stout heart began to quail before the horror of it all. Just as she was on the verge of crying out to Haile, a match flared, and a moment later the steady but feeble flame of a candle began the battle against the gloom of the cave. Haile then returned to her, and striking another match set it to the torch.

"Where did you get those matches?" asked Hattie.

"Out of the pockets of our friends the enemy."

"Are they——"

"Both dead," said Haile. "There were only two of them."

"Who were they?"

"One is Dave Little. The other is a breed."

"You are badly hurt," said the girl, as she noticed the blood on Haile's clothing.

A few minutes later she had found the stack of blankets that the outlaws had brought into the cave. A pallet was made on the floor, and lying down on it Haile submitted to an examination of his wound. The large-caliber bullet had struck just below and to the left of the heart, and instead of entering the cavity, had torn a frightful wound outside the ribs.

Trickling water could be heard, and a search with the torch discovered a cold spring far back in the corner of the cave, while a few feet below it a yawning pit, several feet deep, showed a torrent of water rushing through it.

Harriet carried water in the bucket, bathed the wound, and stanched the blood as best she could. Then she bandaged it with strips of torn clothing. Haile was pale and weak from loss of blood. He lay on the pallet and watched the girl deftly bind up his wound, and wondered where she had acquired such wonderful skill in surgery. When the blood had in a measure ceased to flow, Harriet said:

"Lie perfectly still, now, while I bring another bucket of water," and taking up the bucket and torch she went again to the spring. When she returned Haile was not on the pallet!

In alarm, she turned and was about to call out to him, when she saw him carefully going through the pockets of the dead men, and even tearing open their clothing. From about Little's body he took a heavy belt that was worn inside his clothing.

"You should not have moved from the pallet," said Harriet. "You will open the wound again, and you cannot stand much more loss of blood."

With tender solicitude she helped him back to the couch. Haile took out his watch.

"Six o'clock," he said, "We can't get out of here to-day, now. There is no telling how many more are watching outside. I have stripped that carrion of everything I wanted, and now I wish they were out of here."

Harriet quieted him, and then she built a small fire in the fireplace, found the food the outlaws had brought, and prepared some of it. Haile ate a little, and drank a cup of coffee, but he was very weak. Soon afterward he dropped into a light sleep. Harriet watched him a few minutes, shading the light from his eyes. When he was sound asleep she took the torch and went back to the place where she had seen the water flowing through the pit. Casting the light on it she saw that the pit was about ten feet wide by twenty feet long, and a very flood of dark water pouring through it. She had lost all sense of direction and did not know that the water was the underground source of Sycamore Creek, which broke out of the mountain a little farther down, a bold flowing stream coming from under a projecting ledge.

She left the torch and returned to Haile's pallet. He was still sleeping. The air in the cave was suffocating. With the door closed there was no draft. The pungent odor of the burning torch, the acrid fumes of the powder smoke, and the sickening scent of blood, combined,

made the place unbearable. Harriet stood undecided for a moment, then dragged the bodies of Little and Brant to the pit and rolled them in. They floated toward the lower end and disappeared. She did not know it, but they lodged on the rocks a hundred yards below the head of Sycamore.

When this gruesome task was done, and some of the blood wiped up, Harriet stole to the door and listened. Through the hole where the chain went through the door she could see that the entrance was a winding passage through the rocks, faintly lighted by daylight. The key was still in the lock, and softly turning it she opened the door. A great gust of air rushed in and through the cave. The girl was faint from the labor and the bad air, but after a few minutes she regained her strength, and closing the door returned to her patient, who was still sleeping.

The day dragged on. Haile slept by fits, rousing up from time to time to ask for water. Harriet sat by his side, drowsy, but afaid to go to sleep. There was a great mystery about it all.

After noon Haile began asking for water with greater frequency, as his fever rose. Harriet bathed his face with cold water, and revived him, but in a few minutes he would lapse into a stupor, only to start up and call insistently for water.

As night came on her only hope was that Haile might have strength enough in the delirium of fever to travel a few miles. She did not dare to leave him there in the cave. She turned to him, and made ready for the trail. His belt and two pistols lay beside the pallet. These she buckled about her own waist. She was an expert pistol shot, although she only carried a rifle when she had rescued Haile, and that was left at the top of the bluff. When all was ready the girl roused her patient and said:

"Come, Mr. Haile, we must be going."

"Going to look in the Kimish? All right," he said, as he staggered to his feet.

They passed out, and she closed and locked the door. Then began a journey that to Harriet Hedwick was a nightmare ever afterward. The cool night air revived Haile somewhat, and they made the trip to the top of the hill, where Little had first shot Haile, with very little difficulty, but the climb had taken the last of his wonderful reserve of strength, and from thereon it was a battle with death. Sometimes he walked, with Harriet supporting him. He would talk in broken, gibbering sentences, and once or twice he broke into song. Finally he collapsed completely, and for some distance she actually carried him. His wound had opened again, and the warm blood came through the bandage.

For eight miles from the gorge at the head of Hell Roaring Creek, over the south side of Blue Point, and on to a cabin in the outskirts of a civilized settlement, she struggled with her almost lifeless burden. She was making good her statement that she was not a quitter, but her own wonderful strength could not last much longer. She had had little sleep for two nights, and had very little food that day. Just as the first streaks of dawn were painting the east, Harriet Hedwick staggered to the door of the cabin, half supporting, half carrying the now almost lifeless body of Rufus Haile.

An hour later Haile, his wounds dressed, bathed, and clad in snowy linen, lay sleeping under the influence of a soporific. In a tiny room adjoining the cabin Harriet was sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion.

On the following morning when Haile woke up he looked up and rubbed his eyes, as if to correct his vision. There was a wonderful woman that he had never seen before in his life, standing by his bed and smiling at him. When she spoke, he knew it was Harriet, but she was clad in a sober-toned dress of some soft, clinging stuff, instead of a buckskin hunting suit.

"How are you this morning, Mr. Haile?" she asked.

"Why—oh, is it you, Miss Hedwick?"

"Certainly. Did you think it was a ghost?"

"No, but—you are—changed. Where are we?"

"Why, we are at home."

"How did we get out of that cave?"

"We walked out. Don't you remember?"

"No. The last I remember, you gave me a drink of water and told me we were going somewhere."

There was a puzzled frown on Haile's face.

"Where is that belt, and the things I took off Little?"

"We left everything in the cave just as it was, and I locked the door as we came out."

"And the key. Where is the key?"

"I have it. Do you want it?"

"No. Just keep it for me."

Haile ate a good breakfast, and called for his pipe. His fever was gone, and his voice strong as usual. In the afternoon Harriet came in and sat down by his bed.

"Why, you are almost well," she said, as she laid a cool hand on his head, in a professional manner.

"Oh, I feel fine," said Haile, "aside from being a little sore when I move."

"Are you still puzzled about where you are?"

"Yes, there are a great many things that are a mystery to me. Tell me about it."

"Well," said Harriet, "there is no mystery about it. My father, who has nursed us both during the night, was a surgeon in a great city, and had quite a reputation. His health broke down, and after a long illness he recovered, but his mind was slightly affected. He had an hallucination that he should have made a study of mathematics, instead of surgery. He has regained his health completely, but he still works at impossible problems. He has been much better of late. The greatest alienists in the country say that some day his trouble will suddenly disappear, and he will be the same as he was before he became ill. We came here to these mountains three years ago, thinking father would hunt and fish and spend much of his time out of doors, but have been disappointed. When he was young, and even up to the time of his illness, he was a great hunter, but since then he has never hunted. I have spent much of my time in the woods. My father taught me surgery from my childhood, and for a few years before he became ill, I was his assistant. I also have some knowledge of medicine. I have lived properly, and have developed my body until I suppose I am wonderfully strong for a woman. I was hunting on the mountain, and had trailed a deer over Blue Point, when I saw Dave Little shoot you. The balance of our adventure you know."

"Yes, except that I don't understand how I could walk eight or nine miles over a mountain in a delirium and weak from loss of blood."

"I supported you, and I—I carried you part of the way," stammered Harriet, her face flushing.

"You seem to be determined to save my life," said Haile.

"I think it quite likely that you saved mine at the fight in the cave. Turn about is fair."

"I am greatly indebted to you for your kindness to me," said Rufe Haile. "I do not remember anything about leaving the cave, or anything that happened on the way here. Did we pass any houses, or see any one?"

"Yes. The cave is only a short distance from Dave Little's house. We passed along the foot of the mountain back of his house. I saw no one as we passed, but when we reached the road that leads over the mountain from Sycamore Cove, I looked back, and there was a light in the window."

"I will rest and sleep to-night, but to-morrow I must go back there," said Haile.

"May I go with you?" asked Hattie.

"I don't know the way, myself," said Haile, with an odd smile, as the color crept into Hattie's cheeks.

CHAPTER IX.

THE KING IS DEAD.

THE day that Haile lay wounded in the cave was rather an exciting one in Sycamore Cove.

Day was just breaking when four men on horseback rode up Hell Roaring Creek, passed the gorge, climbed the winding road to the crest, and passed on down into the cove.

At the same time two horsemen, deputy United States marshals, came over the trail from the northwest. Halfway down the mountainside the two came upon the

bodies of Ben Brown and Kahlita, by the side of the trail.

"This is Ben Brown," said one of the men, dismounting and looking at the body. "Some one has beat us to his case, but who is the woman?"

"That is Dave Little's breed wife," said the other man.

"Must have been some kind of family trouble. We'll get on down to the house. Maybe Mr. Little don't know about this, and we can tell him."

They rode on down to where the trail crossed Sycamore Creek, and stopped to let their horses drink. One of the animals put his nose to the water, snorted and whirled back out of the stream, almost unseating his rider.

"Now what do you suppose is the matter with this fool horse?" said the rider.

"Look what's peepin' over those rocks there in the creek, and you'll have your answer," replied his companion.

Twenty feet above the trail, awash on the rocks lay the body of Brant, the head raised above the rocks, as if really peeping over them.

"Seems to have come from upstream a ways," said one of the men. "Let's make a little investigation."

They dismounted and started up the stream on foot, after dragging Brant's body out of the water. A few yards farther on they came upon the body of Dave Little, washed ashore on the same side of the stream.

"This is getting serious," said the man who had proposed an investigation. "Seems to have been a regular epidemic. This is all the business we came after, and a woman thrown in. Let's go up the creek and see if we can find where it happened."

They went on to where the stream boiled out from under the mountainside into a great blue pool, but there were no evidences of a battle of any kind.

"Well, they are pretty wet, but a coroner would never say they died from drowning. Little got a bullet through his heart and Brant got one through his head."

"No. I guess it's pretty plain what stopped these two gents. The question is, who done it?" replied the other officer.

"I take it they went in swimmin' with their clothes on, had a fallin' out and shot each other. That's about as close as we'll ever get to the facts. Whatever way it happened, it saves us some trouble, because this gang was plumb ripe to be got, and it was up to us to get 'em."

"Looks powerfully like some of that fool shootin' Rufe Haile does, with both his eyes wide open and his guns at his hips."

"Oh, yes. I've seen Rufe shoot, and I've heard a whole lot about it, but where is Rufe? Far as anybody knows he never even got into the Kimish with that wagon of his."

"Maybe not. He started here, though, and I ain't never knowed him to fluke on a proposition yet. Let's ride on over to the house. The rest of the gang ought to be there by this time."

At the Little home they met the four men who had come over the mountains. At the same time two men came up the Sycamore road, and joined them. The chief of the posse had been with the four who came over the crest.

"Well," he said, to the two men who came up Sycamore, "what did you fellows pick up? See anything of Rufe Haile?"

"Nothing," replied one of the men. "The country's plumb quiet down that-a-way."

"We've hailed the house, and there's nobody at home. Did you fellows see anything as you came down the mountain trail?" asked the chief.

"Yes, we seen uh right smart. Up the trail a ways we seen Ben Brown and old Dave's breed wife layin' by the side of the road, dead. We comes on down to the creek and found Dave Little and Bill Brant in the creek, both dead."

"Best luck we've had in some time," said the chief, "but nobody has seen Rufe Haile. Wonder what could have become of him."

The bodies were all brought down to the house and laid out on the porch.

"I don't know where Rufe Haile is but there's his tracks. I'll bet a hundred dollars he can stand in a dark room and shoot a man in the head by the sound of his voice."

"I've heard that somewhere before,"

said the skeptical marshal, who had found the bodies.

"Well," drawled the chief, "you won't get any bets out of anybody that knows Rufe Haile. As to believing he can shoot, Rufe don't care a whoop whether anybody believes it or not. All the same, I'd like to see Rufe and find out how it all happened."

"I guess Rufe won't be able to tell much if you ever do see him," said the skeptic. "He's been in the Kimish three or four days, and we ain't even been able to locate that fool waggin."

"Well, this ain't getting us anywhere, standing here arguing about Rufe Haile. He's either dead or alive. I'm betting he is alive. If he is dead I've lost the best man on my force, and it can't be helped. Two or three of you fellows ride down to them tenant houses and round up everything that can walk, and bring 'em up here. We'll see what we can find out. Tell 'em to bring a spade or two."

An hour or more later the detachment of marshals returned, bringing with them three men and two women. Interrogation developed the fact that two of the men, and their wives, lived at the rear side of the farm. They all stated that they had heard no shooting, either that morning or the night before. They were all white people, but ignorant and illiterate. They declared that none of them had ever been at the Little house before, and had only been on the farm a few weeks. The chief gave them up as hopeless, and turned to the third man, who said he lived in a cabin on the front side of the farm, and seemed to be a kind of foreman.

"You know all these dead people, do you?"

"Yes," said the man in surly tones.

"Did they all live here?"

"No. Brant lived down Hell Roarin', and Brown lived somewhere over the ridge. They both came here, sometimes."

"Did any one else live here, besides Little and his wife?"

"Been a girl here for about a month, but I ain't seen her lately."

"Did you hear any shooting last night, or this morning?"

"Heard one shot just after dark, last night. Haven't heard any since."

"Rather strange that you heard only one shot, if you heard any. Here are four people killed, and it must have taken at least one shot to kill each one of them. We'll just take you along on account of what you don't seem to know, and because your hearing is defective. Turn to, now, and bury these people and then the balance of you can go back home. We'll call for you if we want you."

While the burial was taking place the marshal and one of the men entered the house. The clock still ticked on the mantel. A cat slept peacefully in the edge of the ashes at the fireplace. Silence reigned throughout the house. A door stood open leading from the living room into another room of the house. The marshal approached the door and looked in. The only sign of disorder was one chair turned over.

"Pretty swell-looking room for a dive like this," was his only comment.

By mid-afternoon the cove had been carefully searched, with no further developments. The two ignorant tenants and their wives had gone back to their cabins. The King of Sycamore Cove, and the queen, too, for that matter, was dead and buried. There had been no "keening," no "whillelew" had been raised. It was an informal funeral of four without tears. The foreman of the farm was a prisoner, with no charge pending against him other than certain knowledge that he might possess in regard to the activities of Little and his confederates. In other words, he was under suspicion of knowing too much, and telling too little.

Just before night the cavalcade of marshals, with their one unimportant prisoner, rode up the slope to the crest, and then wound down the trail toward the camp at the second crossing on Hell Roaring Creek. As they reached the crest the chief looked back to where Sycamore Cove lay dreaming in the October sunset. A more peaceful scene could not well be imagined.

"Well, boys," he said, "there is one more dirty nest cleaned up. I don't know how it was done, nor who the main agent was, but it was a good job. There

was not a thing definite on any of those men, but everybody in the country was morally certain that they were guilty of every crime in the calendar, and too smooth to get caught. It has cost some mighty good men to get headquarters to the point of making this raid. Hurt and Lefwell came in here and never returned. Now, Rufe Haile has disappeared. If Rufe ever shows up he may be able to throw some light on this situation. If he never comes back the secret of Sycamore Cove will remain a mystery, perhaps. At any rate, the nest is broken up. I don't know who the next of kin to Mr. and Mrs. Little is, but I do know that he will be watched for a long time after he takes possession."

"I reck'n the girl 'll inherit the property," said the prisoner, who had been riding in glum silence since they left the cove.

"What girl?"

"Little's girl, of course."

"Why didn't you tell me Little had a girl?"

"I did tell you, but you didn't pay no 'tenshun to me. I told you a girl had been there for a month, but I ain't seen her for the last week. Guess she was Little's girl. She calls him father."

"Do you know where she is?"

"No."

"Well, she is not anywhere around here, unless she is buried. We have given this neighborhood a good combing to-day."

"I'll take a danged sight better comb than eight depity marshals, to find out what's in the Kimish," retorted the prisoner, with an evil grin.

The chief felt sure that his prisoner could tell a great deal more than he had told, but there was no means at hand of making him talk. The marshals lapsed into silence, and the creak of saddle leather, the beat of hoofs and the sullen roar of Hell Roaring Falls, were all the sounds to be heard.

Out on the northeast shoulder of old Blue Point, at that moment, sat a lone hunter. He had a rifle lying across his lap, but the anxious expression on his face was not that of a hunter in quest of game.

Harrington had come to the trysting place as usual, and had waited through the waning afternoon for Lena, but she had not appeared. He lingered on through the twilight, and when the first deep shadows fell he was beneath the tree on the point, from which Lena's window could be seen.

As darkness drew on and no light appeared the suspense became unbearable to him. Shouldering his rifle he worked his way down the mountainside. An hour later he stood in the deep shadows near the house, listening intently, but there was no sign of life about the place.

Harrington was a man of action. To stand idly, waiting for developments, was not in his nature. He knew nothing of being afraid, and even fear, if he had felt it, could not have held him back from that house of mystery, that sheltered, or should shelter, the girl that he loved. Grasping his rifle firmly he strode boldly up to the house and knocked at the door. There was no movement within. He knocked again, more loudly and insistently, but there was still no response.

He took hold of the doorknob, turned it, and the door opened. Foolhardy and dangerous the action might be, but if Lena was in that house he meant to know it. She had said something of being a prisoner. The man who kept the woman he loved a prisoner would have to reckon with him. Inside the house he boldly struck a match. The place was deserted. He knew which was Lena's room, and striding into it he lighted the lamp that still sat on the table. There was no disorder, save the one overturned chair. No sign of a struggle. Could he have known what had taken place in the yard the night before he would have gone mad with rage.

Harrington searched the place thoroughly, then gave up in despair. Wearily he plodded back to the tree on the point, where he sat and waited in the hope that the light might flare forth to tell that all was well, and that Lena had only been out for the evening. But no light came, and such sleep as he got that night was

taken on the bare ground, beneath the tree.

He had noticed the tenants' cabins from the crest of the mountain, and with the first rays of morning light he was on his way to them. A frowsy-headed woman stood in the door of one of the cabins.

"Good-morning. Is your husband at home?" asked Harrington.

"What do y'all want him fur? He ain't done nuthin'," said the woman.

"I don't want him. I merely want to ask him some questions," replied Harrington.

The woman went inside, and presently the man came out. The sleep was still in his eyes, and his breath rose on the cold morning air like white steam.

"Good morning. Can you tell me where Mr. Little is? There is no one at home there," said Harrington.

"Yes, I kin tell yuh whur he is. He's dead."

"Where is Miss Little?"

"She's dead, too."

"My God, man! Are you sure of this?"

"Oughter be. I seen 'em, an' helped bury 'em."

"He means the Injun woman, not the gal, mister," called the woman from the door.

"Oh, I see," said Harrington, with a sigh of relief, "it was Mrs. Little who died."

"Yes, that's what I said, only she didn't die. Somebody kilt her and him too."

Shocking as this revelation might have been to Harrington at any other time, the violent death of Mr. and Mrs. Little was not troubling him just then.

"Can you tell me then where Miss Little is?"

"I told you she were dead, dang it!"

"Aw, Hen, he-all means the gal," called the woman again.

"Oh, her. I ain't seen her for a week."

"She was there the day before yesterday," said Harrington.

"You seen her since I have then, podner. She wan't at the buryin' none. Them marshals mought have found her and buried her. They shore raked hell with a fine-toothed comb around here yistiddy. 'Peared like the Little fambly had been takin' somethin' they oughtn't to, an' they were a plumb damn eppydemic 'mongst 'em. The marshals didn't seem sorry that they was dead. Y'all ain't no relation, I reck'n?"

"Miss Little could not have been implicated in anything wrong," said Harington.

"If you mean the gal, I don't know nothin' about her, but she had powerful white hands, and wore mighty good clothes for a honest woman."

Harrington begged a cup of coffee. When he had drunk it, and offered pay, they refused it, and invited him to breakfast, but he wanted no food, and wearily took his way back up the mountainside

CHAPTER X.

A RAY OF LIGHT AND A RAY OF HOPE.

HARRINGTON plodded back up the slope of Blue Point, going without reason to the place where he had last seen Lena Little. His mind was a whirling vortex of half-formed, intangible thoughts that, in his great love for the girl, he strangled at their birth. Thoughts came to his mind that he would not allow himself to entertain.

Weary from his night's vigil, sick at heart, and despondent over the loss of Lena, he sat down on the old log, beneath the sheltering young pines, and tried to grope his way out of the mental labyrinth in which he found himself. For several days he had been on the verge of telling the girl that he would not continue in this clandestine manner. That, as a man having a high sense of honor, he could not continue to pay his regard to the woman he loved, in the skulking, cringing manner of a moral coward. But the delightful sensation of their love being a secret from all the rest of the world, together with Lena's pleading that they would not be permitted to meet if her father knew of it, had deterred him. Now, it was too late.

The father was now gone, but where was Lena? If the final hour had come when she could no longer stay beneath her father's roof, why had she not come to him? Who could have so great a right, to whom could it be so great a privilege, and so pleasant a duty, to pro-

tect and care for her? These questions came to him over and over, and like all other unanswered and unanswerable questions, they were the precursors of doubt and acute unhappiness.

The tone of the ignorant tenant to whom he had talked left no doubt that Lena's father was an outlaw, at whose death there was little regret among the people who knew him. If they were respectable people, why were marshals scouring the country in search of them and their associates?

Thus, the cold, logical reasoning of the judicial mind sought to smother the fires of passion, and did smother them for the time. Harrington rose from his seat on the log and bent his steps along the mountain trail. His dream had suffered a rude awakening. He would go back to his Texas home and forget. The episode would be but a memory of a wonderful fortnight of unalloyed happiness, that ended in a cataclysm of sorrow, which time alone could heal.

Arrived at the sawmill Harrington packed his belongings, and left his rifle standing in the corner of the room, intending it as a gift to his friend. By the time he had finished it was late afternoon. He could not leave until the following morning. Worn out with the mental and physical effort of the last twenty-four hours, he lay down across the bed to rest.

When Dave Little left Prell's cabin he expected to return, at least, by the next night. Prell knew that he expected to return soon. He knew the man, and knew that when he had set his heart on a more than ordinarily ruthless piece of wickedness, he never rested until it was accomplished. Prell was not surprised that he did not return that night, and he hoped and prayed that he would not return the following day. He had a horror of any one coming to his hiding place in the daytime.

Lena slept through the night, and far into the next day. She woke as the shades of evening were falling, and started from the rough bunk with a cry of alarm, then remembered where she was and shuddered. Her throat was dry, and she asked for water. Prell, who sat near her, brought a dipper of cold water, and she drank it gratefully.

"You must eat, now," said Prell.

"I don't want anything to eat," replied the girl.

"Come, come, that is no way to do. You are only punishing yourself by refusing food."

"Let me out of there, and I'll eat before I go."

"I can't do that. You heard what Mr. Little said to me. If you are not here, and well, when he comes, he will kill me."

He lighted his candle, which was set in a kind of sconce cut in the wall of the cave, in order that its rays could not be seen through the door. Lena's eyes lighted up suddenly, and she became quite cheerful.

"Let me help with the supper," she said.

The old man looked with suspicion on the proffered assistance, but seeing no reason to doubt its sincerity, he permitted Lena to lay the table for the simple meal. He watched her closely, at first, but as she had said nothing further about her wish to escape, and seemed more cheerful, he decided that her action had been prompted by a desire for companionship in the lonesome old cave.

When supper was over they sat by the fire, talking on various subjects. Little was not mentioned, nor was any reference made to the girl's being a prisoner. The old hermit, if he had ever known much about women, had forgotten what he knew. He had not noticed that she had secured several matches from a box in the rough cupboard where he kept his dishes. If he had noticed her he would have had no idea what she expected to do with them. There was nothing in the cave that would burn except the small stock of firewood, and the few pieces of rough furniture, all of which would have made but a puny blaze.

Lena had slept twelve hours the night before, under the influence of the drug, and she was not sleepy. She felt reasonably certain that her jailer had slept but little. She had not been permitted to go near the door, but had been close enough to note that the old man, through force

of habit, had laid the key on a little shelf cut in the wall.

Several times Prell suggested that the girl lie down, and try to go to sleep, but she assured him that she was not sleepy, and kept on talking to him. At last, well after midnight, she sought the bunk, yawning as if she were sleepy. Prell, prompted by some rags of decency that still remained in him, turned his back while the girl retired. When he looked around again she was in bed and covered up. He watched her for a few minutes, and as she seemed to fall asleep, he turned to the fire, knocked the ashes out of his pipe and sat dozing and nodding in his chair.

He did not know Lena had the matches. Neither did he know that she had a sharp old table knife, that had been worn down until it was a perfect stiletto. He did not know that when she went to bed she got beneath everything except the mattress, which, she had discovered, was of wild grasses and pine needles.

She had reached the point where she was no longer willing to let this old man's life stand between her and freedom. It was now his life or her own, or what, for her, would be worse than death.

As the old fellow nodded by the fire Lena worked the cover down toward the foot of her couch with the cunning caution of a great fear. Softly she set her feet on the floor, and for one breathless second she sat staring at the old chemist. She held the knife in her right hand, while with the left she scratched a match and ignited the grass in the mattress. Then, catching the corner of the mattress she ran toward the door, scattering a stream of fire between herself and her jailer.

The old hermit slept soundly, and Lena had reached the door and had the key in the lock when he woke with a start and sprang from his chair. With a hoarse bellow of rage and fear he sprang toward her, hestitated a moment at the curtain of fire, then plunged through it. His long whiskers and hair burned like dry moss. His clothing was on fire in several places, and a demon was in his eyes.

Lena threw the door open as the chain fell, but the hermit was by her side as she went out. His long beard was singed from his face, and his heavy hair singed into shaggy scallops. He saw the knife in Lena's hand, and as she drew back to strike he caught her wrist.

Insane with fear, now that her effort to escape had failed, Lena fought with maniacal fury. Driven by a still greater fear, not of the girl, but of Little, and the possibility of discovery, Prell fought like a demon for the mastery. He was weak from close confinement, and the girl was wild with fright. They struggled back and forth in front of the open door, until, losing her footing, Lena fell to her knees, and Prell wrenched the knife from her trembling hand, and raised it to strike. In his rage he had forgotten Little's command to keep the girl alive, and unharmed.

Harrington, in the meantime, lying upon his bed at the sawmill, had been thinking. Doubt of the wisdom of his decision to leave the mountains had crept into his mind. Had he been fair to Lena? It now occurred to him that he was preparing to leave this girl to her fate, without making an effort to aid her. That he was about to condemn her without a trial. If he had doubts as to her fitness for a life mate for him he should have entertained them before, and not after he had taken her in his arms and vowed eternal constancy to her. If she was yet to be condemned, it could not hurt him to at least give her that which was accorded a felon, under the law—a fair and impartial trial. With this thought hammering in his mind he ate supper and said nothing about his intended departure.

A little while after dark he buckled on a pistol, and taking up his rifle abruptly left the house. There was some mystery about all that had occurred in Sycamore Cove, and he would make another effort to solve it.

When he got out on the mountains he noticed that the sky was overcast and starless. The wind had been blowing steadily from the northeast all day, and was raw and cold. He set forward with all speed, intending to go again to Sycamore Cove, guiding himself by the wind. But the wind veered to the east, and steer-

ing by its course he went too far to the north. At last, when he knew he had gone far enough to have reached his destination, and the country was totally unfamiliar to him, he realized that he had missed his course and was lost in the mountains. He came to a deep gulch and sat down to rest, thinking to wait there until morning.

A few minutes later a long pencil of light shot out of the darkness across the way, and soon afterward a burst of light from an open door, as a woman's scream rang out across the gorge. It seemed to Harrington that it took him ages to cross that gulch, and reach the scene of the struggle, in front of the dugout door. In reality it was a scant ten minutes. Just as Prell raised the knife to strike, the barrel of Harrington's rifle crashed on his head, and the old man slipped to the ground.

CHAPTER XI.

HARRINGTON REACHES A DECISION.

HARRINGTON'S fighting blood was aroused. Here in this wild, lawless country, where justice could only be had by strength of the body and quickness of the gun hand, he had reverted to type, and was imitating his pioneer ancestors who had helped to free Texas from the Spanish yoke.

As soon as he had ascertained that Lena was not dengerously hurt, he examined the old man, who was already coming around from the glancing blow he had received. The fire in the cave had burned out. Harrington took Prell inside, where he found cords and bound him hand and foot. Then he threw a pile of bedding in a corner, and placing him on it, left him to his meditations.

Relocking the door on the inside, to prevent surprise, Harrington and Lena sat down by the fire, while she told him as best she could the terrible ordeal through which she had passed since she saw him last at their trysting place beneath the young pines.

"If you are really not that beast's daughter, then who are you?" asked Harrington.

The old doubts were coming back into his mind, and quite unintentionally his tone showed it.

"Oh, Chester!" and a little heartbroken sob escaped Lena. "The only man who could tell my name is dead. There is nothing, not a trace. I do not even know my age, exactly. Oh! what can I do?" and Lena's chin quivered.

Then the primal instincts of man snapped their fingers in the face of conventions, and Harrington took the girl in his arms and comforted her. In his absence from her he might have doubts and misgivings, but when she was near she was altogether too desirable. He could not withstand the lure of Lena's beauty, and now in her distress she was a thousand times more lovely than she had ever been before.

Harrington was playing with fire again, and for anything he could possibly know, there might come a time when he would regret the step he was taking. In spite of all her cloistered life Lena was more thoughtful than one might have expected her to be. Looking up at Harrington through her tears, she said:

"No one can ever know how much I love you. I love you so much that I will never marry you while I am nameless. I know you would take me as I am, and would love me always, but there would always be a little rift in our happiness."

"Don't say that, darling," said Harrington, his arm around the girl and her golden head pillowed on his shoulder. "We will try every way to find out who your people are, but in the event we do not, that must never come between you and me."

Lena was almost hysterical from her recent experiences, and from the loss of sleep. Harrington soothed her, and finally persuaded her to lie down and rest a while. He spread some blankets that had escaped the conflagration, and made her a bed near the fire, and there she slept, while he kept a grim vigil over the woman he loved and the man that he wished he had killed.

He did not wake Lena until he had prepared breakfast of bread, bacon, coffee and such things as he could find in the hermit's larder. When she was up and they were in a distant part of the cave from

the old man, who still lay bound, on his rags in the corner, Lena said:

"We are still in great danger, dearest. Little is likely to come here at any time."

"Little will never bother you again, darling. He is dead," said Harrington.

"Oh, thank God! I can be happy now. I have been fearing he would come here and kill you. Did you go to the house in search of me, and kill him?"

"No. There seems to be no one that knows who did kill him." Then Harrington told her as much as he knew. He also told her of his own visit to the Little home in search of her. "But let's not tell the old man that Little is dead just now. His fear of Little may make him do things for you that he would not otherwise do."

The breakfast was placed on the table, and the old hermit was unbound and permitted to eat. He took his breakfast in silence, answering only when he was spoken to.

There was another breakfast scene in the Kimish that morning, in which a man and a woman figured. Rufe Haile and Harriet Hedwick ate an early meal at the Hedwick cabin.

There was a deference in his actions toward the girl that Haile made no attempt to conceal, and she could not fail to notice. At the same time there was a tone in her voice when she spoke to him that thrilled him with pleasure. The time was opportune for personal confidences, and Hattie wondered that Haile did not take advantage of it.

They had secured horses, because she had insisted that Haile must not attempt the walk across the mountain. They started early to the Little place. Harriet rode slowly, and watched Haile as if he had been a little child, cautioning him from time to time.

"It is really dangerous for you to be out such a morning as this, with that wound," she said. "The mist is thickening, and I am afraid it will rain. I could never forgive myself if you should take cold," said Harriet.

"Why say that? It is not your doing, and indeed it is imperative that I go, or I should not have taken the risk. How are you responsible in any way? You could not prevent it, because the matter is of so much importance to me that I would go if I had to crawl."

There was a tinge of red in Hattie's cheeks that the ride across the mountains had nothing to do with.

"I shall always shudder when I think of that place," said Hattie, as they passed the head of the gorge where Little first shot Haile.

"And I shall always consider it the turning point of my life," said Haile. "I had known nothing but bad luck all my life, until I fell from that bluff. Since then I have known nothing but good luck."

They approached the Little house and found no one about the place. Riding on to the willow thicket they dismounted, left their horses, and entered the cave. Everything was just as they had left it, and when a light had been made, Haile began a systematic search. In a crevice in the wall, hidden by a bowlder, he found a common tin dispatch box. Taking it out he set it on the table. Then he opened the belt that he had taken from Little's body, and removed its contents. For half an hour he went over a mass of papers and photographs. Harriet sat by and said nothing. At last he returned all the papers to the box, and placed it back in the crevice.

"Miss Hedwick," he said gravely, "you have done me more than one great service, and you are here with me now, not knowing how great danger we may be in. I owe it to you, and to myself, to tell you what I am, and why I am here.

"I am a United States deputy marshal, and have been in the Indian country a little more than a year. There were two great criminals at large somewhere in the United States. Every effort had been made to apprehend them. I have spent much time in various parts of the country in an effort to find them. At last I became convinced that they were in the Kimish. After a year I succeeded in persuading my chief to permit me to come here in my own way, and make the investigation, in the hope that I would find them. He consented with reluctance, and

I came into this country in a wagon, just as any other traveler might.

"Little was one of the men I was seeking. The other one, I am sure, is still at large in this country. Little was a devil, and the other man was chiefly vicious on account of being Little's dupe and tool. I should not have killed Little, for he had facts in his possession—or at least I believe he did—that are of the utmost importance to me. If you will let me, I will tell you why this means more to me now than it ever did. It does not take years to become acquainted when two people meet as we have. It does not even take more than a few hours for a man to know that he loves a woman. I know that I love you. I believe that you will not be offended with me for saying so; and if you do not forbid it, I shall come to you some day, I hope soon, and ask you to be my wife."

"I shall not forbid it," said Harriet, in low tones. "I think I loved you as soon as you loved me. And the thing I love you most for is the simple, matter-of-fact way in which you tell me that—you love me. You might have said it half a dozen times, and much as I love you now, if you had spoken sooner I should have hated you for it."

"Thank you for another great kindness," said Haile, simply. "Now, let's go down to Little's house."

When Harrington and Lena and the hermit had finished their breakfast, Harrington turned to his prisoner and said:

"What is your name?"

"Prell," answered the old man.

"Well, Mr. Prell, I made the mistake of not killing you last night, for I can't bring myself to kill you now in cold blood. But I give you my word that if you make the slightest attempt to escape, or do anything that gives me the opportunity, I shall kill you gladly."

All through the night Prell had been wondering why Little didn't come. He had relied, was still relying on Little to come and extricate him from a desperate situation. He had not heard of Little's death.

"What are you going to do with me?" asked Prell.

"I am going to take you and turn you over to the law," replied Harrington.

"You will never take me anywhere," exclaimed Prell. "I refuse to go."

"You have a considerable walk before you," continued Harrington, apparently not noticing Prell's remark, "and we are about ready to go. It's beginning to rain, and you are an old man, so if you want to put on heavier clothing you may do so. We will start in a few minutes."

"I tell you, I won't go!" almost screamed the old man.

"Yes," said Harrington, "I heard you say that before, and I tell you that I am going to take you dead or alive, and it is time right now for you to make your choice."

Prell considered; there was one more chance; they might meet Little on the road; so he finally yielded.

It was an odd party that took its way down the gulch. Lena's clothes were torn and disheveled; she was bareheaded, and great dark circles showed around her eyes. The prisoner presented a ludicrous appearance that, under any other circumstances, would have excited mirth; his long beard had been burned almost entirely away; his hair was tinged into a ragged mat; brows and lashes were gone, and he was an altogether woeful and bestial-looking wreck of humanity. Down the gulch they wound in the raw east wind and drizzling rain. Lena was uncomfortable and wet, but was happy in the knowledge of having her freedom and her lover. Still ignorant of what had occurred in the cove, the old hermit had staked his last hope on either meeting Little, or finding him at his home, where he understood they were going.

Tired, cold and bedraggled, they filed up Sycamore Creek, and just before noon reached the big log house in the cove. Two horses were tied at the fence, and a man and a woman were standing very close together in the shelter of the porch.

"My name is Harrington," said the young lawyer. "I have a prisoner here that I want to surrender to the proper authorities."

"You needn't take him any farther, then. I am a United States marshal, and my name is Rufus Haile."

"Good! Glad to know you, Mr. Haile. Is there any one in the house? This young lady is very cold and wet."

"The house is empty, but the door is open, and you are welcome," said Haile. He nodded to Hattie, and she passed into the house, and on into Lena's room with her.

CHAPTER XII.

GATHERING UP THE THREADS.

THIS is not my house, Mr. Harrington," said Haile, as he, Harrington, and the prisoner entered the living room of the old house, "but we needn't be afraid of being disturbed."

There was plenty of dry wood, and Harrington soon had a roaring fire in the fireplace. Haile made a foray into another room and found some of Little's clothing, which Haile knew he would never need again, and in a short time Harrington and the old hermit were clad in dry, comfortable garments.

"Now, Mr. Harrington, if you will keep the prisoner company a few minutes I think I can find what I want in a very short time," said Haile.

Harrington assented, and Haile left the room, returning in a few minutes with a basin of water, a razor, shaving mug and brush and pair of shears.

"I beg your pardon, but I do not know your name," he said to the prisoner.

"Prell," said the hermit, in a surly tone.

"Thank you. I believe you have heard my name, Haile. Now, Mr. Prell, if you will sit over near the light I believe I can improve your appearance."

A wild look of apprehension leaped into the old man's eyes, and he protested volubly.

"I am going to cut your hair and shave you," said Haile coldly. "If your throat is cut in the operation it will be your own fault. If you keep still I will not hurt you."

In a few minutes Prell's hair was neatly trimmed and his face smoothly shaved. On the left cheek there was a long, deep scar from a knife wound. On the right cheek a blue stain like a powder burn, grotesquely resembling the shape of a dragon.

Haile studied the transformation of his prisoner critically, but made no comment. Then he dried the razor, washed the mug, and disposed of the utensils. When he came in he sat down near the handcuffed prisoner.

"Mr. Sarkey," he said, "you have eluded the law for a long time, haven't you?"

The old hermit, with a protest, started from his chair.

"There is no use getting excited," remarked Haile calmly. "Those are the same old scars, and the face has not changed greatly. You have doubtless been hoping, since you left your den with Mr. Harrington, this morning, that your brother, David Sarkey, would come to your rescue. I am obliged to remove that hope permanently. David Sarkey is dead—he and his wife, Ben Brown, and Bill Brant, all of whom were probably friends of yours—and they were buried near here the day before yesterday. I have learned this from a tenant on the place, who does not seem to know how they died. This leaves you playing a lone hand, I am afraid, and what happens to you in the immediate future will depend greatly upon your own behavior."

"Who are you, anyway?" gasped Sarkey.

"Rufus Haile, a United States marshal, who was called a fool for daring to come into the Kimish in quest of Charles and David Sarkey."

"How did you know about my scars?"

"I had a photograph of you, and had heard something of you before I came here. You are a chemist, I believe, Mr. Sarkey?"

"Yes."

"Good! I shall want your opinion upon some matters in that line. But the ladies have announced dinner. We will go in and eat first."

They went out to dinner, and none of the party, not even Hattie, who was beginning to think she knew Haile very well, sensed the volcano of emotion that was stirring beneath his calm exterior. After dinner he said, quite calmly:

"I want to ask you all to take a walk with Mr. Sarkey and myself. He is going

to sign a document, and I want you to witness it."

"I will sign nothing," snarled the prisoner.

"Oh, I think you will, when you understand," said Haile. "At any rate, we will take the walk."

Haile led the way into the willow thicket. At the entrance to the passage he said:

"I will go first, then Mr. Sarkey, after him Miss Hedwick, and the others will follow."

At the entrance to the cave Haile lighted a match, and then a candle, which he placed on the rough table. The door was closed and locked. Sarkey was placed at the head of the table. On his left sat Haile, with Harriet beside him. On Sarkey's right sat Harrington, and beside him sat Lena. Haile had placed the open box on the table before him, and selecting certain papers therefrom he passed them to Sarkey and to Harrington. It was a strange council which sat in the silence of the cave. There was no sound except the rustle of the papers. For ten minutes the two men looked at document after document. When they had finished, Haile laid before them a series of photographs. They were pictures of Lena, one taken each year, and dated on the back, since her infancy.

"You are a lawyer, Mr. Harrington, and are competent to pass on the validity of these records. Do you think there is any doubt now as to the identity of the young lady?"

"None whatever," said Harrington, proudly.

"Oh, who am I?" cried Lena.

"You are Miss Lena Haltman," said Harrington.

"Oh, thank God! I am no longer a nameless waif," said the girl, grateful that she had learned her identity from the lips of the man she loved.

"Do you agree with Mr. Harrington as to the young lady's identity, Mr. Sarkey?" asked Haile.

"There can be no doubt of it," said Sarkey, "but they told me she was dead."

"Your brother David told you she was dead. He lied to you and duped you, as he had done a thousand times before. You can see from these records that it was his purpose to marry Miss Haltman and claim the fortune that is hers by inheritance from her parents, both of whom are dead.

"Charles Sarkey, your brother David was, as you doubtless know, as great a criminal as ever went unhung. I killed him, here in this room. I did not murder him. He shot at me first, and hit me. I had not intended to kill him until I got some information from him, but the Fates willed it otherwise. You were your brother's dupe and tool, while he was alive. Now, you must go ahead, and straighten out some of the matters that he left undone. You can, at least, do that much toward reparation of the wrong you have done certain people, who never showed you anything but kindness. I will not charge you with having been in league with David Sarkey, for I think that he was really the head devil, but you can, and must answer my questions. You say this young woman's father is dead. Where did he die?"

"In the State penitentiary, at Jefferson City, Missouri," said Sarkey, in a tense voice.

With a shocked exclamation Lena fell forward and hid her face on her arms. Haile sat looking straight at Harrington with an inscrutable expression in his gray eyes. No one knew what he was thinking. Harriet started as if to go around to Lena's side and comfort her, but Haile laid his hand on her arm. Harrington put his arm around Lena and said:

"Don't, darling! Don't take it so hard. You are not in any way to blame for these things; they can never make any difference to us."

CHAPTER XIII.

SARKEY TELLS HIS STORY.

"CAN either of you gentlemen write shorthand?" asked Sarkey, when the tense situation had somewhat relaxed.

"I can," said Harrington.

"I told you, Mr. Haile, that I would sign nothing, but I have changed my mind. My race is nearly run. I have been a party to many wrongs, and now I am going to do what I can to right one

of them. I will make a statement, and sign it."

Harrington produced a notebook and pencil, and Sarkey began:

"My name is Charles Sarkey. My brother, David Sarkey, I now believe to be dead. He was my only known relative. We were born on a house boat, and spent our boyhood on the Black River, from Poplar Bluffs down to White River, and along the bayous of that stream.

"I do not know anything of our antecedents, but my father was an educated man and possessed a considerable library, which he carried with him on his house boat. He taught me, and I acquired some education. I had a good memory, and a predilection for chemistry. In my boyhood I knew the name of all the herbs that grew in that part of the country, and especially of those that were poisonous.

"When I was eighteen years old, and David fourteen, an epidemic of swamp fever swept away all our family except David and me. Thus, left to shift for ourselves, we went to Poplar Bluffs, a pair of typical river rats. After a time I secured work in a drug store, owned by Richard Haltman, a pioneer citizen of the old town. I soon demonstrated my knowledge of drugs, and my aptness at learning. There was no law at that time requiring pharmacists to register, and in a few months I had acquired sufficient knowledge to qualify as a prescription clerk.

"Meantime, David secured employment in the grocery store of James Vard. Haltman and Vard were both rich, and were recognized as two of the leading men of the town. David was really an apprentice in Vard's store. As a boy he had an ingratiating manner, and Vard took a liking to him, and took him to his house to live, and he continued living there for several years. Vard had but one child, a daughter three years younger than David. They grew up together in the same house, and played together, as children.

"Haltman had one child, a son about my own age, Richard Haltman, junior. From the first day I was in Haltman's drug store I conceived a dislike for young Haltman, who stayed in the store when he was not in school. He was a bright boy, and had a splendid knowledge of the business. I owed my education and my ability, in a great measure, to my dislike for my employer's son. I spent every hour of my spare time in study, in an effort to excel him in the business. I never showed my dislike for the boy, and he never suspected it, but always treated me in the most kindly manner. There was, however, a tone of condescension toward me in his manner that, instead of winning me, made his kindness the more irritating to my dislike for him.

"David had a quick mind, and while not well educated, he gave promise of making a capable business man. At the age of twenty he had the confidence of his employer, and I do not think that up to that time he had any evil intentions. I had then been in the Haltman drug store six years, and by close application had made myself indispensable to the business. Young Haltman had been away at school a great deal of the time. I was of a quiet, secretive disposition, and no one ever learned of my dislike for him, except my brother David, to whom I talked unreservedly.

"David and I had, up to this time, behaved ourselves in a becoming manner. We were respected in the community, but there was a social circle to which we were not admitted. There were certain social events attended by young Haltman and Ella Vard, from which David and I were excluded. This roused in us a fierce something that seemed always to lie dormant in the hearts of river folk.

"I had no social aspirations, but David had, at last, fallen desparately in love with Ella Vard. She had been away from home two years at school, and when she returned she was a wonderfully lovely woman. When David, presuming on their old comradeship, told her of his love, and asked her to marry him, she refused. When he protested she flatly called his attention to who and what he was. She told him she could not consider marriage with a man of his class, and that he had no right to presume that she would entertain such feelings for a river rat whom her father had rescued and tried to make a man of.

"This roused all the latent rage of the river people in David. He came to me with his troubles, and I counseled him to keep his temper, and wait for an opportunity for revenge. I had no thought then of committing any crime. Petty annoyance was all I thought of at the moment. My mind in those days never ran far from my books and my prescription case. I had proved my ability and Haltman had every confidence in me.

"Then, like a bolt out of the blue it was announced that Richard Haltman, junior, and Ella Vard had married. The people in the town commented on the fact that, by the marriage, the two largest fortunes in the county had been consolidated. David came to me and swore that he would kill Haltman, but I counseled him to wait for an opportunity to humble his rival.

"Several years passed. A son was born to the Haltmans, and five lears later a girl was born. When the little girl was three years old an epidemic of yellow fever visited the South, and extended farther north than it had ever been known to go. At Poplar Bluffs there was a great scare, and although there was no yellow fever there, there was a great deal of sickness.

"By this time old Richard Haltman was dead, and his son had succeeded to the business. James Vard was also dead, and Richard Haltman and his wife occupied the old Vard home, which was the finest in the town. Thus the Haltmans became immensely rich. David and I, who had worked many years in the two stores and had done much toward building up the fortunes, received nothing but our meager pay.

"During the epidemic of sickness Mrs. Haltman and the two children became very ill. Richard Haltman was a pharmacist, and always insisted upon filling all prescriptions for himself and his family. I think now that this was not intended as a demonstration of a lack of confidence in me, but at the time it enraged me. One evening, late, Haltman came into the store with two prescriptions that had been given him by the old family doctor, He filled them, wrapped up the medicine, then went away and forgot it.

"The grocery business had been sold, and David was out of a job at this time, and he often loafed about the drug store with me. He had heard me talking about a powerful narcotic that would produce hours of sleep, and even apparent death, and if given in heroic doses, would produce death. When Haltman left the store, David, seeing the package, suggested that I substitute this sleeping powder for the mild soporific that Haltman had prepared for his wife, under the prescription. Notwithstanding I was the elder, David always had his way with me when he set his heart on it. What I did was wrong, but I had no serious purpose. The powders would make the woman sleep. Would frighten Haltman almost to death. And, if the medicine were examined, would ruin his confidence in himself forever afterward, for he would think it was the medicine he had prepared.

"I made the substitution. While I was doing it, David went to the show case and got a fresh cigar. When he came back I had wrapped the medicine up again, and he said he would carry it to Haltman's house. On the way he doubled the powders, emptying two powders into one paper and throwing the other papers away. The two children were suffering with colds, and the bottle of medicine prepared for them was a mild soothing sirup. Into the bottle he emptied one of the double powders. Then he went on to the house and gave Haltman the medicine, inquired after the sick, kindly, and went on about his business. All this he told me only a few years ago, but he has held it over my head since them to make me do his bidding. It was a diabolical crime, but wholesale murder was not the worst of the plan, as you will see.

"The woman took one of the powders, and died before morning. The amount placed in the bottle was not enough to produce death in the eight-year-old boy, but the little girl died within an hour of her mother. The people became panic-stricken. They thought these were the first cases of a plague that was to sweep the town of its population. Haltman, who was a sensitive, nervous man, and not physically strong, was prostrated. The

boy lay in a stupor for twenty-four hours, and afterward slowly recovered. No one would go near the house, and even the servants ran away, except one faithful old negress, who stayed on, nursed Haltman and the boy, dressed the dead woman and the little girl, and with the help of David Sarkey, who as a friend of the family volunteered his services, placed them in their coffins.

"When I heard of the deaths I was in a frenzy of fear. It was David who told me. He then had me at his mercy, and from that day I was his slave. He made me give him the antidote for the poison, which was a liquid, and he took it with him that night to the house, where he was sitting up with the bodies, alone. No one else would go near the place. He examined the little girl, in her coffin, and was convinced that she was not dead, but in a state of coma. He injected the antidote with a hypodermic needle, then wrapping the child's body in a blanket he took it to a house boat owned by a man with whom he associated. The next morning before daylight the boat dropped down the stream, and disappeared in the bayous of White River.

"David then went back to the house and placed enough weight in the coffin to deceive any one who might handle it. When morning came he and the old sexton buried both of them, without opening the coffins. In the afternoon of the same day the doctor picked up the bottle of soothing sirup and smelled of it. The condition of the boy was perplexing him greatly. He gathered up the two packages of medicine and brought them to the drug store. He asked me several questions about the preparation, and I told him that Haltman had prepared it himself, and that I knew nothing about it. We were standing behind the prescription case talking, and the doctor still had the medicine in his hand, when the city marshal, who had entered the store quietly, came around the end of the counter, and holding out his hand told the doctor to give him the medicine. There was no help for it, and the doctor yielded the package. The officer was a bitter enemy of Haltman, who had opposed him politically.

"Within a week Haltman was arraigned for poisoning his wife and children. He admitted mixing the medicine, and the evidence of myself and David, together with his own admission, convicted him. Because the medicine had been out of Haltman's hands between the time he prepared it, and the time it was given to the woman and children, the jury recognized a doubt, gave Haltman the benefit of it, and made the verdict life imprisonment. His case was appealed, and he lay in jail for months, but was finally sent to the State penitentiary, where he died five years later, still believing that he had poisoned his wife and child. That was the starting point of David's career of crime, and from that hour he had no compunctions about murdering any one who was in his way.

"Fear clutched me until I broke under the strain. Up to that time no one had suspected me, and I left the town. Later David left. Nearly four years later I met him one day in Fort Smith, and he told me that I had been suspected, and brought me here and hid me in the mountains. This is the first time I have been away from my dugout since I came to this country."

The four hearers had sat spellbound with the horror of the recital. When the old man stopped talking Haile said, in tones as cold as winter:

"Is that all you know?"

"All, except that David told me it had been his intention to revive the girl, keep her hid until the opportune moment, and then produce her to inherit the Haltman fortune. But, he told me the child had died on the house boat, and had been buried in the White River swamps. Enraged at this, he had hired an assassin, who went to Poplar Bluffs and murdered the boy. He showed me a newspaper clipping giving an account of the finding of the boy's body. I have lived in dread all these years, and now the end has come. I am willing to sign this statement. It is true, but never in my life have I had intent to murder, and in late years I have often begged David to refrain from the crimes he was about to commit."

"Your signature to that statement, to-

gether with these other documents, completely removes the stigma from the memory of Richard Haltman, Lena's father, and shows that he was a martyr, and the victim of two soulless plotters who posed as his friends," said Haile.

"David Sarkey made his mistake when he intrusted the murder of the Haltman boy to a hired assassin. The murder was committed, and the assassin no doubt received his pay. But no allowance was made for the fact that on the day before, the Haltman boy had given a suit of clothes and cap to an orphan river rat. When the mutilated body was found it was promptly identified by the clothing, the face and hands having been destroyed. The papers published a long article about it, and the death was supposed to have been entirely accidental.

"David probably never knew that the old bachelor lawyer who defended Richard Haltman, was a very close friend of his, and a great admirer of the Haltman boy; that, on the day of the alleged death of the Haltman boy, that lively youngster was out at the lawyer's farm, with the lawyer, on a rabbit hunt; that the lawyer, who was also trustee of the Haltman estate, learned of the death of his young friend through a paper, and instead of taking him back to town, took him into another State, and put him in school under another name.

"The boy was then nearly nine years old, and the lawyer explained the situation fully to him. No one, except the boy and the lawyer, ever knew that the boy was not dead. The boy grew to manhood under an assumed name, and traveled widely. The lawyer, at first deeply interested in the Haltman case, became obsessed with the idea that the Sarkey brothers were the criminals, and he spent many thousands of dollars of the Haltman fortune in an effort to find them. Haltman money has been defraying my expenses in this campaign. The lawyer also had the grave opened and found that instead of a skeleton in the little girl's coffin there was a book, and two heavy door props.

"As for you, Charles Sarkey, the end is indeed near. But, you shall not die by my hand. Death is too good for you. You shall lie in that same prison where Richard Haltman died, and repent of your crimes."

Sarkey leaned back in his chair and said:

"No prison taint, or hangman's rope shall ever touch me."

There was a slight grinding of his teeth, and a moment later he stiffened in his chair and fell to the floor.

"Apoplexy," said Harrington.

"Poison, I should say," said Haile. "He was a wizard in chemistry, and a poisoner by profession. Such men sometimes carry a deadly poison in a tiny sealed glass capsule, under the tongue. When in danger of being taken to trial for their crimes they crush the capsule with the teeth, rather than suffer the punishment that they know will be meted to them."

Examination of the dead man's lips disclosed tiny bits of glass in the froth.

"We will just leave him here, for the present," said Haile. "The marshals will be here in an hour or two to take charge of a very interesting collection of articles in another part of the cave that we will not visit, and incidentally to break up the last vestige of the worst nest of crime that the Kimish ever has known, or ever can know." Then replacing the papers in the box, Rufus Haile led the way back to the house.

As they stood in the old living room, with the clock still ticking away on the mantel, and the fire burned out in the fire place, the clouds broke away and the evening sun poured in at the window.

"Pardon me, Mr. Haile," said Harrington, moved by his professional curiosity, "but how long have you been following these criminals?"

"Several years."

"What induced you to take such an interest in the case, and above all, to risk your life here in the Kimish?"

"I think Providence must have had a hand in that. The best answer is that it is because I am Rufus Haile Haltman. Lena is my sister, you are going to be my brother-in-law, and this young woman is going to be my wife," and Rufus put his arm around Hattie and kissed her.

The Fighting Fool

By

Wallace Jackson

Author of "Watch Your Step!" "What's the Use?"

THE tender sex is responsible for a lot of things besides hunger strikes, alligator-pear salad, bargain sales, movie heroes, bridge whist, the latest scandal, busted bank rolls, nut sundaes, Palm Beach, and you and me. When a male person sets the world or an orphan asylum on fire, jimmies a fortune out of Wall Street, buys a limousine, takes to the water wagon or vice versa, shaves regular, writes poetry or home for money, lives in Brooklyn, cops on the third race, goes to Congress or goes to work, the French have a saying which, being translated, means: "Look for the skirt!"

While men fight for a lot of things they don't make fighting fools of themselves unless some dame is mixed up in it. Yes, siree! The hand that rocks the cradle can also rock the boat.

If you don't believe it, take the case of J. Stanley Buxton—the one and only. He never struck anything in his young life worse than an attitude and was about as brutal as a charlotte russe until he looked into a pair of cerulean blue eyes and caught a reflection of something that looked like the valentines you send yourself. After that J. Stanley was so satisfied with his lot that you would have thought it was in a cemetery.

Back in the days when he was a hedoll in the chorus he never had enough of anything, unless it was cigarettes. Even then he spent the coupons recklessly and had nothing laid by for the well-known rainy day. But when it required about sixty feet of our celebrated white lights to inform the public that J. Stanley Buxton could be seen—and, possibly, heard—from the last-row orchestra seats sold by speculators, you'd think that he'd play safety first, and hanker after some one to love, honor and annoy him. Not atall! After the incident I mentioned a prosperous season was only part of the calendar in his young life. With health, wealth, and time for ping-pong and pink tea, he looked as happy as a party reading the city directory.

Of course I couldn't believe it at first, for J. Stanley didn't think any more of himself than a mother does of her only child. He was surrounded by chorus beauties that Ziegfeld had tried to kidnap and chorus cuties that wanted to be kidnaped, but they made no more impression on him than a slap on the wrist. He had his own company, his own theater building, and the latest adding machine to figure up his income. Not only was he the salesgirls' delight; he was the idol of the society lasses. With the men, I blush to say, J. Stanley was as popular as this near-beer.

Oh, yes, he was there in many ways to beat the band. As a female impersonator his batting average resembled a census report. When you saw him on the stage you turned over the magazin covers with a sneer, and when you saw him off, the collar advertisements no longer held attractions for you. He looked good both off and on—almost too good!

When I first met J. Stanley he thought he wasn't getting all the publicity that was his. I was made to understand that the newspapers were paying entirely too much attention to prohibition and votes for women and too little to J. Stanley Buxton, and that something had to be done about it. That something was a contract in which J. Stanley—always the party of the first part—agreed to furnish photos and regular pay while I came across with the inspiration.

For a time J. Stanley and I got along better than two Haigs. He wanted publicity, and a plenitude of the same is what he received. The first story I planted went over with a rush, and the second landed me twenty columns and a raise. After that ambition marked me for its fall guy and I perpetrated a fashion column, illustrated with poses by J. Stanley Buxton, and syndicated it all over the country.

J. Stanley Buxton was satisfied—for a time! He was so delighted at first that he giggled grammatically every time we met. Later, when the ball was rolling at full speed, he kept one or the other of us up till all hours reading him the clippings. Not an inkling did I have of the change to come. How was I to know that something had caused his sweet content to curdle overnight?

II.

THE first shock I received was from Pierre, his secretary-valet-chauffeur. "Friend boss is off his feed, I guess," he confided to me.

"Aha!" said I. "What fresh crimes have you perpetrated upon his peerless person? Have you been skidding with the curling irons again?"

"Say, but you're funny," sneered Casey, as he was called by every one except J. Stanley. "Your lines get about as many laughs with me as the lockjaw." Then he recovered his Angora and his grin. "Anyhow," he went on, "I'm not the cause this time."

"No?" I inquired politely. "Well, what is his pet reason? Has some hated rival slipped poison ivy in his bouquets?"

"Nope," said Casey, stooping to shake his head gloomily. "It's the publicity, I think."

"Rave on," I sneered, "if that's a sample of your so-called thinking. Why, he couldn't have copped more publicity if he'd been the latest murderer."

Casey looked at me sadly. "That's so," he admitted with another gloomy shake of the head. "But the boss is a queer bird. When I hand him a batch of clippings nowadays he acts as if they were death notices."

"Is that so?" I snarled. "Well, here is where J. Stanley Buxton and your Uncle Dud palaver about the same."

"All right," Casey agreed hastily, seeing that I was on the point of exploding. "Only don't let him know I tipped you off. Pleasing him in the last few days is like trying to lose your job."

"Maybe; but he's been pulling down more publicity lately than the high cost of living and I want an explanation."

"Well, there's no better time than the present. The boss is usually feeling good after his cold shower."

"Oh, he is, is he?" I remarked scornfully. "Then I'm sorry to have to spoil his pleasant morning."

"Well, don't spoil the afternoon for me," entreated Casey as I beat it down the corridor and crashed into J. Stanley Buxton's ten-a-day suite.

Probably I looked about as calm and contented as a freshly shaven poodle, but I might have been a summer breeze for all the attention my entrance attracted. J. Stanley hardly looked up from where he was sitting, dressed in a cerise lounging robe and sniffing sadly at a pale-pink rose. The sight of this picture had me so hipped that I started across the room like a party walking in his sleep. Halfway across I stumbled over something and sat down on the polished floor with a sudden and painful precision.

"Ah!" exclaimed J. Stanley. "The very man I wanted to see. Take a seat."

"This will do, thanks," I replied with what dignity I could muster. Then I looked about to discover the reason for my downfall. The first thing I discovered was a neat and nifty little fifty-pound dumb-bell and near to it nestled its playmate. As my injured gaze wandered about it encountered still another dumb-bell, probably the head of the family, for it looked about the size of a flivver and appeared more useful. I was still puzzling over this when I found my voice.

"I dropped in to see you——" I started.

"So I observe," he remarked with a sad smile. "Only I wish you would be more careful of that smoking stand to your right next time; you missed it by a miracle."

"I don't think I missed anything from the way I feel," I managed to say.

A gloomy laugh from J. Stanley interrupted me. He bent over and tossed me a couple of cushions. "Here; make yourself more comforable," he advised.

I sat there as solemn as an ass and calling myself worse. As he passed me the cigarettes I looked at his lily-white hands and then at those dumb-bells—and smoked up.

"Now," he said with prim sternness. "We'll take up a subject I have had on my mind for some time."

"Meaning what?" I inquired, knowing the answer would be bad news.

"Why, the—er—publicity?"

"You might as well halt where you are and let me out," I said, getting rattled once more. "I couldn't get you more publicity if you were a ton of coal."

"I'm not referring to the quantity," he answered mildly. "It is the quality I wish to discuss."

I looked away from those dumb-bells before I found my voice. "Quality?" I sneered. "Does it strike you that the subject has to do with the matter? Now if I was a press agent for Napoleon or Cæsar or Shakespeare or some bird in that league, the quality might be different."

"You are entirely too hasty," he said, as if addressing some one at the foot of the class. "What I mean to convey is that all of your publicity—stories as well as photographs—excellent as it is, has to do with J. Stanley Buxton the female impersonator, and nothing to do with J. Stanley Buxton the man."

"I don't get you," I muttered feebly.

"Well," he went on impatiently, "everything that appears concerns my appearance in the rôle of a woman on the stage. Never has there been a thing about my manly side; never has there been a photograph of me in regular duds. Of me off the stage the public has not the slightest conception. Doubtless I am pictured by some as a spineless and effeminate creature——"

"A sissy?" I interrupted.

"Exactly," he shuddered. "And now do you follow me?"

"I'm ahead of you," I retorted. "What you want is stuff about the terror of the tennis court, the bazoo of the breakers at the beach, the demon driver on the links, and so on."

"Yes," he admitted without a smile, "and pictures in clothes to correspond."

"Well, you're the boss," I sighed, scrambling to my feet. "And I might as well get busy."

"I knew you would see it that way," he said with that same sad smile, as he followed me to the door. "What photographs would you advise me to have taken first? The—er—ones in tennis togs?"

"By all means," I insisted. "Overalls would be too brutal to start with." Then I remembered those dumb-bells. "Why the young foundry?" I inquired, nodding in their direction.

"Oh!" he stuttered and looked confused. "I have never done that sort of thing before for fear of developing abnormal muscles in my arms. You know," he hesitated, "I couldn't play feminine rôles with arms like a stevedore."

"I get you," I assured him. "I thought for a minute that you harbored some delusion about dallying with them."

"I am," he answered a little fretfully. "In fact, the condition of my—er—health demands that I do some such thing."

"I see," was my consoling reply. "Well, you'll have enough health to stock

a health resort if you are ever able to toy with those babies."

"What do you mean?" he asked in an exasperated voice. "Don't you think I can manage to exercise with them?"

"Not with my arms," I answered fervently. "I prefer to break them some other way. Of course, if you like that sort of exercise——"

"I don't understand you," he cut in. "I telephoned for them and the clerk asked me my weight and height——"

"He must have got you mixed up with a derrick," I started. Then I saw he was getting peeved. "Anyhow," I went on, "I would begin with lighter ones if I were you and sort of work up to those young man-killers."

"That may be a good idea," he admitted as I started for my room to tap the old typewriter. "I hope your ideas work as well with the new line of publicity."

Naturally I was puzzled in this abrupt change in J. Stanley, but I had no notion that the shadow of a perfect thirty-six was looming up to disturb the peaceful horizon. How was I to guess that a person who thought so much of himself had room to think about a Jane?

III.

WHEN I say that I never piped so hard in my life I am saying only a few words. Some of the stories I pounded out would have landed me in Class A of the fiction writers, only I mentioned real names and places. As it was, a column of my most classical come-on would ease its way into our leading journals for a stick next the real-estate news. And all the nourishment I got out of shooting a bale of photographs through the mails was to pay the return postage. J. Stanley Buxton in his tennis cuties was as welcome as the whooping cough in second childhood.

Breaking the news to him was an act I postponed as long as I dared. Stalling, however, has its limits, and in the end it was up to me to share the sad secret with J. Stanley, come what might.

I stopped at three relief stations on my way to the theater, and by the time I reached the stage door I was all primed and ready to face J. Stanley even if I saw two of him. I was going so well that the old doorkeeper began to sniff at my approach and give an imitation of a runnhound at bay. Then he beat it around the corner to let me find the way in by my lonely.

As I pried the dressing-room door open I heard a long and lingering sigh and beheld J. Stanley's doleful face regarding me from the make-up mirror.

"Now about the fall-down on this publicity," I started right in, but he silenced me with a gesture.

"Bother about the publicity," he said, nodding toward a chair. "Sit down, my boy. Misery loves company."

"We ought to be good company," I agreed, "for this is the first time I ever skidded on a publicity stunt."

"Not another word about that," he commanded in a hollow voice. "I have more important things to think about. My boy," he asked suddenly, "do you know anything about women?"

"Enough," I replied.

"Ah!" he brightened. "Then perhaps——"

"Enough to keep away from them," I hastened to insert.

He seemed to think this funny, for he hahaed painfully and proceeded to look unnatural again.

"Then," he said, "you've never thought of getting married?"

"Oh, yes," I conceded, "I'm just as foolish as the next one. I even thought of jumping off Brooklyn Bridge, only a lot of others beat me to it."

"What I mean," he stated testily, "is that you never have seriously contemplated matrimony?"

"I should say I had," I hastened to assert, "but only as an innocent bystander. I decided long ago that I could squander my huge earnings without any kind assistance."

"Piffle!" he exclaimed and then stopped. "Of course you are joking! Now, to be serious," he continued, "I have enough salted away to live at ease the rest of my life if I retired to-morrow."

"That's good," I remarked, "all but

that 'at ease.' I didn't know you were speaking personal, as it were."

"I was," he said after a long and penetrating look. "And it may be that you can advise me—Pierre is such a dunce, you know—because, to be frank, my boy, I'm in quite a quandary."

"I see," I answered with appropriate sadness. "And the lady's name?"

"Has nothing to do with the case," he replied harshly. "It is sufficient to say that she is not a stage person, nor yet a member of the so-called smart set."

"Well, that's something," I admitted.

"But," he went on with a far-away look, "she is the most wonderful girl in the world!" He halted, breathed hard, and then spouted absent-mindedly: "She is wise and she is witty; she is kind and she is pretty——"

"She must be a wiz," I hurriedly interrupted.

"She is that—and more," he beamed. Then that suffering look came back. "I met her in a strange way," he added huskily.

"Were you introduced?"

He ignored my remark.

"I first saw her," he said dreamily, "as I was riding along the beach."

"The beach?"

"Yes," he answered in the same strange voice. "I've been going down to Deal Beach on the afternoons I don't play. As I said before, I saw her at the beach, but there was no way in which I could make her acquaintance."

"Ah," I said, "what was the matter? Were you tongue-tied?"

"She wasn't that kind," he exploded, "as you will realize in another moment." His tones registered like a sick oboe again. "Her face haunted me! I could think of nothing else! And then—then—one day came opportunity!"

"Aha!" I breathed with bated breath.

"A ruffian spoke to her," he gulped, "and in another moment I was at her side. One glance at her white face and another at the leering face of her insulter told me the story. 'Be off, fellow,' I cried, 'or something will happen to you!' "

"Good for you," I encouraged. "And did he go?"

"Yes," nodded J. Stanley as he mopped his brow. "For an instant the wretch looked at me. Then he slunk off. From the fringe of the crowd he shouted something back in his crude way about not wanting to be sprayed with an atomizer, coupling the same with an epithet. However, I ignored it—you know how I detest brawling—and turned to the young woman. Her eyes were blazing, her little hands clenched.

" 'May I?' I asked, extending her my arm.

" 'Why didn't you knock him down?' she demanded suddenly. 'Ugh-h! If I were only a man.'

"What was I to say? And besides, her question astounded me. 'I was afraid of seriously injuring the wretch,' I blurted out in my perturbation. For an instant she looked doubtful, I must confess. She smiled in a most peculiar way and her glance swept me from head to foot. However, when she spoke I thought I could detect a note of admiration in her voice.

" 'Are—are you a prize fighter?' she asked, her innocent, blue eyes fixed upon me expectantly."

J. Stanley stopped to mop his brow once more, his face working convulsively.

"What was I to do, my boy?" he went on desperately. "Here was the one girl in all this world for me—and my one chance of knowing her depended upon my answer. She hoped I was a prize fighter—I could see that—and—and I lied to her!"

"Oh, boy!" I gasped. "And who did you tell her you were?"

"I didn't at first," he flushed. "But after a stroll—during which I learned how fond she was of athletics and red-blooded life—and it came time to part—I told her my name was Teller and—and asked her if I might call on her!"

"What, Gentleman Jack?" I bellowed. "The ex-champ?"

"Yes; I guess so," faltered J. Stanley. "I had read the name in the papers frequently—it sort of impressed me." He looked up. "You should have seen the look that came into her eyes when I said that. Immediately she told me that I

might call, in fact almost entreated me—and ended by giving me her card."

"Do you mean to tell me that you got away with *that?*" I choked.

"I don't see why I shouldn't," he flushed. "Do I look any worse than the—er—ex-champion?"

"No; that's the trouble," I replied. "Say, where was this queen born?"

"In Harlem," he answered seriously.

"Even that doesn't account for it. Well, anyhow, you didn't follow it up?"

"I did!" he groaned. "I have been acting other parts all my life, and the curse followed me. That and my fatal fascination are responsible for the terrible predicament I now find myself in."

"Which is to say?"

"That she now wants to see me fight!"

"Good night!" I exclaimed. "And then you ducked!"

"No—nothing of the kind," he stuttered, "I consented!"

"But you have about as much experience at that game as you have eating glass," I reminded him. "If she isn't cock-eyed she'll spot you for a ringer in the first round—unless—unless——"

"Go on! Go on!" he urged excitedly.

"Unless you go in for a little training," I continued. "Now if we could fix it up with a man like Mike Mulraney to take you on——"

"The very idea!" he cried. "When do we start?"

"Hold on," I broke in. "I'll have to run out to his farm to see him first. You know he's not instructor at the Athletic Club any more—he's retired."

"Isn't he too old?" asked J. Stanley, suddenly.

"You'll find he has two arms," I assured him, "and a right and left. Do you know that he has trained three champs, including your friend, Gentleman Jack?"

J. Stanley winced but came back gamely.

"Travel out there as fast as you can," he ordered, "and let me know the instant you have completed arrangements."

"All right," I answered and started out.

It was an hour before I reached the little farm that Mike called his own, and another hour before I could make the old boy see his way clear to taking on a novice like J. Stanley. In fact, it wasn't until I talked turkey—and posted a hundred with him—that the veteran trainer agreed to put J. Stanley through a course of sprouts in the faint hope that he could be fitted for a bout with some third-rater.

IV.

WHILE I may have had some doubts about J. Stanley's attitude after he had slept it over, they were shattered by his prompt arrival at Mulraney's the next day. He arrived with bells on, and in his new roadster. Leaping daintily from the car he exposed himself clad in nothing but a gray silk sport suit, gray shoes, gray cap, and gray gloves.

Behind him staggered Casey with a section of a sporting-goods store that almost completely obscured his old-rose livery. From the number and sizes of the parcels decorating his person I imagined that the only thing J. Stanley had overlooked was the good will of the business and a carbuncle on the salesman's neck.

"Ah, what have we here?" I questioned gayly.

"Just a few necessary things," J. Stanley explained.

"I hope you include your own dukes," I told him. "While Mike isn't as fast as freight, there's no microbes on his wallop. Anyhow," I ended as I spotted the old boy coming our way, "come on and meet Mulraney."

"Shure, I'm pleased to meetcha," the trainer grinned finally, holding J. Stanley's hand in a vicious grip.

Though he winced J. Stanley registered the utmost unconcern.

"The pleasure is all mine," he piped politely, making no attempt to remove his hand.

At that Mike smiled a little more and looked more interested. But he said nothing and led the way to a ramshackle gym in the rear of the barn.

Believe me, though done up in a fancy cover, J. Stanley was considerable of a surprise package to both of us. Instead of showing timidity, marked or otherwise, he danced in and banged away

desperately without waiting for instructions from Mike.

"I like your spirit, lad," complimented the old trainer finally. "But don't be in such a hurry."

While his voice had taken on a friendly note there was a gleam in the cold, gray eyes which told J. Stanley he got off there—and he did.

For three days running J. Stanley dashed into the city and out again. Then his season closed and he settled down to a steady grind. It was a revelation, I tell you, and a week had hardly passed before he showed that he had an occasional kick in his right. He landed a lulu that forced the veteran to come back with all he had. It was a hot rally for a minute, and then J. Stanley got one in the wind that caused him to breathe like a fish out of water.

"There now, lad," grunted Mulraney, "you mustn't rush the old man too much."

"That's the way to fight, isn't it?" breathed J. Stanley hoarsely.

"It's one way," dryly commented the trainer. "When you have everything that the other fella hasn't! Otherwise," he ended with a chuckle, "it pays to wait."

"I see," nodded J. Stanley, as he guarded his wind.

As I said before, J. Stanley had a sound physique and was naturally graceful, yet I did not expect to see him dancing around the old master at the end of another week.

"There's a good deal in that lad," remarked Mulraney as I started back to the big burg to look after some of J. Stanley's neglected affairs. "All it needs is bringing out."

"Well, if you can make a scrapper out of J. Stanley Buxton," I replied, "you'll deserve all the medals that Sousa—and his band—can wear."

"It's not me that'll make that of him," observed Mulraney wisely. "I can only show him the way."

And then I thought of the blue-eyed cause of J. Stanley's sudden madness and said nothing. And I was still thinking when I beat it back to Broadway and started out to look after his belated business.

It was a week before I got things fairly straightened out, and another week before I could call it a good job. While I had heard from J. Stanley by phone every day I was by no means prepared for the sight which greeted me at the station upon my arrivel. In fact if it hadn't been for the striped roadster—and Casey—I would hardly have recognized the brown and husky party in the sweater who hailed me as J. Stanley Buxton, female impersonator. He seemed to have taken on about six inches everywhere you looked but his waist, and had a grip on him like a newly elected president of the truck-drivers' union.

"Well, my boy," he exclaimed, with a slap on the back that brought back my asthma, "how do you think I look?"

"If you looked any better," I gurgled, "you'd have to be twins."

"Ah," said J. Stanley delightedly, "I thought you'd be surprised." Then his face sobered. "I hope I surprise some others," he ended mysteriously.

"Meaning just who?" I asked, puzzled.

"Well," he hesitated, "Gentleman Jack for one!"

"What?" I gasped. "Have you had the nerve——"

"Yep," he answered lightly. "It's all arranged—Mulraney attended to that. We are to meet in a private bout at the Athletic Club!"

"Mulraney!" I managed to wheeze out. "Why, he must be nutty! As for you, why——"

"Now—no personalities, please!" he interrupted coldly. "I know you mean well, my boy, but I prefer Mulraney's judgment to yours. You said yourself," he added more warmly, "that he had made three champions!"

"Yes," I managed to mumble, "but—but he had a lot of material to start with. Do you mean to say that the old boy thinks that you——"

"He *thinks*," cut in J. Stanley crisply, "that I have a show as long as the ex-champion *thinks* I am a lemon—to use his own words."

"Aha!" I said. "Then Gentleman Jack is being kidded."

"If he is, he is kidding himself," came back J. Stanley, "because I have offered

to double the amount I am to pay him if he puts me out in three rounds. You see," he ended brightly, "the bout is scheduled to go six rounds."

"Scheduled is right," I groaned. "But things don't always go according to schedule. And Mulraney aided and abetted you in this?"

"Now, look here," he rapped out suddenly, "I'm going to meet Gentleman Jack if I break both arms and both legs!" He paused and that old far-away look came back to his eyes. "I am heartily ashamed of the deception I practiced on—well, you know who I mean," he went on in a tragic undertone, "and I am going to show her that while I am not an ex-champion that at least I am not afraid of one. *She* is to be at the ringside!"

"So am I," I muttered. "And I'll pray as hard as the next one."

"What's all this?" called a voice at that juncture, and I turned to see the veteran trainer bearing down on us.

"The boss is just telling me," I replied weakly, "that he is going to meet Gentleman Jack."

"He is that," answered Mulraney, with one of his shrewd looks. "And you had better be there with bells on. The bout comes off Saturday night!"

"Yeh!" I said suspiciously. "You must be an awful good friend of the ex-champ to hurry things so."

"I haven't spoken to th' man goin' on five years," answered old Mike quietly. "So don't get any wild ideas in your bean, lad." He hesitated and then a broad grin mantled his battle-scarred features. "Gentleman Jack," he chuckled, "is busy training—on Broadway!—with the advance money he received."

"Well, I hope it was a million!" I retorted. "That would help a little."

"Let it go at that, lad," answered the veteran softly. "Only be there—when th' trouble begins."

V.

AND say, gentle reader, I was there—and so was every one in the theatrical and sporting game who could get a ticket of invitation. The arena looked like a cross between the horse show and a six-day bicycle race. The arena proper was filled with the leading—and hidden—lights of little old New York, and the tier of boxes with fair women so heavily veiled that you could only see the faces of the good-looking ones. I should have said all but one box—and it was on that box that J. Stanley first fixed his eye when he finally clambered in the ring to receive the ovation of his young life. Gone was his old stage bow, gone his musical laugh. He just stood there with a thin smile, his face showing a little white under its tan, his glance darting to that tier box.

I knew what was on his mind, and I kept an eye peeled on it myself until the usual announcement and instructions drew my attention. Then the bell sounded.

To the surprise of every one in that audience—unless it was Mulraney—J. Stanley Buxton darted from his corner like a greyhound unleashed and crashed into the ex-champion before he had taken three steps. Slam! Bang! went his two gloves, and then, as Gentleman Jack attempted to cover, came a torrent of blows that beat him back into his own corner. The wild cheer that went up must have brought the ex-champion to his senses, for the dazed expression left his face, he suddenly side-stepped and ducked under a swinging blow, and gained the center of the ring. From there his once famous left shot out and jabbed the rushing J. Stanley, jabbed him until the blood came from his mouth and nostrils, jabbed him to a standstill! When the bell sounded it could hardly be heard for the ravings of that ringside bunch.

While Gentleman Jack showed no marks from J. Stanley's onslaught he was breathing like a porpoise and keeping his surprised eye on his amateur opponent in the other corner. However, the beginning of the second round found him leaping nimbly to the center, the old reliable left held out like a piston.

"Remember!" came the gruff voice of Mulraney from the ringside, and J. Stanley seemed to remember, for he dropped his rushing tactics and coolly waited for the ex-champ to take the lead. For a few seconds Gentleman Jack regarded

him with a sinister smile. As his gaze took in his opponent's damaged features his lip curled in derision.

"Don't want your beauty spoiled, eh?" he jeered, and then let a wicked right catapult for the actor's jaw. It was a glancing blow, yet it rolled J. Stanley's head back.

"Clinch, lad! Clinch!" came the hoarse command of Mulraney. J. Stanley clinched, but the ex-champion, his arms working like pistons to the other's body, fought his way clear. Gasping, the female impersonator staggered back a few feet and waited, crouching, for the next onslaught. Then Gentleman Jack started slowly in his direction, his breath coming in spurts, his legs trembling under him. Even J. Stanley could see that the exertion had told on the prize fighter and he straightened up with a grim little smile.

"Easy money!" puffed the ex-champ as he attempted to feint the actor off his feet. "I'll cop that extra thou in the third!"

"Why not now?" snapped J. Stanley as he backed away for an instant. "I'll give you another thousand if you finish me in this round!"

Even as he spoke the prize fighter threw himself at J. Stanley, his guard down and both arms going like flails. And then came an exhibition of footwork on the female impersonator's part that made his famous stage dance look like a stationary washtub. Gentleman Jack was fighting wildly and viciously as he followed his dancing opponent around the ring, but his blows were becoming shorter and weaker with each passing second.

"Why don't you stand up and fight, you—you *she*ro?" he choked as he made another lunge in the actor's direction.

At that word J. Stanley stopped short, his lips going white, his eyes snapping; and then he set himself for a comeback. Even as his right swung around, with all his strength behind it, the wicked left of Gentleman Jack started from the ground in a fearful uppercut. Then came the impact of two blows—and the startled cries of the spectators.

As an awed hush came over the audience the ex-champ was seen to be falling to the mat. As his body struck, a great cry shook the arena and all eyes turned on the female impersonator. Under that gaze the motionless figure of J. Stanley seemed to crumple up of a sudden and slump to the floor.

"Goshamighty!" cried some one. "A double knock-out!" And then I leaped to my feet to see the referee's arm moving up and down, his voice trying to rise above the storm of sound.

"One!—two!—three!—four!—five!—six——"

Another roar drowned the sound of his voice, for one of the figures was moving.

"Seven!—eight!——" he shouted, as the figure rose to its knees. "Nine!" he cried like a man demented—and J. Stanley Buxton staggered to his feet.

"Ten!" came the final call, in a bedlam of noise. Then the dazed referee looked at the unconscious ex-champ, reached for J. Stanley's right hand, and held it aloft in token of victory.

And say, boy, talk about a mob scene! It's a wonder they didn't attract the squirrels in the park, they acted that nutty. And the climax came when some of them lifted J. Stanley aloft and bore him toward his dressing room. Once he looked back in my direction, and then he focused the eye that wasn't closed on that tier box. It was still empty.

It took me about fifteen minutes of my rapidly ebbing life to fight my way to the said dressing room and once I did I found J. Stanley being slowly suffocated by his congratulating friends.

"Get them out of here," he managed to whisper in my ear, and that I managed to do after losing my voice—and my watch.

"Now, my boy!" he said gruffly, after the last of his admirers had faded away, "see if Pierre—er—I mean Casey—has the car at the side entrance. I have a most important errand!"

"Face specialist?" I queried, as I looked at his battered map.

"You'll need more than that," he snapped back, "unless you're out of here before I can swing!"

Yes, it was new stuff, but it came from a new J. Stanley. Not being a fighting fool myself I found Casey and got him around to the side entrance just as J. Stanley came bounding down the steps.

"Uptown," he ordered, and settled back on the cushions with a groan as the car sped up Central Park West. "Faster, Casey," he urged. "I'll take all the summonses they hand you!"

"Just where are we hying?" I asked in wonder.

Before he could answer something started to make a racket in the car. Casey struggled with it a minute, and then we came to a dead stop.

"Damn!" said J. Stanley suddenly and then looked wildly about. "Never mind!" he called as he leaped out and made for a passing car. "Come on!"

I came on as best I could and was pulled on board by J. Stanley. We shouldered our way through the crowded car and managed to find a couple of empty straps up near the front.

We had covered about a mile in this way I guess, and I was still breathing hard when a tainted voice spoke from behind us. "Hello, old atomizer!" is what it breathed.

J. Stanley turned like a flash and beheld a beefy individual leering at him. However, at sight of the female impersonator's warlike countenance he took a step backward.

"Mistake," he muttered weakly, and started for the rear end of the car as if he had important business there.

"Oh, no, it isn't," suddenly gritted J. Stanley from between his teeth. Then he made after the beefy one just as that bird took a backward glance and flopped from the moving car.

"What's the trouble?" I called to J. Stanley, but he was already crashing his way through the car. Before I could catch up with him he had leaped from the car and was pursuing the stranger across the avenue and over a side street.

I turned the corner in time to get a flash of J. Stanley hurdling a fence. By the time I had followed his example I could hear sounds—sounds of conflict—emanating from a small building which looked like a garage. Anyhow, it was through the open door of that structure that I panted just in time to have a figure of a man crash into me and lie down with yours truly underneath. As a human mattress I evidently appealed to him, for he made no move to turn over.

As I attempted to recover my breath, I stared about until my eyes became used to the darkness and my glazed gaze could make out the person of J. Stanley Buxton some feet away.

"What d'ye mean?" I choked from under two hundred pounds of perfect stranger. "What d'ye mean by throwing this bird at me?"

"My, my!" exclaimed J. Stanley in a surprised voice. "That explains why I did not hear him fall." He stopped wiping his hands on a silk handkerchief and looked down at me. "Why don't you get up?"

"Why don't I get up?" I bawled feebly. "Why don't you speak to this bird? Do you think I'm carrying him about for a mascot?"

"Oh, I see," he said politely. Then he reached down and jerked the husk to his feet. "Stay there, fellow!" he commanded, propping him up against the brick wall.

"Say! What does all this homicide stuff mean?" I demanded, floundering to my feet.

"Nothing," he stated, "only——" Then he stopped to meet the rushing figure of the beefy one who had recovered everything but his common sense. There was another crack and a crash and quiet reigned once more. "Only," he went on, "the brute insulted me."

"Insulted you?" I echoed. "Well, that's nothing to what you've done to him."

"He applied an epithet to me," breathed J. Stanley, getting out that silk handkerchief again.

"A whatithet?"

"An epithet," he piped impatiently. "He—he called me Lizzie once. Be-besides he insulted a lady friend of mine at the beach."

"Well," I grinned, "as soon as he recovers enough to sit up he'll probably be calling you uncle. He's certainly had enough to satisfy his whole family."

"I hope so," replied J. Stanley. "For I assure you this sort of thing pains me as much as it does him."

"Sure," I agreed as we beat it back

to the street. "You have all the worst of it. This bird can conceal his pain under bandages!"

"Hello!" exclaimed J. Stanley at that instant. "Here's a taxi!" And he had landed on the running board before I could turn around. "Harlem!" he was saying as I came up, "for a twenty-spot."

The driver gave one look at J. Stanley's sadly damaged features and said nothing. Likewise, he said nothing when we pulled up in front of a little old-fashioned brick house and J. Stanley thrust a yellowback into his palm and made a dash for the front porch.

As he took the three steps in a bound there was an exclamation from the porch and a lone feminine figure rose to meet him. And oh, boy! But she was some little danger signal, for when it came to looks she had the magazine covers looking like last year's calendars.

At sight of her the impetuous J. Stanley stopped and started to stutter.

"Dolly," he finally said in a thick voice, "I have a confession to make and —and I hope you'll listen to me. The— the fact is," he floundered on, "is that I have been deceiving you for a long time——"

"Oh, Joe!" she exclaimed in a shocked voice, though I noticed her eyes twinkled strangely.

"Yes," he said miserably, "and I only hope that I have redeemed myself this night in your eyes. I—I'm not Gentleman Jack—or gentleman anything," he skidded on, "bu-but I licked him——"

"You did!" she cried, round-eyed. "I —I was so afraid! That's the reason I didn't come." She hesitated, her melting eyes taking him in. "As for the deceiving, you goose," she ended, the twinkle coming back. "I knew that you were not Gentleman Jack all the time!"

"How—how did you know?" gasped J. Stanley Buxton as he sat down heavily on the porch.

"Why," she answered softly, "I went to school with him!"

"Our Old Man"

by Frank Richardson Pierce

SHE was an American destroyer. You could tell that by her actions. Not that they differed particularly from the French or English ships of the same type, but there was a something about her that suggested good old U. S. A., and that unknown something had on more than one occasion sent shivery little thrills playing up and down the ribs of the thousands of France-bound doughboys who chanced to come for a few days under her protection.

The young officer of the deck, who in civil life clipped coupons, played football, and burned up public highways with one of the fastest cars ever made, referred to his ship as "A 1918 model that can beat anything in her class!" At present,

the captain, affectionately termed "Our Old Man" by the crew—a title sought by many and gained by few—was taking a badly needed sleep. The ship cruised along at half speed, waiting for something to happen.

In the fo'c's'l the off-watch members of the crew loafed; playing cards, telling lies, or followed their captain's example and "corked off" as sleeping is termed by the men who dwell "for'd."

Tom Lowman, bos'n's mate, first class, and division petty officer of the first division, borrowed the "makin's" from a fellow sailor, stretched himself out lazily as a hard-working petty officer has a right to do, and opened up the conversation. This time it was the captain for a topic.

"S'funny thing about Our Old Man," he said between puffs, while his eye wandered about with its usual effort to detect something that might have been left undone, but never was, "I've sailed under a few skippers in my twenty years in the navy, but he heads all of them. He's as patient with a dub as a mother and just as near a pal to the fellows who make good as it's possible for an officer to be, and still be an officer. You'd think a fellow who loves men the way he does, would be the kind that married and had a couple of dozen kids, but no sir, not him. He's scared stiff of anything under three years old, makes those from three to fifteen keep their distance, and fairly hates women. They say, when he first came out of the academy, the other juniors on his ship had a cinch. He'd stand their watches for them so they could go ashore and dance with the society dames. Pretty soft, I calls it. But that's his way, always doing something for a man, and it makes little difference whether it's some third-rate meathound serving his first enlistment, or an admiral."

Up in the wireless station the operator suddenly began to jot down notes, then as suddenly ceased. For several moments he waited, then hurried to the officer of the deck.

The message read:

S. S. *Skagit* torpedoed, sinking, lat . . .

The operator stood at attention until the officer completed the message, then reported:

"I got the message strong until it stopped. It's evident that his set suddenly went out of commission. With your permission, sir, I'll see if I can pick up a ship that has passed the *Skagit* recently, and maybe we can get a hint as to her approximate position when she was torpedoed."

"Very well, Sparks." The officer found it hard to be dignified even under the most exacting circumstances and knew every man by his nickname.

For a considerable time the wireless cracked at intervals, each followed by a period of silence.

In time the message came. A ship had passed the *Skagit* several hours before, and the point of sinking was a good three hours' steaming.

Evans spent exactly three seconds in consideration, after receiving the operator's report, then he changed the ship's course and sent a report to the captain. And the captain, though sound asleep but a minute before, was wide awake when it came. When a destroyer's engines suddenly leap from half speed to full speed ahead, the difference in vibration is a whispered message of itself.

"It's tough on Our Old Man to be routed out," thought young Evans, as he eyed the stripe and a half of gold braid upon his sleeve, "but 'orders is orders' and we're supposed to obey them."

In a remarkably short time the captain took the bridge. He glanced at the chart, course, and speed, nodded approvingly at his young lieutenant and changed neither.

The sea was smooth for a change, and the ship cut the water like a knife with just enough of a roll to require the use of "sea legs."

It was two hours later the captain sharply called: "Bos'n's mate!"

"Here, sir," and a head popped into view.

"Clear away three boats ready for instant launching and tell the men to expect a boatload or two of survivors."

With the clear-cut "Aye, aye, sir," came the sharp shrill of the bos'n's pipe, and a series of commands into the fo'c's'l

that would have been wholly misunderstood by a landsman.

Taking survivors aboard meant a lot of added inconvenience to the crew, but not a kick or a grumble was heard. If any one of them had been asked it would probably not have occurred to him that he was inconvenienced, even though he did part with his bed, clothing, and, in many cases, money, to help out a less fortunate individual engaged in the same common cause.

The usual lookouts were on duty, and every man with nothing to do had appointed himself one also. Small boats, particularly small boats with dead and shell-torn men lying on the bottom boards and over thwarts, are not easily discernible at sea. It was the captain himself who picked up the first. Captains have this pleasant little habit of sometimes picking up something before the lookout does, thus beating him at his own game. It doesn't discourage the lookout, rather it keeps him right on his toes and at top-notch efficiency, and he admires the captain the more.

It was a small speck away off to starboard, and the ship was within two miles of it when a lookout picked up another boat to port and something he couldn't make out dead ahead. The ship was steaming through a sea covered with wreckage and the thousand and one things that make up a war-bound cargo.

One of the lifeboats was launched first, with Lowman at the steering oar.

"Keep your eye on the ship for signals," instructed the captain, "proceed straight ahead and pick up any survivors you may find in that boat. If any are too badly injured to be removed, stand by until the ship returns; watch for survivors upon the wreckage you pass."

"Some class to the way Our Old Man gives orders to his meathounds, eh?" said Lowman, as his boat's crew pulled away, "any boob could understand him."

"Yeah," grunted the stroke oar, "and I'm bettin' he saw somethin' in them boats he didn't mention to the rest of us—that part about the badly injured."

"Uh-huh!" commented Lowman, who was peering intently ahead.

II.

AS they approached the lifeboat, the stroke oar watched the other's face intently. Watched the puzzled look change to one of surprise, then grow dark with rage. Then he exploded. He cursed as only a man's man can when fully aroused to a sense of cold-blooded unfairness.

"Way 'nuff!" he snapped. "Boat your oars."

The members of the crew nearest the shrapnel-torn boat caught its side and held the two boats together. A sickening sight met their eyes.

"Not a chance did they have," said the stroke, "not a chance from that hell of shell from above. Look at that poor devil that tried to get under the thwart for protection. Good God, I hope we never take another sub crew alive. Fighting unarmed men in open boats with big guns." He stopped for lack of words.

"We'll stand by till the ship comes back," said Lowman, "we may find a man the doctor can patch up, but I doubt it."

"Look at the fellow on his knees and chest in the stern sheets," said the stroke, "I believe he moved a little."

Lowman stepped into the other boat and lifted the man into a more comfortable position. As he did so, the other opened his eyes slightly, then with a moan closed them again, but it was not the man that caused the look of amazement upon Lowman's face. Nor was it the bloodstains upon the back of the heavy coat he wore. Instead, it was the roll of blankets that lay upon the stern sheets. From the roll appeared the head of a baby, a head with a small mop of hair on top and a bald spot in back where all babies are supposed to have a bald spot. Lowman picked up the roll and nervously pushed the blankets aside.

The face wrinkled up in the sunlight, the eyes blinked slightly, then the little face changed from a squint to a broad grin, which showed its toothless gums.

"A—a—a milkhound!" exclaimed the amazed sailor.

"Sklibsk," replied the youngster in perfect English. He was probably between

six and seven months of age and none the worse for his experience.

Lowman again turned to the man who had placed his body between the youngster and the death-dealing shells. "Make him as comfortable as you can, men,"—and there was more feeling in his voice than his men supposed him capable of—"here's your chance to look at a 'hero' if ever there was one."

"Hero, hell!" suddenly came from the wounded man, "forget the hero stuff and give me something to drink. You'd 'a' done the same thing wouldn't you?"

To which statement Lowman was too modest to make reply.

"The ship's headed this way and the doctor'll fix you up in short order," said Lowman to the man's next question. "Whose kid is this?"

"Search me. There was a lady aboard on her way to England, and I guess it was hers. Don't know, though. There was a rush for the boats, and during the excitement somebody handed me the kid. We cleared the ship all right, but, after we got away, the sub squared off and let us have it. One of the other boats was shot to pieces with a single shell. The first shot they fired at us went over, but the second was just right and put everybody but the kid out of business."

The destroyer was but a half mile away when she stopped to pick up the second boat of rescuers.

Suddenly the stroke oar shouted a warning:

"Look! The sub!"

Not fifty yards away Lowman and his men saw the periscope appear for an instant, then as quickly disappear.

"I hope those on the ship saw her," said Lowman, "they're almost broadside on—a fine target. Keep your eye out for his nibs and I'll signal the ship."

With the aid of an oar he repeatedly wigwagged the letters "S-U-B."

When they next saw the periscope it came slowly above the water so that the boat was hidden between it and the destroyer. From his partially hidden vantage point the German deliberately maneuvered his craft to a position of firing. The little boatload of men saw and understood the maneuver and with impotent rage looked about for a weapon with which to combat it. They saw the water suddenly boil from a point well in advance of the periscope. Saw the deadly white streak of warning approach them, pass beneath them, sending a million bubbles about their craft, and wing its swift sure way toward their beloved home.

The business of a destroyer is to destroy without being destroyed. The anxious group held its breath until it saw the water leap from the force of the destroyer's propellers and the ship itself move with gathering speed from its danger.

"Well," breathed Lowman with relief, "they've got to go some to catch Our Old Man asleep, and I suppose that guy thought he was perfectly safe hiding behind us."

When they looked again for the periscope it was gone. In its stead was the telltale mark of bubbles, turning this way and that in an effort to shake off the pursuit it rightly expected.

Lowman leaped into his own boat, scrambled over his men, and stood up in the bow. "Take the steering oar," he shouted to the stroke, "and follow my orders to the letter. You meathounds row as you never rowed before, we'll follow the bubbles as well as we can and give the Old Man a general idea as to the sub's course."

The destroyer plowed through the water like an avenging angel—a sight well calculated to inspire a friend and strike terror into the heart of an enemy.

From her bridge the captain eagerly watched the uncertain course of his small boat, murmuring to himself, "God bless 'em—an American crew for brains every time." Presently he caught sight of the trail he was seeking. He barked an order to the man at the wheel, the ship swerved sharply and bore down toward the small boat.

"He's spotted him! He's spotted him!" fairly shrieked the delighted Lowman, "pull, you meathounds, pull!" Danger of being run down by their own ship seemed possible, then the stern moved slightly, and the long, dark body shot by them, throwing out a wave that caused the lifeboat to toss about violently. She

was not far beyond when the depth bomb splashed into the water.

"Now it's going to happen, boys!" exclaimed some one, and happen it did. The shock was terrific. A huge column of water spouted into the air, and, as it settled back bits of wreckage rained down about them. The white foam hissed and eddied for a moment, then all eyes turned to the greasy patch on the water; watched with deep understanding as it spread, the diameter ever growing, supplied, seemingly, by an inexhaustible source from below.

"This is the life, fellows, things happening in bunches like they do in the movies," piped the bowman, who not so many months ago had changed his "civilians" for a hammock and bag.

Lowman climbed back again to the steering oar and headed the boat toward the other boat that floated some distance away, to take aboard one infant and one wounded man.

III.

AN hour later, with the wounded under the doctor's care and the baby occupying the stateroom of a junior officer right out of Annapolis, the destroyer headed for her English base.

As stated in the previous paragraph, "Mr. Winslow" was fresh from the academy. He was an "intensified naval officer," which is not unlike the product of an "intensified farm." The navy being badly in need of officers when the war engulfed the United States, his training had been rushed through and he found himself, one bright morning, a member of the destroyer fleet. He was making good, but in his efforts to never make a mistake he was inclined to be "painful" at times.

"I don't know what I am going to do with you," he said, addressi g the infant. "It is really the doctor's work, but he is busy, so if you will just meet me halfway and not howl we'll get along fine."

The infant had been dropped unceremoniously upon the officer's bed, and Mr. Winslow appointed nurse, he being off watch at the time. For perhaps fifteen minutes nothing of moment occurred. Then the baby realized that it was long past mealtime. In fact, it seemed ages since he had dined. He protested with a series of grunts that ended in a wail. Mr. Winslow made a series of "faces," said "hitchy-koo" several times, danced up and down in a very undignified manner, but it was unavailing. At times the baby would have been deeply interested in the performance, but this was not one of them. The wails continued. Mr. Winslow hurried to the sick bay to consult the doctor.

"He is hungry," he volunteered.

"Give him something to eat."

"What?"

"Oh, I don't know," said the busy individual, "try some condensed milk and about four parts water. Only a little, however, just enough to satisfy him until I can attend to him. And another thing," he became very impressive, "don't give him anything without first boiling it."

"Boiling it? Why?"

"Germs," replied the doctor in a solemn voice.

"Oh!" said the other, as he disappeared. In five minutes he was back, but during that five minutes he had a cook and three seamen attending to various duties.

"I tried making him drink out of a cup. He doesn't seem to get the idea—nearly choked to death. What'll I do?"

The doctor was a resourceful man, and his reputation was at stake. He scratched his head in the hope his brain would spark with an idea. It came. He picked up a rubber glove, cut the thumb off, then he punched several pin holes in the end of the thumb. Then he stretched it over the end of a three-ounce bottle. It fitted.

"Boil this mess gear fifteen minutes," he said, "then try it on the baby."

A half hour later Mr. Winslow was back again to report the baby asleep after his repast. He returned to stand a watch over the sleeper. The duty lasted but a few moments when the ship gave a nasty lurch that rolled his babyship completely over.

His protest could easily be heard above the noise of the engine. Mr. Winslow tried a number of ways to pacify the in-

fant. It was useless, and, to make bad matters worse, Evans knocked gently upon the door, then inserted his head.

"Having troubles, mother?" he inquired.

"Go to the devil," answered Mr. Winslow.

"I'll see if I can't help you out," returned the other good-naturedly. He was soon back again, with Jiggs, the ship's cat, under his arm.

Jiggs, being of unknown parentage, therefore boasted no pedigree. He was vaguely aware there was some mystery about his past that savored of scandal. He was half Persian on his mother's side, that was sure. But his father? Here felines in discussing the matter lapsed into scandalized whispers. Jiggs felt sure that his father was just a roughneck alley cat, and promptly ran away from home. In time he sneaked under the navy-yard gate and, after a day's wanderings, leaped from the dock to the deck of the destroyer. Here he introduced himself to the cook. Jiggs promptly enlisted for life and was known among other ship's cats as a "continuous-service man."

Before Mr. Winslow was aware of what had happened Evans had deposited the cat upon the bed within reach of the infant, who immediately fastened his hands in Jiggs' fur. He had never seen a baby before, hence he was somewhat embarrassed. Nevertheless, he remained. It was Mr. Winslow who lost his poise over the incident.

"Take him away! Take him away and boil him, he's full of germs," yelled Mr. Winslow, glaring at Evans. The slander was too much for Jiggs, and he refused to remain in the same room with the man who insulted him. With head erect and tail at a rakish list to port, Jiggs hopped to the deck and walked sedately from the room.

With the cat's departure two things happened. Evans, thinking he had caused enough trouble, followed the cat, and the baby, who rather fancied its furry coat, bemoaned its loss in no uncertain terms.

Mr. Winslow tried several methods of quieting his charge without avail. He even tried ragging about the small confines of the room. Then he went into executive session with himself. He was positive that the subject of the care of infants had never been brought up at the academy. Further, he was decidedly of the opinion that turning a young naval officer into a nursemaid was unconstitutional. He was prepared to risk the firing squad and carry his case to the president if necessary.

Gathering up the red-faced and now shrieking youngster, he made his way to the captain's cabin. On the way he passed the officers' mess boy, who so far forgot himself as to grin. Mr. Winslow squelched him with a glance.

Knocking upon the captain's door, he entered and stood stiffly at attention, at the same time marshaling all his dignity. "I can do nothing with this child," he stated coldly.

The captain glanced curiously at the baby, then retreated a step or two. "Take him away," he said nervously.

At the sound of the voice the baby stopped crying for a moment and eyed the captain. Possibly it was the man's face or the bright markings upon his collar that attracted him. Before the two bright tears, rolling down either cheek, could reach his little jaw and drop off, his face began to wrinkle in a smile. Then he grinned broadly.

"Sklibsk," he said.

"Same to you," said the captain, reassured and surprised to learn babies were not as bad as he supposed.

"Put him on the bed, Mr. Winslow, call all hands to quarters, and see if you can find a man among them who is the father of one or more children."

"Aye, aye, sir," replied Mr. Winslow, after the manner of one relieved of a great load.

He returned some time later with a gunner's mate.

"Well, well, Reynolds, so you are a family man?"

"Yes, sir," replied the man, "four times —two, four, six, and eight and every one of 'em boys."

"Very good. You'll bring your bedding to my quarters and, from now until we reach the base, you will take care of

the baby. You are relieved from all other duties. And, Reynolds, this is a request and not a command, you understand."

"Yes, sir," replied Reynolds, "I am tickled to death for the chance, but, sir, it's going to make me dog-gone homesick."

"Don't worry about that. I'll see you are granted a leave, the first time we return to America, if you will only take care of the baby until we reach port."

IV.

WHEN the captain left the cabin, Reynolds carefully seated himself, glanced about, then sighed. Turning to his charge, he said, "You poor little cuss —never'll know the joy of a mother and father—both drowned by a dirty Hun. How you ever pulled through is more'n I know. Suppose you'll land in an orphan home—tough luck!"

At mess time the captain returned. "I'll stand by," he said, "while you go to mess. Take your time, but if he should start to cry I'll send the boy for you and you come on the run."

"Aye, aye, sir!" replied Reynolds with a grin which the captain returned.

When Reynolds made his appearance an hour later an amazing sight greeted him. A blanket had been spread upon the deck. In the middle of the blanket lay the baby gleefully kicking his feet. The captain was on his knees and elbows, pretending to struggle vainly from the chubby little hands entangled in his hair. He looked slightly embarrassed, but remarked good-humoredly, "cute little devil!

"Reynolds," he said, a few minutes later, "I'm a damn fool, or have been. Have always been scared of kids, just because I never really became acquainted with them. This little cuss isn't half bad. Funny world. Fate is a peculiar thing. A sub sinks a ship, then decoys a destroyer with its wireless in hopes of bagging the destroyer. Because the destroyer's crew is made up of men with heads, who use them, the sub is destroyed, and a mite of a baby lives where strong men are lost."

"Don't forget the strong man who saved the baby," gently suggested Reynolds.

"In confidence, I will tell you that I am going to do my best to see that the English government decorates him if it is possible. The heroes of this war are not all in uniform," said the captain.

It was just such chummy, man-to-man conversations the captain frequently held with enlisted men that caused them to swear by him, and earned him the title of Our Old Man—a title bestowed by enlisted men upon comparatively few of their leaders. It was the V. C. or Medal of Honor the ranks only can award, and one that pull or wealth can never acquire. And, withal, this particular destroyer was one of the best-disciplined ships in the navy.

What the officer did not tell the man was of the pleasant, though strange, little thrill he experienced when the baby touched his face with its little hands and smiled approvingly at the big, strong face but a few inches away. It was then that the doubt and fear of the little fellow gave way to a tender regard and lively interest.

The following afternoon Reynolds was directed to "bundle the boy up for windy weather." This done, the officer pulled himself together, cradled the baby in his arms, ignored the looks of amazed approval from the crew, and made his way to the bridge. For an hour he wandered about, instructing the baby in the use of the compass and pelorus. Each new object brought forth additional grins of approval from the youngster, who was inclined to be friendly and grin at everything and everybody in sight. When the bos'n's pipe shrilled, he thought it the best ever, and the bos'n's mate of the watch was called to the bridge and required to pipe all calls from " 'vast heaving" to "piping the side for an admiral."

"We'll be in port to-morrow morning," commented Reynolds to the captain, as he tucked the baby in his improvised bed, "and I suppose the poor little cuss will have to spend the next fifteen years in an orphan home. I was sort of thinking maybe the boys might chip in, adopt him, and perhaps find a private home for him somewheres?"

"No doubt they would," replied the officer, "but I have plans of my own. I am thinking strongly of adopting him. There is a vast amount of comfort derived from a child."

"Yes," said Reynolds, "yes, sir, there is, but there's more in three or four of 'em. You're a navy officer and one of the best, but, captain, if you'll pardon me for saying so, I'm a more experienced father than you, and I'd like to give you a tip about kids. Kids need other kids to fight with if they do well, so don't let some nice old lady bring him up. She'll only make a gentleman out of him, and he'll be proper and never do the wrong thing. You want to find a place where he can play in the dirt; be bowled over by a dog several times a day; fall downstairs and raise the devil most of the time. Then he'll grow to be a man's man and you'll be proud of him."

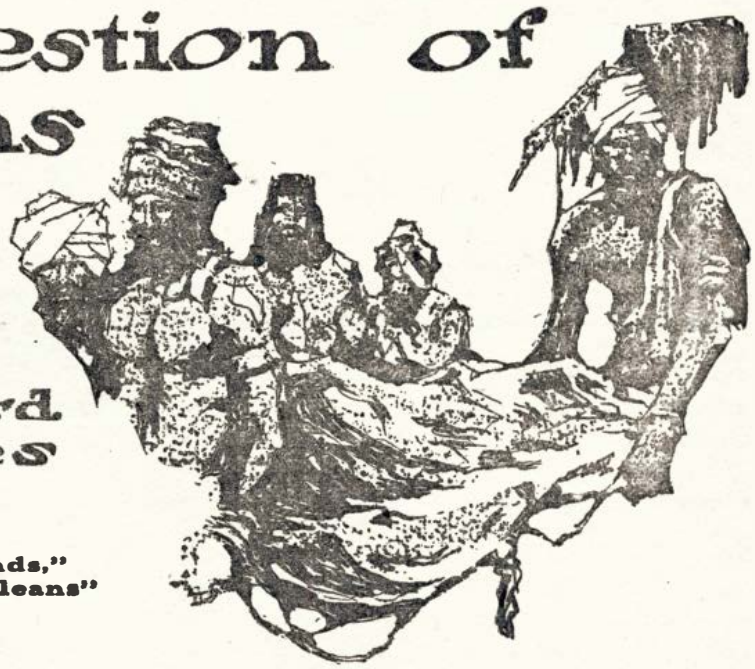
"Reynolds, I believe you are right. I can't do much right now, but this war is about over. When it is, I am going over to France and pick out two or three likely looking orphans to go along with this one, then, back in God's country, I will buy a nice home in the country where they can be brought up right. Yes, while I am doing it, I'll do it right and adopt six or seven; damn me if I don't!"

"Sklibsk!" said the youngster with approval.

"Here, you little cuss," said the captain with delighted astonishment, "I thought you were sound asleep."

And Reynolds knew Our Old Man was rapidly learning a thing or two about the trials of a family man.

A Question of Brains



by H. Bedford-Jones

Author of "Jack of Diamonds," "Tyrone of New Orleans"

YOU can get away with anything," said Carnahan, laughing his obscene laugh, "if you have brains enough."

The boat sidled in under the huge mangrove roots with a lunging thrust of the sluggish current. Carnahan was in the bow; now he leaned outward over the gunwale and took up a little slack in the bowline which was made fast to the roots there.

The movement brought him under a shaft of the radiant sunlight which pierced down only at rare intervals through the tangled jungle foliage above. The man squirmed beneath the touch. It burned him as a concentration of light burns beneath a sunglass. It made his

profile stand out sharply against the shadowed gloom—a white cameo of bronzed skin, tangled black hair, unshaven jowl, hard and reckless linings.

"You're right," purred the silky tones of Winters from the stern. "You and I have the brains, old boy; no doubt of that! The slickest thing ever pulled off south of Singapore, yes, sir! And now it's all done. Nothing left but drift down to the sea and let the wind take us across the strait, and pick up the schooner under the Peak of Lingga to-morrow, or whenever we get there. Pretty smooth, Carnahan! We have the brains."

"Take up that slack aft," rejoined the other man. "Must ha' worked loose while we were sleeping."

Winters bestirred himself from his somnolent posture and uprose. A vagrant shaft of sunlight struck upon him, too; one could almost imagine a thin volute of steam spiraling up from where the white-hot ray touched his skin. The man cursed purringly, and Carnahan echoed the curse from forward, with his obscene laugh.

"Tasting hell already, Winters? Bit o' blood on your cheek, lad; but leave it be. Don't wash it off. Must have come from the girl and she's in the river. Wash it in the boat if you want, but not in the river."

Winters lifted a hand to his sleep-pink features. Yes, there was blood there, as though a jet of the crimson fluid had spurted across his cheek. Not his own blood.

"What do you mean about not washing it?" he demanded silkily.

Winters was of a finer stripe than his companion; a nervous, lithe, terrible man, very intelligent, and much less coarse than Carnahan, so that the latter assumed a paternal air. Carnahan was intelligent, also, of course, but lacked the fine piercing quality of Winters.

"Any fool knows that it's bad business to send blood back to blood, in a river like this," said Carnahan easily. "That's what the Dyaks say, and those beggars know!"

"You're a fool yourself," and Winters laughed. He leaned over the side and caught up a flirt of water in his fist.

Carnahan cursed and attempted to interfere, then fell back with a gloomy scowl.

"All right, my bucko!" he glowered. "Now you've done it, you have!"

Winters wiped his cheek on his sleeve and flung a sneer at Carnahan; if the laugh of Carnahan was obscene, the sneer of Winters was a terrific thing deadly and venomous. It changed swiftly to a laugh, however. Leaning forward, Winters took the tarpaulin that covered the great heap amidships of the boat, and stripped away the cover.

Fascinated, the two man stared at the mass of treasure thus revealed. One of the intermittent sunbeams broke down through the leafy shroud overhead and struck athwart the pile. It was a heap that bespoke mad confusion. Ruddy gold, yellow brass, black-struck gilt lacquer on wood, all intermingled; a radiance of confused plunder.

Carnahan had forgotten his scowling thought and now laughed sheepishly.

"Lord!" he said abruptly. "We must ha' been stark mad last night, Winters. Look at the rotten stuff we mixed in!"

"Let's eat," suggested Winters. "Then we can jettison the junk and be on our way. Ought to get down to the river's mouth during the hot hours; no Dutchmen on the river then."

Carnahan growled in his throat. "Damn the sleepy Dutchmen! We've got brains. You can get away with anything, if you have the brains!"

"Right," and Winters laughed happily. From the edge of the pile he took a basket and placed it atop of the massed treasure. He produced rice and curry and fish, bread and cakes. Carnahan opened a locker up forward and got out a bottle of native wine.

The two men fell to their meal.

A few feet from them, the wide Indragiri sluggishly swung through the lowlands toward the Berhala Straits—a wide, lazy, muddy river, overhung with Sumatran fevers and touching the nostrils with vague jungle evils.

"Don't you worry," observed Winters between bites, "no Dutch on the river now. They won't look for us to be on the river, either."

Carnahan grunted. "One hell of a trip for us without an awning over this cursed craft! But we got to reach the mouth before afternoon, or the Dutch will set all the Malay villages out to catch us. Watch out for those Malays down at the mouth!"

The two fell to their replenishment again hungrily.

Outside, the river swirled past, steamy hot beneath the pouring sun of noon. An occasional mugger appeared sluggishly and retired in haste to the cooler depths. The hordes of parrots had ceased to flit like jewels through the treetops. The screeching monkeys had disappeared. The sun streamed down in an absolute dead heat—a heat that was like a scorching, searing fog of blinding whiteness.

When the basket of food was finished, Carnahan did not drop the débris overside; Carnahan was no such fool as to send word down-river in *that* fashion. He rose, instead, and carefully tossed basket and all up among the tangle of mangrove roots. Then he sat down and pulled out his pipe. Winters was rolling a cigarette. Winters touched a match to the ironwork of the forward thwart, in the fall of a sunbeam, and the match flamed. The two men lighted up, then sighed, and faced their heap of treasure.

Winters, the poetical and imaginative, picked up a brass cup ringed with great Solok rubies, three abreast.

"Queer how these fool natives combine worth and dross," he observed reflectively. "You got this off the Vishnu altar, didn't you?"

Carnahan nodded and puffed at his pipe. "Sure. That was when the cross-eyed Brahman butted in and started things."

Winters inspected a dull red-black blotch across the lower part of the cup, a stain so rich that it came away in little dry flecks from the brass as he touched it. Smiling dryly, he laid aside the cup.

"Let's get rid of the junk," he suggested.

Together the two men fell to work, earnestly sweating in the stifling sultriness. They picked through the mass of treaure, jerking out the gold lacquer and tossing it up among the mangroves; they inspected the brass and gold for possible gems before discarding each piece. Most of the heap, however, was of gold—and one acquainted with the Sumatran temples would have guessed whence the loot had come.

"Must say the old man and the girl treated us white," observed Carnahan, sucking at his long-dead pipe and surveying a little lacquered box with matter-of-fact appraisal. "Real feather beds, too. The girl must have gone to a Dutch school somewhere."

"Too bad we couldn't bring her along to help pass the time," said Winters. "Hello! that's her box you have there, isn't it?"

Carnahan nodded and forced open the lacquered lid. "Yes. I got a few things out o' there while you were dropping her in the river. And that reminds me, you washed off—say, by jings! This was a worth-while haul, eh?"

He shook into his great paw a glittering heap of baubles from the box; goldwork and jade, a few rough diamonds from the hills, some gaudy buckles. The buckles he tossed into the stream. The other things he swept back into the box and handed it to Winters, who casually inspected it, then tossed it on the pile.

"Better wrap the stuff in the tarp," suggested Carnahan. He looked up with his obscene laugh and a sudden coarse grin. "Say, d'you know, I was afraid you wouldn't have nerve for this job. Taking their hospitality and then bleedin' them, and all that. But you're all right, pal."

Winters smiled frostily. "Thanks. I might say I thought you were too much of a bucko sailor to do the job right, too. But everything's fine. We've brains between us!"

"And with brains," declared Carnahan, solemnly, knocking out his pipe against the gunwale, "you can get away with anything—anything! We've done it, ain't we?"

"Looks that way," agreed Winters. He stooped over and began to sweep the pile of loot into the tarpaulin.

Five minutes later they shoved cautiously forth from among the mango roots, emerged from their leafly screen into the sluggish current, and ran out

their oars. Neither man observed that a spark from Carnahan's pipe had fallen into the rolled-up sail. They were absorbed in watching the wide reaches of the river and in gingerly expending their inner resistance to the steaming, lurid waves of heat that streamed down upon the yellow water.

It was not until an hour had passed that Winters, at the after thwart, smelled smoke.

II.

IT was three hours after the two had shoved forth from their shelter among the mangrove roots; and now they lay in just another such hidden spot, roots all around them like giant frozen tentacles, and a leafy screen covering them safely.

In those three steaming, torrid hours of midday, sundry things had happened. The sail, upon which they had counted to take them across the Berhala Strait that night, had slowly smoldered, unsuspected, and when discovered too late, the damage was done. The discovery, quite naturally, had been attended with excitement, and this excitement had resulted in further disaster.

Brains cannot prevent accidents of fortune, if one considers them as such and denies any providential interventions. Brains could not prevent the boat drifting on a concealed mugger while the sail was being quenched overside; could not prevent a flirt of the mugger's tail knocking the boat's bow strakes into a sievelike mess.

Being seamen and having brains, the two voyagers had mended matters neatly. The remnants of the sail, together with a fine skill in loading the heavy freight aft and keeping the craft all hunky, had negatived any actual sinking. By dint of sweating effort, the two men had attained their objective at the mouth of the river, and were safely hidden. They perched on the slimy mangrove roots and used their eyes with somber longing.

They had reached the islands that split the Indragiri's wide delta. Out before them stretched fifty miles of sea, the wide straits rolling under the afternoon sun. One could almost fancy the mighty Peak of Lingga nosing across the horizon, and the brown sails of an island schooner slowly tacking between the peak and Singkep, waiting for the boat which came not, and the men and treasure of her lading.

But it was not at the sea that the two men sat and stared.

"Curse the luck!" growled Carnahan, moodily filling his pipe. "We'll have to take her, o' course; and we have to wait until dark to do it; unless we want every Malay proa on his damned coast out after us!"

Winters nodded abstractedly and began to construct a cigarette.

"Oh, sure," he assented. "This old boat of ours is on her last legs now. Even if we had a sail, she'd never stand it for five minutes. That craft over there looks providential, if you ask my opinion!"

Carnahan grumbled in his throat.

"I don't want too blamed much Providence mixed up in this here affair," he stated. "You washin' that blood off into the river, that's what did it! The girl was dropped in the river too, remember. And it was her blood——"

"Oh, give me a match and stop being a fool!" sneered Winters, then broke into a hearty laugh. "We'll paddle over there, load the loot aboard, and trade boats, eh? They'll not discover it until morning. By that time we'll be aboard the schooner and they can chase until hell freezes for all we care."

Carnahan lighted his pipe and his scowl vanished.

"Yes," he assented with a sigh of relief. "Yes, we're all right, I guess. Can't keep *us* from fallin' on our feet, eh? Brains, that's what it is!"

Winters gestured toward the scene at which they were gazing.

"But why the devil is the boat yellow? Stained with turmeric, probably. Know what they're about, Carnahan?"

The other shook his head. "Some native bobbery. Damn that mugger. Except for his cursed tail, we'd be all right. We'll have a job trimming ship aboard that craft, pal—this loot weighs like the devil, remember. Hello! That's baskets

of fruit, or I miss my guess! We'll not starve, eh?"

Winters sniffed the breeze. "It isn't turmeric," he said thoughtfully. "Saffron. And that boat's a model of the big proas the rajahs up the coast use, savvy? A model of a *lanchang*, and everything complete! Even wooden cannon fore and aft."

"A good craft for us," quoth Carnahan complacently.

Facing them, and less than fifty yards distant, was a curving half circle of sandy shore, upon which emerged paths through the jungle. That these paths came from a Malay village around the next bend, was fairly obvious; the village was well out of sight, however, which was fortunate.

Upon the sandy shelvage lay a small but beautiful craft, which had been stained the royal yellow from masts to keel with saffron, this color being acceptable to devils. The craft was slightly larger than the half-broken whaleboat and was a perfect model in miniature of a *lanchang*.

She was complete from her two masts, with silken sails, to the galleries fore and aft, where were mounted imitation cannon of wood. While the hidden men watched, parties of Malays brought baskets of flowers and fruits and stowed them aboard, with jars of wine and arrak. Carnahan's eyes glittered at the raw smell of arrak on the breeze.

"Must be some religious business," said Winters: "It's mighty providential for us——"

"Keep Providence out of it," growled the other irritably.

"You're too superstitious!" came the cheerful retort. "Now, I'd like to know what that ceremony over there means! It means something big, that's sure; these Malays don't built a model proa just for the fun of it. They don't waste grub and liquor that fashion, either, without something big behind it."

"Wedding, maybe, or funeral," suggested Carnahan.

"No. That would be an individual matter, more or less. This is a communal affair. You'll notice there haven't been any songs and dances, either; a mournful sort of proceeding all along."

"Well," growled Carnahan, "what the hell do we care; anyhow, so long as we get off in that *lanchang* to-night? What I want to know is this; why ain't the Dutchmen showed up? There was a government patrol launch up at Rengat agency. Where is it? First thing those fool Dutchmen would do, would be to get down here and try to head us off at the river mouth."

The two men fell to discussing the matter earnestly, as befitted men whose lives hung upon the decisions involved. All that afternoon they had seen no sign of human life, either white or native, upon the wide reaches of the river, until reaching this spot. And in view of certain incidents which had taken place the previous night, they were warranted in expecting to see the government patrol launch dashing about very busily. They had made all their plans with that launch in view, and it was rather irritating to find that their caution and trouble had been wasted. Thorough workmen dislike to see their pains expended for nothing.

Quite naturally, it did not occur to either of them that there might be any connection between the saffron *lanchang* there before them, and the nonappearance of the Hollanders.

"What I don't like," said Carnahan suddenly, "is the sails on that craft. Silk! Yellow silk! Near as I can tell, they weren't made for use, either; no reënforcements, and holes cut in the bloomin' silk for cringles. How long's that goin' to last in a breeze?"

"True." Winter's eyes narrowed. "No leech linings, no bellybands, not even a footband! Say, those sails weren't meant to use, Carnahan—they'll blow out in a shot! What'll we do about it?"

"Use our brains," grunted Carnahan. "That's what we got brains for, pal. We'll use this here tarp; she's good and stout, see Those silk contraptions will take us out a few knots, anyhow, then we can bend on this tarp for'ard. What's left of the boat sail we can patch up here and now from our clothes. I got a palm and needle."

"There's nobody in sight over there

now," said Winters. "We'd better start in, for any one over there might catch a flap of the canvas between the leaves. Let's get to work while they're gone."

True enough, the strip of beach was now deserted. With much labor, the two men got their brown-holed canvas unlashed from the broken bow of the boat, and hauled it up, spreading it across the tangle of mangrove roots. Carnahan produced palm and needle and line; their rolled-up pea-jackets were produced from the bow, where they had been packed into the seams as makshift calking, and were cut up into ragged patches to cover the holes in the sail. Winters was a poor hand at sailmaking.

"Lay low!" ejaculated Carnahan suddenly. "Don't flap the canvas—they're coming!"

Quite true. Coming unannounced by any song or drum pulse, a great company of Malays broke from the jungle and filled the sandy strip of shore. They carried two long burdens, which at first could not be clearly seen by the two hidden watchers. After a moment, some of the men seized the yellow *lanchang* and ran her down into the water.

"Hell!" exploded Carnahan, viciously. "Are we goin' to lose her?"

"No," rejoined Winters. "No. She's anchored there."

The anchor of the saffron craft was carefully hooked into the stream; she swam securely, scarce a dozen feet from shore, in shallow water. All this was accomplished without a word, which was unnatural. But presently Winters descried an old man, a wizard, who was directing operations.

"These coast Malays are a mixture of Mohammedan and devil worshipers," he observed. "This is some kind of religious business, sure."

"A corpse, by jings!" breathed Carnahan.

One of the two burdens was disclosed, as it was borne carefully aboard the *lanchang*. It was a rattan couch, draped with very handsome silks and adorned with the tassels that frighten devils; and upon it lay a covered object which was evidently a body.

The two white men watched operations with fascinated intentness. Upon them both was the fear that this yellow craft might yet be sent dancing out upon the current, and with it their hopes of salvation. But no such disaster happened.

Upon the shore was now set the second burden. This proved to be another rattan couch, decorated like the first very handsomely and covered with pillows. Upon the pillows lay a woman, her face alone visible. She was neither dead nor sleeping, for she seemed to be watching the operations with a calm and unexcited interest.

The old wizard waded out to the *lanchang* and fumbled beneath the covers of the body. He came back ashore, carefully bearing a long thread; this thread, it was evident, had been attached to the hand of the defunct. The woman on the shore lifted her hand from beneath her silken coverings, and the wizard drew taut the thread, then tied it about her thumb.

"The corpse was their sultan or headman probably," ventured Carnahan.

Winters nodded. "Sure. And the woman there is his wife. Maybe she's got to spend the night that way, tied up to him. Then in the morning they'll cut him loose and let him go out to sea. That sounds logical, anyhow. What's the old boy talking—Malay?"

The wizard seemed to be pronouncing incantations. Carnahan growled in disgust.

"Yes, but it's High Malay, and no white man can fathom that lingo. Hello! They're off."

The Malays, one and all, were vanishing back upon the jungle paths. The saffron proa floated alone upon the stream with its burden of the dead, and the thread that ran ashore. And upon her gorgeous couch by the shore, the woman lay unmoving.

III.

DARKNESS was falling quickly upon the island-studded river. The two men perched upon the tangle of mangrove roots could no longer see the details of the shore, although the yellow *lanchang* still showed as a vague, grayish spot.

"We're up against it," said Winters

thoughtfully. "One screech from that hag will raise the devil with us, Carnahan."

The other laughed his obscene laugh. "We'll settle her quick enough!"

"But, see here. We'd have to bail out this craft before we could row over there, and she'd catch the noise instantly. We'll have to swim over there, make a careful landing, and get our knives into the woman before she can sing out. Then come over here with the proa; it has oars aboard, because we saw 'em. We can dump the corpse here, set our stuff aboard, and be gone in ten minutes. We'll have to chance the muggers."

"They won't bother us." Carnahan arose and stripped off his trousers. "You're right. Brains, that's what we've got! You get her throat and I'll settle her."

He slung the lanyard of his knife about his neck.

The two men slung themselves down into the lukewarm, dirty water, efficient and wasting neither words nor actions. They swam without thought for the possible dangers of the river; they swam silently and swiftly, every faculty concentrated upon the business in hand.

They gained the shelving shallows and moved forward without splashing, at last gaining the white beach. Already the stars were beginning to twinkle ghostily, and they flashed faintly, once, as Carnahan's naked knife rose and fell. It rose again, but this time it did not flash.

"Done," said Winters under his breath, without emotion, as he relaxed his grip. "Good stroke."

Carnahan's obscene laugh echoed at him from across the couch.

"Carry it down and chuck it in, see? The muggers will do the rest. The beggars will fancy that her husband chucked her into the boat and beat it for paradise, see? Good joke, and makes all safe behind us. Using our brains, eh?"

"Excellent notion," agreed Winters. "Heave!"

They slid the couch noiselessly into the water and watched it fade away upon the stream, sagging a little at one corner before it was out of sight.

Losing no moment of precious time, their thoughts already upon the Peak of Lingga and the schooner which would meet them there in the dawning, they waded to the saffron proa and climbed aboard. They knew where the oars had been placed; a moment later the anchor was in and the proa was moving like a yellow ghost.

"All in all," commented Carnahan exultantly, "the slickest job ever pulled south o' Singapore, mate! Easy, there—lay the corpse off here in midstream."

They bent over the task, and it speaks well for their efficiency that they accomplished it without a single splash. Also, they found their own hidden boat again without unnecessary delay and hauled the *lanchang* in beside it. They were hungry, and upon exploring the heaped-up baskets they discovered a multitude of good things to eat. Also, there seemed to be a good many personal effects aboard; Winters, puzzling over this, suddenly chanced upon the explanation.

"This is great!" he exclaimed softly, with suppressed delight. "They put all the headman's stuff aboard with him, Carnahan! We'll find some rich pickings in the morning, I'll warrant! Some of those green jars of camphor, anyhow, and likely a bit of dust."

"Nothing like having brains to take advantage o' circumstances," returned the other complacently. "Here, lend a hand to this tarp and dump the loot aboard the yellow craft!"

They threw the plunder in a heap amidships, transferred their meager belongings, and got aboard their new craft. Shoving out into the current, they drifted seaward and presently managed to get the two silken sails hoisted without noise. The light offshore breeze had come up with evening, and the sails filled. The proa gently heeled and began to sing through the water.

The two men stool on the poop beside the long steering oar. Carnahan had broken out one of the jars of arrak and now drank gingerly of the biting fluid.

"What I'm wonderin' about," he said, his tongue loosening, "is these here preaching sharks, talkin' hell-fire and the like o' that. What've we done upriver? We've pulled a slick job, we have!"

"Including a few murders," put in Winters purringly.

"Sure, but what of it? Here we're out o' trouble and layin' a straight course for the Peak, where the schooner is standin' by to pick us up. That's what comes of havin' brains, mate! All we got to do is to split the loot. All this preacher talk about——"

"You mean," queried Winters, "that we've evaded retribution? Of course. Your're dead right there, Carnahan; nothing can touch us now. It's the poor inefficient fools who slip up somewhere and get caught, and then talk about retribution and hell."

"Sure," agreed the other, with his obscene laugh. "If you've got brains, you can get away with anything—anything! Ain't we proved it? Sure!"

IV.

UNDER the lee of the long island that lies in the channel between Singkep and the Peak of Lingga, the dirty little trading schooner *Island Queen* was anchored and pitching slowly to the long swells that came in across the shallows.

Two of the Kanakas were peering through the misty dawn, the rest were asleep. By the stern rail lounged Captain Nichols and his mate, both in pajamas, for the morning was hot and steamy.

"No," observed Nichols, "how do I know what they went ashore for? I didn't ask no questions; Winter guaranteed the charter if I wasn't satisfied with results, that's all. I know *their* breed, and I wouldn't take no hand in it, that's certain!"

"Carnahan had spotted some sort o' temple he meant to loot, I guess," said the mate, gazing longingly at the western horizon. "It'll be easy money for all hands. But what was that you was just sayin' about the yellow proas? I never heard about it before."

"There's a hell of a lot you never heard before I've noticed, since you signed on with me," snorted the skipper with heavy sarcasm. "But *that*—well, most folks don't know it either, I guess. Y' see, these coast Malays take a heap o' stock in superstitious fancies, so when they get the cholera real bad and some o' their head men come down with it, they fight it in their own fashion.

"Y' see, they take and build a *lanchang* on a small scale, large as a whaleboat, sometimes. Then they put the dead man aboard, maybe; or else they put all his stuff aboard, and all the other cholera-infected stuff in the village. They got some sense, that way. Then they lay the boat off shore overnight, and if anybody else is sick they take and put 'em on the shore with strings running to the boat."

"Drawin' out the cholery, eh?" suggested the mate, with interest.

"Sure, that's prob'ly the idee. Come morning, they cut the strings and let the boat go out to sea. Incantations and charms and so forth play a big part."

"But you was talkin' about a yellow boat!" said the mate.

"Oh, sure. I forgot to say that they always stain the whole caboodle bright yellow. Sometimes they use turmeric, sometimes saffron. But believe me, when any skipper in these here cussed seas lamps one o' them yellow boats drifting past, he gives it lots o' seaway."

"Shouldn't think the gov'ment would stand for it," opined the mate.

"They don't, especially the Dutch, which thinks nothin' of blowing the bottom out of a cholera junk and drownin' all aboard, sooner'n get the infection on land. No, them Dutch and others, they waste no time with the yellow proas! They just give 'em a shot or two and down they go. There's a reward o' ten florins for information that'll put a gunboat on the track of them proas, too!"

One of the Kanakas turned with a low, musical call.

"All hands!" bellowed the skipper, rousing suddenly. "Lay for'ard and shake a leg!"

The mate took charge, and the capstan pawls clinked merrily. Having obtained his glasses, the skipper focused upon a glinting object against the western horizon—an object which was just catching the first rays of the rising sun.

As the *Island Queen* slowly stood out into the strait and gathered way, the skipper remained with the glasses glued to his eyes. A startled oath broke from him,

then another. He looked away once, glanced at the mate, said a low word to the Kanaka at the wheel.

The schooner began to fall off slightly, toward the north and the passage into Singapore Strait.

"Goin' to tack down on her?" queried the mate with interest.

"No, I ain't," returned the skipper curtly. He was secure in the knowledge that he had the only pair of glasses aboard.

"What? Ain't that them?"

The skipper fell to gazing again at the glinting object. He saw very clearly that it was a yellow proa, and that the sails which drove it were tattered silk ribbons over a canvas backing, which seemed to have been bent on in a hurry.

And the skipper saw two men standing in the stern, waving.

"No," said Nichols. "That ain't anybody that's goin' to speak *this* hooker, you can swear to that! Mr. Jimson, you set a course for Singapore Strait, and you mind them reefs to the east o' Kundar."

The mate stared, and scratched his head. His gaze went to the distant craft.

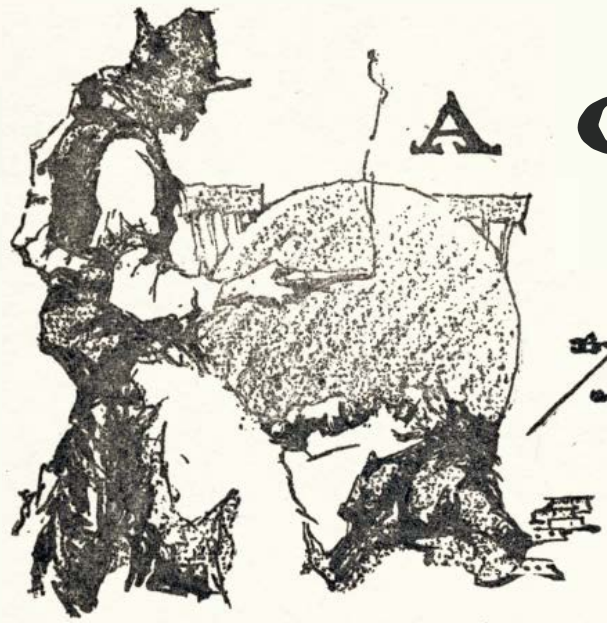
"But you ain't goin' off and leave Winters an' Carnahan!" he uttered in amazement. "Not to mention the stuff they was going to bring——"

The skipper's lips compressed firmly for an instant.

"Them two ain't coming," he returned. "That there is one of them cholera boats, and it's come straight out from the Indragiri, with this wind. Ain't that true? Well, if there's cholera along the Indragiri delta, do you reckon Winters and Carnahan are coming aboard here with it? Not if I know myself!"

The mate perceived that this argument contained flaws, but, having no glasses, he could not well perceive that Winters and Carnahan were trying to wave from the distant craft. The skipper apparently did not perceive it either, for he closed the glasses and pocketed them.

"You would have thought," said the skipper to himself, as he turned his back on the distant yellow speck and eyed the northern horizon, "you would have thought them two men would ha' had some brains! But not a speck. No, sir! Not a speck o' brains between 'em! It's a ripe shame, that's what it is. Not a speck o' brains between 'em!"



A Curious Cuss

by James Edward Hungerford

HAVING closed the dead man's eyes, Sheriff McLane turned to the proprietor of Saltillo's leading wet-goods emporium.

"You say Squint Eye did it in self-defense?" he inquired brusquely. "Did Patterson draw first?"

The other nodded with emphasis. "Patterson yanked out his gun, but Squint Eye beat 'im to it. They'd been quarreling over the game a right smart spell before it happened. I reckon Squint Eye got to inquirin' a leetle too close into Patterson's dealin'—and *you* know Patterson. Not always on the level, when it came to handlin' the pasteboards. I reckon he got what was comin' to him."

"Nevertheless, Squint Eye is goin' to stand trial," answered the sheriff emphatically. "This shootin' business has got to be stopped! I'm supposed to be keepin' law an' order in this county—and I'm sick of these outbreaks. Neither Squint Eye nor Patterson had any right to be packin' guns. Now, tell me, as near as you can, how it happened."

The other man frowned thoughtfully. "It happened so sudden, sheriff, I reckon none of us could say exactly just what *did* happen. As everybody hereabouts knows, Squint-eye Cullen's a nosey cuss, and it don't pay to be *too* curious, sometimes—especially when a man like Ed Patterson's dealin'. I reckon Squint Eye got to pokin' around, and discovered that extra ace Patterson had up his sleeve. I was behind the bar, and the rest of the boys was lined up, havin' one on the house, when it happened. I saw Ed yank out his gun, and Squint Eye knock it aside, and jerk his'n out. Ed got it—in the heart—and went over back'ard, takin' his chair with 'im. When we got to him, the ace had slipped out of his coat sleeve, and Squint Eye was pointin' to it with his smokin' gun muzzle.

" 'You can see for yourself, Joe,' he says. 'The dirty, cheatin' crook was tryin' to slip one over on me—but I beat 'im to it! Explain to the sheriff, Joe, and show 'im the ace!"

The saloon keeper turned to the other members of the crowd for confirmation.

"Am I right, boys?"

The others nodded solemnly.

"Squint Eye didn't say any more," continued the speaker, "but went right out, and jumped his hoss, and——"

"Which way did he ride?" cut in the sheriff.

"Up the street," answered the other. "None of us paid much attention. We was too busy seein' if there was any life left in Patterson—but he was plumb dead, I reckon, the second the bullet hit 'im."

The sheriff let his eyes rest upon the deceased for a moment thoughtfully.

"Squint Eye always *was* a curious cuss," he muttered presently. "I reckon it's one of his worst failin's. Patterson was foolish to go tryin' to put any crooked business over on him—but just the same, Squint Eye's got to stand trial." The sheriff turned swiftly to his deputy.

"Call in the coroner, Bill, and take care of things 'til I get back." He faced the crowd which, ten minutes before, had seen the card game end in swift tragedy.

"An' let me warn the rest of you men, right now, to cut out the gun stuff. You helped elect me sheriff of Saltillo County —some of you—and I'm goin' to *be* sheriff. I'm gettin' sick and tired of this shootin' business—it's got to be stopped!"

The others acquiesced gravely, with nods of approval.

"Curiosity," went on the sheriff, "is responsible for a heap of trouble in this old world. It's caused the downfall of many a good man. If Squint Eye hadn't gone nosin' around and located that ace in Patterson's sleeve——"

"He'd have been picked as clean as a dog's tooth," put in one of the listeners.

"Well—mebbe," admitted the sheriff. "But just look at all the trouble it's caused; a job for the coroner, a job for the undertaker and a job for *me*, and a job for a judge and jury."

"That last—if you *git* 'im," interjected another voice. "Squint Eye's a regular desert hound. Ain't a man in Saltillo knows that country better'n he does. He's nosed around over nigh every foot of it, jest for the sake uh curiosity."

The sheriff's weather-beaten face creased in a grim smile. "Curiosity's his failin', all right," he said quietly. "Once, down Calexico way, he put a finger on a wart, on a greaser's nose, just to see what it *felt* like—and that's how comes that knife scar on the right side of his face."

"And once," added another voice, "he poked a big feller in the chest, jest to see if it was fat 'er muscle. That's why his nose is busted. He found out it was *muscle*, all right!"

Amid the general laugh that followed, the sheriff stepped outside, and thoughtfully mounted his horse. He rode down the street a short distance and drew rein in front of the Saltillo general store. "Fatty" Ricks, the proprietor, came wabbling out amiably, in response to his summons.

"Trouble up the street?" he inquired casually.

The sheriff nodded. "Squint-eye Cullen's shot Ed Patterson," he explained.

"Did, eh?" The merchant exhibited mild surprise. "Now, what for did he go an' do that?"

"Too many aces," the sheriff explained tersely. "Did Squint Eye get any stuff from you, Ricks?"

The merchant nodded. "Ca'tridges an' chawin' terbacker—'bout fifteen minutes ago. Bought 'im a little grubstake this mornin', an' packed it away in his saddlebags."

"Which way did he ride?" queried the sheriff. "Notice?"

"East," answered the other. "The desert."

"Funny he didn't mention about the shootin' to you," puzzled the sheriff.

"He's a curious cuss," grinned the merchant. "Always stickin' his nose into somebody's business, but keepin' his own strictly to hisself. Never did see sech a feller fer curiosity. Wanted to know, this mornin', why I never buttoned the lower button uh my vest."

"Tell 'im?" questioned the sheriff.

"Sure did," explained Ricks, chuckling. "Told 'im it was to make nosey fellers like *him* ask fool questions!"

"And what did he say?" the sheriff demanded.

"Aw, nothin' much," answered the other sheepishly. "He jest yanked off the button, saying' he'd save other fellers like him the trouble uh askin' fool questions, 'til it was sewed on ag'in."

The sheriff grinned appreciatively. "I reckon that's one on you, Ricks," he chuckled, and, slapping his horse, he cantered away down the street in a cloud of dust.

Near the edge of Saltillo he drew rein in front of a small, weather-beaten shack, and dismounted. Here Sheriff McLane lived alone, batching it, whenever he happened to be in town—which was seldom.

Entering the house, he hurriedly got together provisions, to last for several days, and packed them into his saddlebags.

Later, as he was filling his canteen at the well, there came to him on the hot, still air, the faint, far-away tinkle of a bell.

Sheriff McLane listened, puzzled for a moment, then tilted his face upward.

High above him, black against the translucent blue of the afternoon sky, a big bird floated lazily, its outspread wings motionless, except for a slight tipping, first to one side, then to the other, as it wheeled in an ever-widening circle.

Again came that fleeting tinkle, clear for a moment, then whisked away by an adverse breeze coming in hotly from the desert.

"The belled buzzard!" he mused interestedly. "First time I've seen it in months."

No one seemed to know when, or by whom, or why, the bird had been captured, belled, and then liberated again. At irregular intervals, it tinkled its way over Saltillo for a little while, then disappeared in the direction of the desert.

The sheriff stood watching the bird as it abruptly ceased its indolent circling, and with slow, flapping wings lost itself in the blue distance.

He stood, staring into empty space, for some moments after the vulture had disappeared, lost in speculative thought.

"I just wonder——" he said musingly. The words came unconsciously, and, just as unconsciously, the rest of the thought remained unspoken. It was a habit Sheriff McLane had, when deeply reflecting.

Then, quite abruptly, his attitude of speculation gave way to decision. A slow smile crinkled his weather-beaten face, and an odd gleam crept into his clear, gray eyes.

"By golly, I'll do it!" he muttered, and turning, strode briskly into his shack.

A few minutes later, he had a fire going in the small, rusty stove, over which he stood, carefully stirring a mixture of flour and water, and every now and then casting amused glances toward the kitchen table, where he had assembled a number of other articles, including a hammer, some tacks, a few old rags, and a couple of balls of twine.

II.

THE sun had been up for some time, next morning, when Squint-eye Cullen awakened with a start, and peered cautiously out from beneath his blanket, his squinty blue eyes blinking rapidly. He had laid down just before dawn, dog tired, after an all-night ride, and had promptly fallen asleep.

About him, the desert was beginning to swim in the blazing heat, and the distant sand dunes danced dizzily before his bloodshot eyes. Rising to a sitting posture, he glanced about swiftly, then throwing the blanket aside, got hastily to his feet. For several minutes his narrow-lidded gaze swept the surrounding country with keen intentness. Then a relieved sigh escaped him, and he addressed a remark to his horse, which was tethered near by.

"Reckon we done outstepped 'em, Pete, ol' boy. Er else the sheriff decided that yace card was in our favor, an' changed his mind 'bout runnin' us down. But no" —after a moment's thoughtful silence— "that wouldn't be Jim McLane. Guilty er innocent, as long as *he's* sheriff uh Saltillo County, a man's gotta stan' trial —if he's *ketched,* But we-uns ain't lowin' to be ketched—eh, boy?"

Stepping to the near-by water hole, Squint Eye threw himself down at full length on his stomach and drank thirstily of the brackish water. Having imbibed his fill, he bathed his dust-grimed face in the spring with sputtering abandon. Then he watered his cayuse, and brought forth food from his saddlebags—a large hunk of doughy bread and several thick slices of bacon, which he had hastily cooked the previous night, under cover of darkness. He would have liked to add some coffee to the menu, but contented himself with washing the food down with drafts of the liquid at hand. To build a fire would be nothing less than a smoky message to the sheriff to come and get him. And Sheriff McLane would be only too eager to seize upon such an invitation.

Having completed his repast, and sprawled at ease in the scant shade of a clump of cactus, Squint Eye spent some time in reflection—if his mental processes might be termed such.

"I ain't sorry I got the dirty skunk!" he addressed the desert belligerently. "I'd do it ag'in—the sneakin' card sharp! No man ever put it over on Squint-eye Cullen, if *he* knowed it!" His eyes gleamed redly for a moment, then dulled to gloomy gray.

"I wisht Jim McLane wasn't sheriff jest now! I like Mac—an' I'd hate *awful* to have to pot 'im."

He shifted his position with the turning of the sun, and as the day grew hotter, Squint Eye gave up all thought of anything but an effort to combat the desert heat. He drank copiously and frequently of the brackish spring, moving about as little as possible, saving his strength for the further plunge into the sandy wastes, with the coming of nightfall.

The hours dragged by slowly. He amused himself for a while with a pack of cards, playing solitaire, then as it grew too torrid for even that, he stretched out flat on the ground and pulled his hat over his eyes.

How long he slept, he didn't know. He was suddenly awakened by a gentle sound which was alien to the desert.

Squint Eye sat up suddenly and his hand flashed to his hip pocket. Again came the sound, clear and distant. Squint Eye tilted his head upward.

Flattened against the scorching sky above him hung a black shape, its widespread wings motionless, except for a slight tipping, first to one side, and then the other, as the bird narrowed its circling.

"The belled buzzard!" exclaimed Squint Eye. "I hain't seen it fer months —last time was down Tucson way!"

He lay idly watching the bird, which hung low enough for Squint Eye to see its peering head, eagerly searching the shimmering sands below. He knew the head was bald and covered with coarse, mottled skin; he knew the eyes were piercingly keen and greedy; he knew the beak was strong and ugly and sharp, and he knew the bird had espied him lying in the shelter of the cacti. A derisive grin twisted his lips, and he got up and waved his arms.

"Yore wastin' time, cutie!" he called out mockingly. "Beat it, if it's me yer fishin' fer!"

His conjecture seemed accurate, for almost immediately the belled scavenger ceased its aërial looping and swung off deeper into the desert.

"I calls that a personal insult," mused Squint Eye, "takin' me fer a dead one!" He laid down again—this time stretched out flat on his stomach—and his natural curiosity became absorbed in a sand toad, catching flies in the shade of a rock near by. This was dull entertainment, however, and after a while Squint Eye went to sleep again.

III.

SOME time later he awakened, his throat parched, and his tongue as dry as sandpaper. The sun had sought him out once more, and cussing it roundly, Squint Eye sat up and swept the desolation about him with somber gaze. All was as it had been, the silence remained undisturbed. With a sigh of relief he got to his feet and stretched his short, thick body and made for the spring again.

Before long, now, he would be able to resume his flight, deeper into the desert, and farther away from Saltillo and Sheriff McLane. Squint Eye again bathed his face in the brackish water, then sought out his horse. The beast stood dozing in the shade of a clump of yucca hard by, and started nervously, at sound of his master's voice.

"What's the matter uh you!" exclaimed Squint Eye, "jumpin' like that!" He examined the saddle gall which had appeared overnight—result of a slipped saddle pad. The horse winced as he passed his hand over the raw spot.

"Danged flies bin at it!" he swore savagely, taking some lard from his grubstake and smearing it thickly on the injury.

Then Squint Eye went back to his clump of cacti and sat, knees belted by his short, thick arms, the lowering sun be-

hind him, a lessening of the heat already perceptible.

He had sat gazing into space for some time before he became aware of a small object flecking the faded sky away to the eastward. He gazed indifferently at it for a few moments, then his curiosity became aroused, and he looked more intently. It wasn't a bird, he was quite sure of that, and yet, if it wasn't a bird—what was it?

He rubbed his eyes, and looked again. It was still there. Squint Eye spent some time in speculation, then tried to dismiss it from his mind. But his curiosity was fully aroused by now, and wouldn't be stilled. As he looked again, he thought he caught a gleam from the object. That *was* funny!

It took him quite a few minutes to decide to investigate. It was a little early to start the night journey, but he felt he couldn't rest until he knew the meaning of that peculiar *thing* off there in the eastern sky. And being in the general direction he intended to take, Squint Eye didn't feel he would lose much time in ferreting it out.

So he saddled his horse and, eyes alight with curiosity, started away over the yellow wastes.

When he came within distinguishing distance of the object that had piqued his imagination, he suddenly halted his horse and gaped with growing amazement.

"It *can't* be!" he gasped incredulously. "And yet, by golly, it *is!*"

He stared upward until his eyes ached and his neck began to hurt. In all his wide experience in the desert, he had never seen anything like this, hanging over its far-flung wastes. Mirages, he had seen aplenty. But this was no mirage.

Prodding his horse into action, he advanced, determined to run the mystery to earth.

Such a hold had it taken upon the investigating turn of his mind, that, for the time being, he forgot everything else.

Reaching a spot directly under the object, which swung a thousand feet above him, he gaped at it some more, then letting his gaze wander in a wide arc, he uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

A sense of caution returned to him, and as he drew his gun from his pocket, ready for instant use, should occasion arise, a voice broke the stillness.

"Hands up!" came the sharp command from very close to the right of him. It was an entirely familiar voice, and took Squint Eye utterly by surprise. He slowly raised his hands, then turned his head, and looked into the steely gray orbs of Sheriff McLane. The latter had just stepped out from behind a clump of cacti.

"Drop that gun!" he commanded tersely.

A swift flicker of indecision leaped into Squint Eye's narrowed gaze, and as quickly vanished. He knew when he was beaten, and he also knew Sheriff McLane. Slowly the weapon slipped from his relaxed fingers and fell to the ground. The two stared at each other steadily.

"I reckon yuh got me," Squint Eye said resignedly.

"I reckon I have," answered the sheriff. "You should have known better than to think you could get away. Now, just move your hoss over there about ten feet and light."

Squint Eye obeyed, while the sheriff advanced, picked up the fallen gun, then tossed the captive a pair of handcuffs.

"Put 'em on!"

Again Squint Eye obeyed.

"Yuh got me, all right," he blurted. "But what I'm itchin' to know, right now, is," he glanced up at the object in the sky, then at the string fastened to a nearby mesquite bush, "what the thunder yuh flyin' a *kite* out here in the desert fer? It's the beatenest thing I ever heard of!"

A twinkle had crept into the sheriff's sober eyes, and he grinned.

"The belled buzzard gave me the idea," he said quietly. "I was just tryin' a little experiment. I'd have got you anyhow, sooner or later. I knew if you saw that kite—and I was pretty certain you would, as things can be seen a long ways on the desert—your *curiosity* wouldn't let you rest until you found out *who* was flyin' it. I waited a spell, an'——"

Squint Eye gasped.

"You always was a *curious* dern fool," concluded the sheriff.

Look out for the Women

By Miles Overholt

THERE are too many varieties of wimmen, it seems to me. They ought to be standardized, like automobile tires, or fruit jars, or phonograph records, so us men would know what we are signing up to fight with beforehand.

Besides being just naturally different, each one of them comes in a different kind of a fancy package and all of them talk about different things they don't mean, till they get a fellow running around in little aimless circles and wondering, "Where am I?" or words to that effect.

That's the way they attack me, anyhow, and Jim Barlow, too, and mebbe a lot of others that I don't know about.

Jim and I, we had an experience with 'em once that showed me you can't ever depend on the wimmen to be what they act like—you know, a kind of an optical delusion.

It was along in the fall that Jim says to me: "Egg"—he calls me Egg because my last name is Hamilton, or Ham, whoever is doing the talking—"Egg," he says, "we've got to get a cook, or a wife, or something."

"Make it a cook," I says. "Any woman can be a wife, but cooks are the noblest works of art, science, or literature."

"This alleged grub you are spoiling from day to day is rendering me unfit for circulation," says Jim. "It is making a human wastebasket of me, and my mentality also is gradually weakening. If it is a diet you are handing me, you are eminently successful," he says. "Die-it is the well-chosen word—and I'm It."

"You didn't hire me to rassle beans," I replies. "I don't ever brag on my culinary manifestations; I'm a cow-puncher," I says.

"What I need more than any other thing I can rapidly call to mind is a combination wife and cook," goes on Jim, kind of to himself.

"One that can bake biscuits," I asserts. "All my life," I says, "I've wondered why wives ain't ever trained to bake those light, creamy, circular articles of diet that makes you glad breakfast comes among the first things in the morning."

"Me, too," enthuses Jim. "Gosh! How I could love a wife that could make those good old-fashioned biscuits that we used to get back in Indiana."

Which started the little wheels turning rapidly inside old Jim's engine of thought, and along about the next day he says:

"Egg, we haven't anything to do now for a couple of months. How would you

like to go to town with me and run in a maverick wife?"

"I don't want any wife," I dodge. "Besides, you can't go to a strange town and pick out a woman and marry her without some kind of an alibi. She might already have a husband."

"The wife would be for me—exclusively," answers Jim. "And we could go to town and stay there till we got acquainted with a few women, couldn't we?"

"I never heard of anything like that being done," I replies, "and I've read up on a lot of terribly salacious literature in my time. Why don't you advertise for one?" I asks.

"She might not be a biscuit builder," answers Jim. "Besides, I've heard a lot about those kind of wives—they're all culls, or misfits, or something."

Well, it was Jim's ranch, and it was going to be his wife, if we ever got one, and he said he'd pay me my wages to go along and act as a sort of a backbone for him, so on the next Saturday we went.

We hired Zeb Wilkins to come over and feed the stock and wind the alarm clock, and then we went to Los Angeles on the trail of the lonesome, wild woman.

II.

WE went to Los Angeles because I got the idea that, there being so many cafeterias in that town, we would range around those quick and easy food emporiums and mebbe get acquainted with a lot of the wimmen, and it wouldn't be such hard mental labor learning how to act around one of 'em. Besides, we figgered all of them could cook.

Which was unanimous with Jim.

So we took a European room somewhere about the middle of town, surrounded on all sides by cafeterias, and started right to work stalking unsuspecting females with an idea of making one of 'em a prisoner for life.

Well, sir, it didn't look nearly so easy after our first meal of food in one of the biggest cafeterias in town. Jim and I, we hadn't ever done any table waiting to speak of, so we hunted for the gate that lets you into the main corral, but the girl at the financial desk herded us down a chute, or runway, with a lot of shorthorns who were picking up various tools of the eating trade, and we watched 'em and didn't make any more blunders for several minutes.

I never saw such a long row of human food troughs in my life, and Jim and I, we had a very difficult time figgering out where the grub was the best, but we couldn't tell. There was too much of it. So we got started in a direction along with a lot of other food-fighting hounds and took whatever the wimmen behind the troughs referred to.

Me, I had to come back six times because the tin plate they gave me wouldn't hold all the grub the hired wimmen mentioned they had for sale, and Jim made four consecutive, or regular, round trips.

But, dog-gone it, we were so busy manhandling all those dishes of gustatory allegations that we didn't get a chance to become acquainted with any of the wimmen food shovelers, and, anyway, they didn't have time to talk about matters foreign to those of a life-sustaining nature.

So we counted that day lost, it being evening. But we talked the situation over that night and decided we'd go to a place that didn't hope to feed everybody in the world in the next few minutes. And we figgered if we went in late the girls would have more leisure moments to indulge in a few verbal pleasantries about the climate and other Los Angeles subjects.

We ate breakfast at a late hour at one of those little one-armed, left-handed places, but all the conversation we could start rolling about was in reference to whether we could get along without sugar.

No, sir, those dewy-eyed disciples of Epicure wouldn't indulge in any kind of conversation that didn't begin and end with eating. It certainly was discouraging, because we had practiced up on a lot of different subjects and little jabs of wit and bon mots and gems of repartee.

For instance, Jim was going to say to one of them behind the liquid table:

"Well, how's the milkmaid this morning?"

And before she could frame a suitable reply, I was going to step in with:

"It's made with water, of course!"

We figgered that we could get her to giggling, and then we would go ahead with other carefully thought-out thoughts. I was going to remark to one of 'em:

"Have you got any whipped cream?" And no matter what the girl replied, Jim was to hurry in and say:

"No, but they've got some licked postage stamps!"

You know—that kind of stuff all the way along.

We went to thirty-seven different places that way at all hours of the day and night, but it looked like mebbe those girls were paid by the unspoken word, which, if that is the case, makes them all millionaires by this time. Because we never got any further along with 'em than: "Gimme some o' that."

I guess it was along about the third week of discouragement that Jim and I met Lem Hazlitt on the street. Lem used to own the ranch adjoining Jim's on the south, but he had to sell out and move to town on account of his wife's health—and he asked us to come out and visit him.

So one evening we groped our way out to his place, and that is where we met Marybell Morton. She is a cousin, or mebbe a niece, of Lem's wife, and she was visiting there, too, for the evening.

We hadn't any more than got inside till this Marybell wanted to know what did we specialize on.

"Jim," I tells her, "specializes on heavy and original thinking," referring in an underhanded way to his idea of coming down to Los Angeles after a wife.

"Every one should specialize on something," says Marybell. "No person can know something about everything, but every one of us can become expert on one subject."

"Egg can't," says Jim. "One entire subject is too big for him. About one-third of a subject is all he can ever be able to grasp," he says.

"If he would apply himself diligently," said Marybell, talking seriously, "I am sure he could become proficient at something."

Well, sir, that is the way it went all evening, but I could see that Marybell Morton kind of took to Jim Barlow for some strange reason. I know that when Lem and I went out to look at his flivver they didn't seem to notice our absence of a couple of hours, which we spent toying with a certain jug of large caliber.

And when we started to go home, she said to Jim:

"Now, don't forget to be there at two o'clock sharp."

And Jim said he would be right on the exact spot at the exact hour, and seemed as pleased as if somebody had told him he was intelligent.

"What is this trysting place where you're going to meet this here inamorita of yours at two o'clock?" I asks, as soon as we were on the car.

"Mary—Miss Morton is going to make a speech on specialization at the Sunset Clubhouse," answers Jim. "You ain't going."

"I knew I wasn't going long before you did," I says. "But you want to be careful. We came down here looking for a cook in capital letters, and a wife in small ones," I says. "Remember that, as you journey on through life around this man's town," I says.

III.

WE made the next morning a kind of a holiday and went to the beach. When we got back we had to hurry and eat so Jim could go to meet that specialist woman. So we dashed into that big cafeteria where we went that first day. And that's where we found the biscuits like we had been dreaming about for twenty years.

Regular old John J. Biscuits they were, light and creamy and full of taste. If I had the wit of a Mark Twain, the vocabulary of a Wilson, and the gall of a G. Bernard Shaw I couldn't even begin to tell you how good those biscuits were. That's how good they were!

"If I could marry the woman that made these decorations of appetite," says Jim, "I would ask nothing more of life."

"Especially," I says, "if she happened to be a man—mebbe a Chinaman at that."

"No man living could build such bis-

cuits," Jim raves onward. "These gems of food are too artistic, too delicate, and too feminine to have been designed by any low-browed man cook."

And so we discussed them o'er till it was time for Jim to mingle with the single trackers. And so we adjourned.

Being in town alone is one of the most serious subjects for debate before the American public, and it filled me with considerable joy when Jim came romping in along about midnight, which is no time for an unmarried man to come home.

"Was the meeting an unqualified success, or what?" I asks.

"What meeting?" Jim wants to know. Then he happened to think. "Oh, yeh, pretty good," he says. "Say, she's a fine girl, Marybell is," he goes on gushingly.

Which was plenty for me, so I turned over and prepared to go to sleep. I guess it was along about three o'clock the next morning when I woke up in time to hear Jim say:

"Well, even if she can't cook, we can—we can hire a Chinaman."

"Say," I says, "what are you alluding at—the specializing person?"

"Yes, I'm thinking of marrying her," he says shamelessly.

"Why, you poor old battered sandwich, you came down here for a cook," I says, "and now you want to take on a wife that doesn't know but one thing—whatever that is—and she admits it."

"Yes—but you ain't ever been in love," says the weak-minded, spavined old cow-puncher. "You can't appreciate what love is."

"Yes, I can," I says. "Love is a derangement of the mind that is cured by getting plenty of what caused you to get that way—which is marriage," I says.

But all my arguments didn't do a bit of good. Jim, he went out to this Marybell Morton's house every evening and left me to wander about from place to place, waiting for him to get enough of her and come on and get drunk and be sensible before we went home.

And then it happened.

Jim got up early one morning—he having quit talking to me about his personal affairs almost entirely—and put on a clean collar and some other dude clothes. Then he said: "See you this evening about five. I've got to chase around and get a license and one thing and another. We're going to be married to-day—about seven."

I went down to the big cafeteria a little past noon and got some more of those poetic biscuits and lingered around there for about an hour. Then I went over to the plaza right across the street.

There was a band concert, or something, going on for the benefit of the people who infest parks and never pay taxes, and I hadn't more than found a seat till somebody spoke my name—and there was Jim and his specializer standing there listening to the music.

Of course, I had to get up and lose my seat just to talk to 'em, and then all three of us went to another bench.

"We changed our minds," Jim says in a little while. "We changed our minds and were married at the courthouse."

But I noticed that this here Marybell wife wasn't as bright and cheerful as she was the first night I met her. Well, I thought, she has already found out that marriage is a tough proposition, after all.

Jim and I, we talked along on subjects of no importance, trying to get his wife in some kind of a mood or other, and pretty soon it looked to me as though she was about to cry. Ain't that just like 'em!

Then she leaned closer against Jim and said to him, kind of tearfully:

"Jim, dear, can you ever forgive me? I have been deceiving you all along."

See! Didn't I tell you! You can't trust wimmen to say the things they mean, or anything!

"You know, I—I—try to be an expert—on—specialization——" She was at it again.

"Sure, honey," soothes Jim, "and it's perfectly all right."

"Yes, I know," she goes on, half sobbing now. "But you—you—think I am a high-class specialist in—in—science—or something—and—I—I——"

"What, sweetheart? Don't worry about it—tell me," says Jim.

"I'm only a specialist with—with—a rolling pin. I bake the biscuits for that cafeteria across the streets," she says.

Heard in the Army and Navy

The editor solicits contributions to this department from the men who are, or have been, in the service. Those accepted will be paid for at the rate of five cents per word for accepted wordage, and will be published anonymously if so requested. Address Editor PEOPLE'S FAVORITE MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, N. Y. If return of manuscript is desired inclose self-addressed stamped envelope, otherwise rejected manuscript will be destroyed.

A Double Salute

THE importance of saluting officers is frequently impressed on noncommissioned officers and men in the Canadian army, and failure to tender the respect due to the king's commission calls forth a severe penalty. When a noncommissioned officer is in charge of a party, armed or unarmed, he orders the men to turn their eyes in the direction of the officer, while he, the noncommissioned officer, salutes. The command to the men is thus: "Eyes right!" or "Eyes left!" depending upon which side of the party the officer is approaching.

Imagine, then, the situation of a newly appointed lance corporal in charge of his first "fatigue party," when he saw two lieutenants approaching him, one to the right and the other to the left of the party. It was impossible to overlook one of the officers, so the corporal gave this command to the men:

"Eyes outward turn!" And while the men were puzzling how to obey the peculiar order, the "lance jack" brought both his hands to his forehead and saluted the officer on each side at the same time.

The officers gravely acknowledged the salute in the regular manner. The "lance jack" is wondering when he will hear the last of it.

Would Rather Die in the Trenches

IN the early days of the war many of the noble women, who volunteered as nurses at the front, had very little training and no practical experience. After a while they developed into very able members of that band of God's earthly angels who bring many boys back from that other world and make life worth living.

In a certain hospital in Belgium were two of these nurses, who were always ready at all costs to do what they could to relieve the suffering of the boys, but lacked practical knowledge. They had often heard the doctors prescribe castor oil for patients, and thought it was a kind of "cure-all."

One day a boy came in from the front line who had not been wounded, but was thoroughly worn out. He was assigned to a bunk, and for a while received

no attention, as everybody was too busy with the seriously wounded. Finally one of the above nurses came along and inquired how and where he was wounded.

"I'm not wounded at all," he replied; "just worn out."

The nurse, after thinking the matter over, gave him a dose of castor oil.

A few hours after the other nurse came along, made the same inquiry, received the same reply, and, not knowing what else to do, gave him another dose of castor oil.

No further attention was given the boy until morning, but then his bunk was empty and a note, left on the pillow, contained these words:

"I'd rather die in the trenches." H. C. B.

Farmer Recruits

A SERGEANT was instructing a squad of farmer recruits. "Now," he said, "forward march is to walk ahead, and halt is to stop."

After drilling them for some time, the command "Halt!" was given. The squad still went on marching.

The sergeant thoughtfully scratched his head, then commanded "Whoa!" The squad instantly halted. PRIVATE R. D. E.

What He Would Do

A RECENT addition to the company, after being turned out for duty, was doing his first guard.

While walking his post some time after challenging hours he halted the officer of the day. The officer was duly advanced and began questioning the sentry regarding his orders.

Suddenly he asked: "What would you do if some one should grab your rifle?" At the same time he jerked the sentry's piece from him.

The sentry seemed very much perplexed and stood without speaking for several seconds. Suddenly, as he almost jerked the officer off his feet, he said: "I would grab it back again."

Ach!

A YANKEE sentinel in a prison camp heard the following lament made by one badly used-up Hun to another. "Ach, Gott, those verdamft Yankees! They know noddings aboudt tactics. Vy, ven we attack them, instead of retreating, as they shouldt, the verdamft teufelhunden come right at us. Ach!"

Keeping Him Posted

COLONEL KNOWLES, planning a midnight call to arms, ordered Private Jones, his rookie orderly, to awaken him at twelve o'clock.

Later he was startled from a sound sleep and looked up to find Private Jones gently shaking him.

"Sir," said Private Jones, "did you wish to get up at midnight?"

"Certainly," replied the colonel.

"Well," said the rookie, "you've got just one more hour to sleep. It's eleven o'clock." PRIVATE S.

He Didn't See It

AFTER receiving a very large draft of men for training, the ship put to sea, and hardly had land passed over the horizon than our recruits began getting seasick.

On the second day out, we struck a really bad sea and were taking "green ones" over the bow regularly. The gun deck, for lack of proper ventilation, being too hot and stuffy, the seasick ones sought the cool air on the "top side."

One was taken worse than the others and never having been to sea before, could not stand on his feet, so lay down on deck, with his head in the waterway, and gave way to his emotions. We had a dog that had come aboard, and he got sick, too, and lay in the waterway a few feet from the sailor.

One of the fellows who had been to sea before kicked his friend on the foot, and said: "Get up out of there, Mac; don't give way so to it. Seasickness is nine-tenths imagination, anyway."

The poor sick Southerner turned his head to one side, and replied: "Imagination, hell! That dog ain't got no imagination!"

A Soldier Must Obey

"HALT!" called the sentry, a buck private recently assigned to the ——th Engineers. "Who goes there?"

"A friend."

"Advance, friend, and give the countersign."

Business of advancing, interrupted by a second cry from the sentry: "Halt! Who goes there?"

"A friend."

"Advance, friend, and give the countersign."

Business of advancing again, once more interrupted by a high-pitched cry of, "Halt!"

"What in h——l are you doing? What in thunder do you think you are doing?" demanded the victim of this unusual behavior.

"Obeying orders," quavered the sentry. "I was told to call 'halt!' three times and then fire!"

LIEUTENANT A. V. P.

Stubborn Phil.

PHILIP BROWN, who was stationed at a near-by camp, was drafted a short time ago. He had a sweetheart in Harlem, and wasn't very anxious to go away when his call came. When he was leaving he promised he would come in to see her often.

About a week after he had been sent to camp he asked his superior officer for a furlough. This request was refused. Phil decided on going without permission, but waited until darkness to make his get-away.

That night when all was quiet and still he stole out along the roadside. He went quite a distance, when suddenly a sentry, who had seen him, yelled: "Halt! Who goes there?"

Phil, kind of frightened, replied: "Friend."

"Advance and give your countersign," the sentry commanded, at the same time pointing his rifle at Phil.

"Ah ain't got no countersign," Phil answered.

"Well, go back into camp again," said the sentry in an angry voice.

Phil ground his teeth, stepped back a foot or so, pulled out a razor, and yelled: "Say, lissen here, man, Ah's got a mother in hebben, a father in hell, and a girl in Harlem, and Ah'm sure going to see *one* of them to-night!"

PRIVATE T. P. M.

A Soldier's French

IN the American Legion of the Canadian army there were boys from all over the States, many ex-sailors (flat feet), ex-marines (leather necks), and ex-army men. My "buddy" was an ex-sergeant of the infantry and as wild an Irishman as ever came from the Emerald Isle.

Upon landing in France we were greatly handicapped by having no knowledge of the French language. The word "good" in French is *bon*, and it seemed to us that every other word was a *bon*. Pat, my buddy, listened to *bon jour*, *bon soir*,

très bon, et cetera, for a while, then disgustedly said: "Sure, and the Frog-eaters have too many 'buns' in their language."

Pat thought the matter over for a few days, then came to a conclusion.

"Begorra, I'll fix the Frog-eaters," said Pat.

"What'll you do?" I asked.

"Bejabbers, I'll club all their 'buns' together and call them *bon ami*," he answered.

While we were in rest billets back of the line, the girls would usually call out as we strolled through a French village: "*Bon jour*," or *Bon soir, messieurs*." I would always answer as near as I could in French, but it was a whole show to hear Pat call out: "*Bon ami*, old gal, *bon ami!*" H. C. B.

He Meant It

THE new recruit was having his first experience of guard duty, and, while he was somewhat doubtful of his abilities to properly perform his duties, he was, nevertheless, very much on the alert and determined that no one would cross his post without proper authority.

Soon he heard some one coming toward his post.

"Halt! Who is there?" he challenged.

"Commanding officer," the answer came.

After waiting some time in silence the C. O. cried: "Well, what are you going to say now?"

The recruit, who had caught the answer to his challenge, said: "I have forgotten, but you had better be damned still until I remember." PRIVATE McC.

The Balance

BROWN is not his name, but it happened while he was a cadet at an Officers' Training School, and as he is a lieutenant now we will call him by that name.

It was Saturday morning, and the captain was noted for his exactness at inspections. Brown was very anxious to show how well he was progressing, so, when the captain passed in front of him, he came up to a snappy inspection arms, but his left hand was too near the muzzle of the rifle.

The captain said to him: "Move your hand to the balance."

Brown didn't move.

Then the captain turned red in the face and bellowed: "Where is the balance of your rifle?"

Brown looked at his gun carefully, and said in a sheepish voice:

"I don't know, sir; this is all that I was issued." SERGEANT GAINES.

He Was from Boston

HE was from Boston; even the rookies could tell that. There was no mistaking that intellectual look, even if the horn-rimmed eyeglasses didn't proclaim the fact.

He had but very, very recently been made a corporal, and the burden of that high position seemed to weigh heavily on his shoulders.

His squad was lined up in front of the barracks for infantry drill. With a voice trembling slightly, he gave the command: "Left face!"

Then a wrinkle appeared between his eyes, and a flush spread over his face. He had evidently forgotten the command he had intended to give. The hesitation lasted for only a moment, however, and then a relieved expression came over his face and he gave the command: "Proceed!" PRIVATE H. E. M.

Call of the Caribbean

By H. A. Lamb

Author of "Under the Black Ball"

IT was at Maryborough, in the year 1894, that we picked up John Stuart. I was on the after deck of the schooner supervising the stowage of some stores, and he came up to me.

"This is the *Madeleine*, isn't it?" he asked in a pleasant voice, "and you're the government agent."

John Stuart was a slender chap, under medium height and weight, and aged somewhere in the late twenties. His steady dark eyes looked me over with curiosity, friendly curiosity. His lean face with its broad brow was tanned. He spoke quietly, almost idly. As I got to know him better, I marked this side of his nature. It wasn't laziness, nor sloth.

"I'm John Stuart," he held out his hand frankly. "Your new supercargo. I'm afraid you'll be rather bored to know this. My father has arranged the matter with your skipper—McShea is his name, isn't it?"

"Tom McShea," I answered, taking his hand. I had known nothing of his coming until then. But the mention of his father enlightened me somewhat. John Stuart, senior, was the owner of several large schooners in the island trade. I remembered hearing that his son was studying in England—Oxford—and later had been at Cape Town. I must have looked my curiosity, for Stuart laughed.

"My father wanted to establish me in trade in Cape Town. I wanted to visit Queensland and see a little of the labor trade. In the Old Country we heard it was something of an adventure, you know."

"It's not that," I told him, for I wanted him to know the truth of the matter. "On the other hand, it's a God-forsaken traffic—recruiting natives among the islands to work in the Queensland plantations—and there is an ugly risk in it. McShea can tell you that. He has a rib showing through his skin where a Santa Cruz spear slashed him."

"I'd like to see the islands," he said quietly. "You see, I was born on the east coast and the islands are a kind of home to me. I was brought up on the plantations. My father finally agreed to find a berth for me. He said the *Madeleine* was the best schooner in the trade. And he wanted me to be with you, he said, because you are a university man. He has heard of you."

"Still," I assured him, "I would not go, if I were you. It's a thankless job and you may see a lot of things you will not want particularly to remember."

I said that sincerely enough. At that time the government had only taken over the supervision of the trade a short while before, and it was still infested with

evils. The honest skippers fared badly enough, having to contend with the enmity of islanders injured by the lawless crowd that was thick in the South Seas. It was a case of watchfulness with a rifle if you hoped to come out with a whole skin, and struggling with the hurricanes that cast many a tidy schooner on the reefs.

Of course the pay was good. And there was excitement, of a kind. But it wasn't the money that brought John Stuart to the *Madeleine,* and I don't think it was the excitement. The boy spoke the truth when he said he was eager to visit the islands again. They had laid their spell on him, the spell of Polynesia. In those days the tourist crowd had not begun to infest the islands, and white men, except for missionaries and traders, were not as numerous as now. Still, those that entered the borders of the South Pacific seldom went away. Those that did generally came back sooner or later. I can't explain why. Many books have been written about the charm of the islands. Perhaps they explain it.

I told Stuart a lot about the cruises, hoping to warn him off. It had no effect. Mind you, at that time, although I knew the *Madeleine* was scheduled to run down to the New Hebrides, I knew nothing about the River Jordan, or the strange story of Don Quiros. Nor, for that matter, about the garden in the hills.

I remember now that Stuart looked at me queerly when I mentioned the fact that we would land some returns at Santo. He had heard the tale of Don Quiros, and the missionaries who tried to found a new Jerusalem at Santo—a kind of earthly paradise—in the year 1606. The lad had run across many narratives of the islands during his travels, and he was acquainted with the stories of the early voyages. He had even heard of D'Urville.

This, in a way, prepared him for what he was to find. That is what I have come to think, considering his experiences on Santo, his and mine. Believing as I do in Providence, I often wonder if John Stuart was not led half across the world to Santo by the thing we call Fate, for want of a better name. To Santo and the garden in the hills.

II.

THE *Madeleine* was a handy craft, ninety-five tons' burden. Her skipper was McShea, a Tasmanian who knew Polynesia like an open book—a dour man of few words. Then there was Quin, the mate. We didn't ship any recruiter that trip, I remember, because we were scheduled to land returns at the Santa Cruz Islands and the New Hebrides, and to load up with fruit and yams coming back to Australia.

McShea being the man he was, and Quin a thick-skulled Irishman, Stuart was a god send to me on the run down to the islands. Not that McShea wasn't all right in his way, but he was as sparing of words as he was of his silver and tobacco. A good skipper and a decent man, but old and set in his ways.

I don't think he welcomed Stuart on board. Probably he thought the lad would make trouble for him. And old Stuart was a power on the east coast. For that matter, Jack—we got to calling him that before the anchor was up in Maryborough—did cause us a lot of worry, not so much for McShea as for me. But it wasn't the lad's fault. And it wasn't mine. It was circumstances; that, and what we found at the headwaters of the River Jordan.

At the time we sailed, none of us, except perhaps McShea, were sorry Jack had come. He was at home on the deck of a schooner, and a fair second mate even if he did not have a master's certificate. McShea gave him the vacant cabin next to mine which would have been the recruiter's ordinarily, and he stowed his dunnage away in shipshape fashion.

I noticed that he didn't bring much stuff aboard, which showed he was no landsman. Tourists and those new to the sea invariably burden themselves with luggage, extra clothing, and patent comforts, half of which they throw overboard before the first leg of the cruise is done. Stuart had only two changes of clothing, his personal kit which didn't half fill the small locker, and two or three books.

Also a handy Spencer, an old rifle which seemed to be a favorite with him.

Yes, Jack Stuart took kindly to the *Madeleine*. He stood his share of the work without any fuss. He was more use to us than Quin, who drank. And he seemed glad to be with us, without saying much about it.

His quietness puzzled me. I thought the lad would be full of questions about the islands. But while he was all eyes when we loafed through one of the verdant groups, he seemed to know as much about them as I did, although not as much as McShea. And then there were the tales he had read.

The first night out of Maryborough he came into my cubby and sat on my bunk to smoke a pipe. He had been on deck with Quin. The two didn't mix well and when Stuart had had his fill of the fresh night air and the stars, he dropped in on me as I was turning into "blanket bay."

"We are heading for the New Hebrides, aren't we, Mr. Haskins?" he asked.

"Not directly," I informed him. "Our schedule takes us north to the Santa Cruz group first. Then south to Santo —about a day's run."

"Santo?" He looked at me curiously out of level brown eyes. "That is the island that used to be called Espiritu Santo?"

"And still is, on many charts."

"A few miles from Leper's Island?"

"Yes," I nodded, surprised at his knowledge of the island groups. "In spite of its name Leper's Island is one of the beauty spots of Polynesia—clean and beautiful. The natives are cannibals of a rather disagreeable type, but their graves are gardens of dracenas and hibiscus flowers."

"I know. The people there are a peculiar race, so light in complexion that they are almost white. That was why Captain Cook christened the island as he did. He thought they were lepers."

I had never heard that. By this time I was between my blankets.

"Santo," he said, half to himself. "Have you heard any legends about it?"

"Nothing very much," I yawned. "Only the natives there talk about a race in the mountains—'small fellow people' they call them."

He nodded as if he had known as much. His familiarity with our points of visit would have aroused my curiosity if I had not been so sleepy.

"Those would be the dwarfs of Santo. Some of the early French explorers give a good account of them. There is another legend I would like to tell you some day, Mr. Haskins."

"Never heard of any dwarfs in Santo. These niggers are as full of fairy stories as Chinamen," I objected. "The men of Santo are an indifferent lot. We never recruit there."

He knocked the dottle from his pipe out the port. He wore a half smile which lighted up his dark, thin face.

"You have not been in the interior of Santo, Mr. Haskins. I am glad we are going there."

With that he doused my light and said good night politely.

During the run to the Santa Cruz group Stuart made himself generally useful. When we hove to off Vanikoro to land some returns he insisted on taking one of the boats to shore. At the time I remember that there was a flock of canoes about us filled with chattering natives. A new hand at the business might well be expected to feel a little uneasy, for the warriors were carrying their long spears and were whitened with lime.

I went with Stuart in what we call the "covering boat." We remained a short distance off the beach while Quin in the whaleboat pulled in with the returns. We took this precaution because the Vanikorans are not especially friendly and we had no wish to lose either Quin or the whaleboat.

Naturally, the occasion was quite a festive one for the islanders, since the returned laborers brought a wealth of calicoes, tobacco, pipes, knives and what not with them, and all their friends were anxious to share in the expected wealth. Excitement ran high while the Kanakas landed from Quin's boat which was in shallow water.

I was watching the confusion in some amusement when I saw Stuart sit up alertly and give the order to give way, to

the shore. Immediately the boat was in motion and at the same time I saw what had caught the lad's eye.

A big buck in a canoe alongside the whaleboat had stood up, swinging his club playfully over Quin's head. I don't think he meant any harm—as long as the covering boat was within easy rifle shot. But Quin distrusted the natives mightily. He reached up swiftly, the muzzle of his rifle catching the islander under the chin and the man was knocked backward into the water, with his club.

In a second an excited jabbering set up among the Vanikorans. Most of them started to run for the bush, back of the beach. Several seized their rifles threateningly. The man that Quinn had hurt crawled away through the water, evidently fearing that we meant to kill him.

The boat boys in our craft were handling their weapons eagerly, but I took pains to caution them not to shoot. Ill-treatment of the natives is to be avoided at all cost.

It was Stuart who restored quiet.

The lad talked to the frightened Kanakas reassuringly, and made it clear that the man who had wielded the war club would not be punished. Aided by the returns, he soon had the Vanikorans assembled once more on the beach.

"No need to be alarmed," he said calmly to Quin, who was scowling and nursing his rifle.

"I suppose," said the Irishman jeeringly, "ye would like to have a love feast, now, with the niggers. Some day soon, Mr. Stuart, I'll have the burying of ye with a war club through the back of your skull."

Stuart turned to me.

"The natives are still jumpy, Mr. Haskins. I think it would be a good plan to go ashore to establish good feeling again—if you expect to get more recruits here another trip. They probably have a feast ready for the returns, anyway."

III.

WHAT he said was true, more or less. The Polynesian is quick to distrust his white visitor. And as quick to forget his anger. I had intended giving them some presents to smooth over the incident of the war club.

But Stuart insisted on going ashore and having a palaver. Mind you, that was not an easy thing for a newcomer at the trade to do. It was more than risky; it was dangerous. The Vanikorans were grouped on shore, fully armed, a score of the young men flourishing their weapons and leaping about—just out of animal spirits.

"We'll take our rifles," I decided.

"We can hunt a bit, you know," he agreed. "I expect there are pigeons in the woods and we need fresh meat in the *Madeleine*."

So the two of us made the Vanikorans understand our purpose. They were delighted at the prospect. Leaving the grumbling Quin in charge of the boats, we struck inshore, among the network of vines and lofty trees that stretched down to the beach. Cockatoos fluttered around us and pigeons, of which we garnered a good bag.

The natives followed us into the bush, exclaiming at our marksmanship. I had a modern rifle, but did not make as good a showing as Stuart with his old one. The boy had a keen eye and a sure trigger finger. He pushed ahead along a pig trail, staring at the verdant mesh of palm and breadfruit trees and the brilliantly colored birds.

"These fellows like flying fox," he told me. "They would be glad if we bag some for their feast."

It was true. But when I asked him how he had come to know it, he laughed. Said he had been raised on the island plantations. We brought down a good number of the little beasts, which the natives scrambled for eagerly. Why they like the odorous things, I don't know. When we came back to the beach the chief invited us to stay for the feast.

"We'll accept with pleasure," Stuart smiled at me, and I assented, knowing it would be good policy.

So that night the lad and I lay by the door of the chief's humpy and watched the ceremonies at the dancing place. Fires were kindled throughout the village and there was the usual roast pig, yams and taro in evidence. Stuart leaned back

against the bamboo wall of the hut, listening to the drums that were pounding out their infernal beat somewhere in the village.

It was nothing new to me and I watched the hut itself closer than the dancing—to see that no one stuck a spear into Stuart through the bamboo wall.

As I have said, the boy had a way of letting his mind drift away. Not every man would have been so careless of his surroundings. Especially after the demonstration on the beach. But Stuart never worried about danger.

He told me later that he could tell when the islanders meant trouble—a kind of sixth sense. It served him well, here and at Santo. Quin, on the other hand, was suspicious and quick on the trigger. He was clubbed to death in the massacre on the *Amy* about two years later.

At the time, Stuart's conduct puzzled me. The flickering firelight shone in his dark eyes, and brought out the strong lines of brow and chin. Apparently he was enjoying the idleness and gayety of the feast. Yet, I think Jack Stuart was more thoughtful than indolent.

"Mr. Haskins," he remarked suddenly, "do you know if any missionaries have been in Vanikoro?"

"Never were any, Jack, that I heard of. The Vanikorans say they haven't been on the island. Why?"

Stuart frowned at the fire. He seemed to have forgotten the native dancers and the interminable tom-toms.

"I thought D'Urville had a missionary and his wife on the *Astrolabe*. He came to Vanikoro looking for traces of the old *Astrolabe* which was lost off this island."

"Then the missionary, whoever he was, thought better of landing," I laughed. "I don't exactly blame him."

"It isn't like the chaps, is it, Mr. Haskins, to turn back?" Stuart gazed idly up at the sky carpet of stars. "And then no missionary came back with D'Urville to Australia. In fact, the records say that the Frenchman left a minister of the gospel —name of Burnie—on the islands."

I paid little attention to him at the time. Later, I had cause to remember what he said. It was true that two vessels of a French explorer, La Perouse, had been lost off Vanikoro. This was late in the seventeenth century. Several attempts had been made to find traces of the missing man and the ships, one being by D'Estrecasteaux.

Owing to some information reported to the East India Company at Calcutta about 1840, the Frenchman D'Urville had sailed to Vanikoro and searched the island without success. A silver sword hilt and a few other articles that might have come from the lost ships were all that he found. A number of years later he made another try, with the same result. After that Vanikoro and its missing ships was listed as one of the unsolved mysteries of these waters. Not an uncommon thing.

Stuart wasted no more words on the past of Vanikoro. He talked more that night to me than he had been doing. I listened to him without saying much. There was an undercurrent of eagerness in the lad's voice, and I did not smile at his fancies.

It was that night he told me the legend of Don Quiros. It was hardly more than a legend.

"That's why I'm so keen to get to Santo, Mr. Haskins," he ended. "The island is the scene of Don Quiros' expedition in 1606. We know that the Spaniard sailed for Santo, and that he reached it with his vessels and the fellow Christians who came with him, hoping to found a new Jerusalem in the paradise of the South Seas."

"But," I objected, "nothing more is known of Don Quiros."

"Where did the name of the island come from, if not from his christening? Espiritu Santo."

"Granted. That, however, was nearly three hundred years ago."

"Then there is the river," Jack Stuart went on impulsively. "The River Jordan, named after the one in Palestine."

"Two names," I grumbled. "Even the natives say they know nothing of the Spanish Christians."

"Have you ever been in the interior of Santo, Mr. Haskins?"

It was the second time he had asked me that, and, glancing at him, I saw his eyes were alight.

"No," I said firmly, "and I have no wish to go."

"The settlement of Don Quiros must have been on the Jordan," he went on, heedless of what I said. "And the visit of white men must have left some evidence on the island. How did the Spaniards make out? Did they leave the place alive? Isn't it worth a little trouble to try to find out?"

Now I have no slight eagerness for accumulating and verifying the legends of Polynesia. Yet it seemed to me the story of the Quiros venture was too vague to investigate.

"It is not worth one life," I told him, "or two."

"Something might be found at the headwaters of the Jordan. Perhaps the Quiros party founded their city and survived. Possibly for several generations. No attempt has been made to find out."

This was true; but for good reasons. Santo is one of the largest of the Polynesian islands, and the interior is a mass of mounatins, running parallel to the coast, and some four to five thousand feet high. Add to this the fact that the coast natives dislike going into the bush on account of what they call the "small fellow men" and you have the reason.

I told Jack Stuart this, and more. "Granted," he said at length. "Yet in the interior of Santo a half hundred white men tried to found a city of their faith, Mr. Haskins. They tried to raise an altar to their God in the hills of Santo. Some trace of them *must* remain. And it could be found."

"Probably not," I objected. "In the islands life is fecund. Vegetation has overgrown any sign of a city—if there ever was one—before you or I saw the light of day."

"The silver sword hilt was found on Vanikoro, Mr. Haskins. If we *could* find some evidence of the new Jerusalem, it would be worth the risk."

I saw that the idea had grown on the lad, and being anxious to keep him from a foolish venture of the kind, I said nothing, hoping that he would forget before we reached Santo.

Furthermore, I asked McShea if we could run by Santo without anchoring. But he had returns to land at Big Bay on the island and would not.

And John Stuart did not forget.

IV.

WITH a favoring breeze, we ran down to Santo in one day. At Big Bay McShea landed his returns. And then Jack Stuart told the skipper that he planned to leave the *Madeleine*. Not only that, he intended to take enough tucker and stuff to get along for two weeks.

McShea sought for—and found—words to fit the occasion.

"Man," he cried, "have ye lost the wits the Lord has given ye? What will ye do for two weeks on yon benighted stretch o' weeds an' hills an' foul rivers? The *Madeleine* will not lay off Santo for two weeks to dry-nurse ye!"

Stuart explained then, for the first time, that he was going to explore the interior of the island, hoping to find traces of the Quiros expedition. I, who had known what lay on his mind, was not surprised —although I liked it little—but good McShea gaped.

"Daft ye are, Jack Stuart," he growled, "daft as a haverin' old wife. What will I be saying to your father, now?"

More he said, and finally pleaded. The lad, however, had made up his mind. He listened quietly to McShea; then asked if he could borrow certain supplies from our stores. The skipper shook his head grimly.

"Not a pound o' flour, nor a potato nor cartridge do ye get from me, Jack Stuart," he said, believing that he could turn the other from his purpose.

"Either I buy the stuff from you, McShea, or I go without it."

The skipper growled at this and turned to me. I added my word to his. I pointed out that Stuart had no means of knowing where to look for the Quiros city. That the expedition had been lost to view for eight generations. That the coast natives might kill him before he could reach the interior.

"Mr. Haskins," he said quietly, "I don't want you to think I am jumping at this thing. I made up my mind to it before

we left Maryborough. Naturally I said nothing about it to my father." A faint smile twitched his lips, and I thought what his hard-headed father would have said to him if he had done so.

"Now if there was gold to be had," observed McShea with a gleam of interest. "There would be sense in ye, Jack. Is there no gold?"

"Nor silver," laughed the boy. "Except maybe a crucifix. I believe that there is some trace of the new Jerusalem remaining, at least of the church Don Quiros must have built."

"Daft," muttered McShea, shaking his head, "clean daft. To look for a Spaniard, an' a dead Papist, at that."

The boy made no response, other than to give the skipper a list of things that he wanted to take with him. I looked him squarely in the face.

"You insist on going?" I asked, but I read the answer in his eyes.

"Yes, Mr. Haskins."

"Then," said I with a sigh, "I will go with you. Old John Stuart put you under my care. I can't let you go into Santo alone."

"That's jolly!" cried the boy. "I had rather hoped you might come. But then I had no right to ask you. Because—as you say—it might be dangerous."

"Two men can go where one could not," I answered briefly.

At the time I was ill disposed to go on with the wild undertaking. But Jack Stuart's frank delight at having me for companion and the cheery way in which he spoke of the coming lark—as he put it—made me shrug my shoulders and stifle my conscience as best I could.

"There are two o' ye," said McShea, not without some secret satisfaction, for if I went with Jack, McShea would stand cleared of the business to old Stuart. He could say, and I believe he did, that it was a scheme of the two of us, carried out in spite of his, McShea's, objections.

"I will be coming by Santo in two or three weeks, Mr. Haskins," he added, "and if ye are still among the living, I will take ye on the *Madeleine*. How will I report ye to the commissioner?"

I explained to the skipper that we had landed the last of the returns at Big Bay, and my duties on the *Madeleine* were over. He would report truthfully what I had done, I told him, and ask that I be listed for duty on the *Madeleine* when the schooner returned to the islands and picked me up.

"Aye, Mr. Haskins, that may be," said McShea grimly, "but I'll be bringing another government agent with me, for 'tis not likely ye will join me."

Once the die was cast, I saw to it that we got the best outfit possible from the stores of the *Madeleine*. McShea had the best of everything on the schooner and he did not stint us—even adding some quinine and sherry of his own to our slender stock.

"Ye will have the fever, 'tis likely," he remarked cheeringly, "an' this will help save ye for the clubs o' the coast niggers."

"Maybe," grinned Quin, "they will build ye a stone cairn at the Papist shrine."

But McShea turned on the mate with an oath, although Stuart smiled. He asked us if we would take one of the schooner's boats. Stuart and I decided that a whaleboat would be too weighty for us to row up the Jordan, and the dinghy would not hold two men with our outfit. So the worthy skipper said good-by more feelingly than I had thought of him, and pulled off to the schooner, leaving us standing on the shore of the cove where the River Jordan emptied into the sea.

When I met McShea again, some three years later, I thanked him for his kindness. He said then that he had hoped to dissuade the lad up to the last and had pulled off to the ship with a heavy heart. There was much good feeling under the gruffness of the skipper. Quin, as I have said, was killed shortly after. An Irishman does not belong in the labor trade. Most of the skippers are Scotch.

I still have the inventory we took of ourselves and belongings on the beach that day. It runs something as follows:

Two able-bodied men, one being English, the other Australian; two rifles with a hundred and fifty rounds of ammunition for the Winchester and Spencer; one makeshift tent, fashioned out of a spare jib of the schooner; one set of blankets; ten pounds of potatoes, with a small stock

of bacon; ship's biscuits *ad lib.* and tea likewise; a handy kettle, matches and an indifferently good compass; also, McShea's donation.

A small outfit, if measured by tourist standards to-day. Yet we hoped to make it serve for a month if necessary.

V.

OF course we were visited and inspected by the natives from a nearby village. They were as treacherous as those of Vanikoro, however, and after seeing that we were well armed and too careful to lay our rifles down, they must have given up hope of a surprise attack—although I expect the sight of so much wealth must have made their eyes water.

We had known better than to try to get any of the Kanakas from the schooner to go with us. But we tried our luck with the islanders. When they heard where we were going they refused point-blank to join us. The interior, they said, was *tabu.*

Moreover. they declared firmly that they had never seen any village or habitation of the dwarfs—the "small fellow men"—of the hills. Some of them admitted seeing the pygmies, or hearing of them. According to their statements, the strange folk of the interior were hard to see. I did not pay much attention to this talk, but Stuart questioned the niggers closely. While he was doing it, I bargained for a pair of their clumsy dugouts.

This brought Johnny Gorai to me.

The Santo native who called himself Johnny Gorai must have been fifty or sixty years old, with a wrinkled face shining with grease and a pair of leaky eyes. He wore the braided black and gold coat of a Dutch naval officer—probably imported at price of many pounds of copra from a Sydney theatrical costumer, and a few hibiscus flowers in his wool. Nothing else except a very dirty *lava-lava.*

He was, he said, a "good fellow pilot altogether." As proof he showed me two scraps of paper, given him by skippers who had visited the island. One read:

Johnny Gorai knows as much about an anchorage as he does about the Book of Prayer. He is useful if you have any trade with the island. Don't forget to keep him covered with a gun.

The other was still less flattering.

Satan is as trustworthy as Johnny Gorai. If he wants to talk to you, make him take out the sheath knife he carries in the hind pocket of his admiral's rig.

The two papers made Stuart smile. Through the "willing pilot," however, we secured two fairly large dugouts at a trifling cost in tobacco. These, being fitted with outriggers, were stable and suitable for one man to paddle.

They would get us and our duffel up the River Jordan, and I hoped, back again, We really needed another man for a guide and a possible interpreter. I made an offer to the islanders again to accompany us, but they hung back.

Johnny Gorai hesitated for some time; then he said that he would go with us as far as the "top-side hills." Evidently he meant the farther summits of the mountains. As this was as far, or probably farther, than the headwaters of the Jordan, we accepted his offer and signed him on at wages of half a stick of tobacco and found for each day of the trip and a new sheath knife together with our tent when we got back to the beach.

These terms were very liberal, and Johnny Gorai made much of them, haranguing his fellows until we stowed our stuff in the canoes and departed. I took the native in mine, being careful to keep him in the bow.

The river was sluggish and the banks were distant enough to insure safety from a spear ambuscade. I had noticed that the islanders had few rifles. But I kept a careful lookout that first day and selected our landing site on a knoll where the palms were thinly scattered, allowing us a chance to repel any raid.

You see Johnny Gorai most likely believed that he could knife either one or both of us and win immortal fame as well as wealth by the exploit. Consequently his fellows would be likely to follow us along the stream to have a hand in the massacre if opportunity offered.

The first thing I did on landing and

making camp was to deprive Johnny Gorai of his sheath knife which I found, as the note had stated, in the tail pocket of his treasured coat. The islander was indignant.

"What for you white fellow man take 'em knife belong Johnny?" he said plaintively. "Suppose small fellow boys along mountains catch Johnny, kill him plenty quick, my word!"

This, naturally, had no effect in persuading me to risk my life and that of my companion at Johnny Gorai's hand. Jack Stuart, however, was interested in the native's mention of the dwarfs and questioned him further.

The account of the dwarfs in the interior of Santo, according to our friend, was more of a legend than anything else. He believed that they had been seen from time to time in the foothills, although he had never laid eyes on them. But he said quite decidedly that no village of the "small fellow boys" was known to exist.

"Where have they been seen?" asked Stuart.

"No see 'em altogether," said Johnny Gorai.

He explained this remark in the following manner. The dwarfs of the hills had made their presence felt mainly by raids on outlying villages of the coast folk. They had carried off pigs, yams, and fowls and even dogs. When pursued they had vanished back into their retreats swiftly.

"Probably it was merely one tribe of the coast fellows raiding the other," I suggested, pegging down the tent.

Johnny Gorai denied this. Said the dwarfs had been followed into the hills, but had not been found in a body. It was dangerous, he asserted, to pursue them too far. The hills of Santo were nearly impassable.

"Looks like a nigger story, Jack," I told the lad. "You may be sure that if there was a village of these dwarf chaps, the people on the coast would know of it."

"Maybe not. I have heard of some tribes that had their habitations where they couldn't be found."

"Such as—where?" I asked, rather nettled by the assured way in which he spoke.

"Oh, above the earth or under it," he said vaguely, and I returned in disgust to my tent.

After dinner we took our pipes a short distance away from the embers of the fire, leaving Johnny Gorai grumbling in front of the tent. If any raid was planned on our camp, I was going to be sure that our "pilot" got the full effect of it and not us. Stuart and I had agreed to stand watch in turn, for we were not in exactly safe surroundings.

We were reasonably sure, of course, that the coast natives had not followed us in canoes, and they could not possibly have kept up with us by running through the dense mangrove thickets on the banks. Still, with Johnny Gorai about, it paid to take precautions.

While we smoked, we talked over our schedule of travel. We would go, we decided, as far as the river went without wasting time. Once at the source of the Jordan we would hide the canoes with some of the provisions and make our way to the nearest mountaintop where we could get an idea of the country.

Mind you, we had no conception of the location of Don Quiros' city. I let Stuart do the talking, for I wished him to be author of everything we did. In this manner I hoped that he would become discouraged sooner than if I joined in his plans.

No, I did not think we would find the lost city of Jerusalem, or rather its ruins. Still less did I believe we would find any trace of the men of Don Quiros. Knowing the almost impenetrable vegetation of some of the larger islands, I thought that our search would be made difficult enough to convince Stuart that the task was hopeless.

Of course I said nothing to him, other than to agree to what he proposed. I had come with him because there was no way of turning him—a lad of age and his own master—back from the venture and I wanted to bring him back alive and sound.

Yet his plans were sensible, surprisingly so. Only I did not believe the ruins we were looking for existed. He said that

Don Quiros had certainly gone up the river; that he had undoubtedly followed it far from the coast, as the purpose of the wanderers was to found an isolated settlement; that we would be likely to guess, from the nature of the country, where the Spaniards had landed.

The lad's eagerness wrought upon me, and I felt a glimmering of the hope that had drawn him to Santo.

Yet I had no belief in his venture. I did not think we would even see the fugitive tribe that was called dwarfs, not knowing that I was to see this, and stranger things, before I again set foot on the *Madeleine*.

VI.

SANTO was nearly eighty miles in width and the Jordan well into the interior. Allowing for the winding of the river, Stuart calculated that we must paddle for fifty miles before coming to the headwaters. For this, he allowed three days, taking into consideration the strength of the current which—fortunately—was slight at present, but was bound to increase as we neared the foothills.

I could not have asked for a better companion than the boy. His enthusiasm did not suffer by the mishaps of the journey—rain and an overturned canoe. He worked willingly, in spite of the heat. And he was pleased beyond words at the aspect of the country.

The river wound through wide areas of luxuriant growth, forests of bamboos and plantains, and level, grassy plains. At times we were in the thick growth of the bush, colored plants glittering in our faces, wonderfully hued birds swinging about the treetops. I began to understand why the Spanish explorer had thought that the interior of Santo would provide a second paradise.

It was the beginning of the third day that I noticed a change in Johnny Gorai. The islander had been sullen at first, and after the first night had done his best to leave us, being prevented by an occasional meaning display of our rifles.

Now he began to urge us to return. Finding this useless he became moody, and remained close to us and the canoes. I guessed that we were beyond the limits of the coast natives' villages and that he was in a strange country. As he might be useful to us, I had no intention of allowing him to slip away. And, indeed, at this point he seemed to have no desire to do so.

Yet I was puzzled by his moodiness. We were in the midst of a glorious forest where food and light abounded. We had seen nothing of any human occupants of the place. As we worked past the foothills, winding between verdant slopes heavy with the perfume of flowers, the stream narrowed and Johnny Gorai became more sullen.

By the end of the third day I calculated that we were some thirty miles inland from the coast. Here we arrived at a waterfall and were forced to abandon the canoes.

Making up light packs we pushed ahead the next day, following the bank of the river. The going was slower here, but the change from the cramped dugouts was welcome. The islander led the way, trying vainly to keep his precious coat from the grasp of thorns.

It was near midday when we came on the fire. It was a heap of ashes, at the bole of a large breadfruit tree, cold and evidently wet by rains. But Stuart was as triumphant as if we had found a doorpost of his lost city.

"This is beyond the territory of the coast natives, Haskins," he cried. "The fire must have been made by the 'small fellow boys.'"

"So you believe," I asked, "there are actually dwarfs hereabouts?"

"Something of the kind," he said gravely. "And I can give a guess as to why their village has never been found. Certain races of stunted people exist in the interior of Africa, and as a rule they are tree-climbing men. They are accustomed to make their way about in the trees."

I admit this remark caused me to glance up at the network of branches overhead. Beyond a lazy and beautiful tree snake or two I, of course, saw nothing.

"The dwarfs of Santo," continued Stuart, "have no village. I think we will

find that they live in caves underground, or in trees. That means they must be a very shy people—probably harmless."

"I hope so," I agreed. "But the shyest tribes are sometimes most apt to pin a poisoned arrow in the neck of a visitor."

By this time we were among what Johnny Gorai called the "top-side mountains" which rose so steeply on either bank of the river that we were obliged to leave the shore and climb almost sheer precipices. The islander no longer led the way, and I let Stuart choose the going, thinking that in this way he would be more quickly tired of the fruitless venture.

I think he was already beginning to be so. More than once I caught a moody look in his brown eyes as he peered down into the mesh of treetops and up at the luxuriant slopes above us. As we came to a turn in the pig trail we were following, he set down his pack, shaking the perspiration from his arms, and motioned me to his side.

"Ready to—make camp?" I suggested, being more than ready to do the same myself.

"Look there," he said, pointing.

No, it was not the city of Don Quiros—not even a timber of it. Nor was it one of the "small fellow boys." It was a woman seated on a breadfruit tree, watching us curiously.

I slipped off my pack, and stared back at her. She was not a woman of the coast tribes of Santo. And she did not look like a white woman, although she was dressed in a slip of calico, bound around the waist with woven grass. She was barefoot. Her hair was gathered in coils secured by a kind of tenril vine, with flowers on it, and it was the color of sun-touched bronze. It was curly, but certainly not kinky.

She watched us steadily, dark eyes wide with curiosity, slim figure tense, like an antelope half minded to stay and watch, half decided to flee. Stuart whistled softly, and her gaze went instantly to him.

Probably by our artificial standards, the woman we came upon at the bend of the pig trail would not have been called beautiful. Her face and bare knees were scarred by thorns and she lacked the pink-and-white complexion which is so prized in the European cities. Yet there was a charm about her slim person and alert, appealing eyes. I felt it, and I believe Jack Stuart did as well.

Johnny Gorai was staring at her, making a queer clucking noise which drew my attention. I saw that his gaze had shifted and was searching the surrounding treetops. His wrinkled face told a plain story. He was not, it seemed, surprised at seeing the girl. Rather, he was looking around for possible companions. That is the impression I received, and it proved I was not much mistaken.

Life is curious in many ways. Here we had come, at some risk, to find a legendary city and a tribe of dwarfs and we found a young girl becomingly dressed in European calico.

"She isn't a dwarf, Jack?" I smiled.

"No," he said, "but what is she?"

Our voices, instead of startling her, seemed to attract her, for she rose lightly to her feet and came toward us. Actually slipped up to arm's reach of Stuart and ran her hand lightly over the gun he carried—that and the week's growth of beard he wore.

"I would have shaved, old man," he laughed, "if I had known what we were going to meet."

I had been studying the strange girl. Clearly she did not understand what we said—which was not to be wondered at—and as clearly had not seen men of our kind before. Like a very young child, she investigated the striking features of her visitors—the shining barrel of the gun.

Gorai she passed over with a glance. She had seen his kind before, I thought.

"What kind fellow this Mary?" I asked him.

Johnny Gorai shook his beflowered head vigorously. At the same time a crafty gleam crept into his faded eyes.

"What for Johnny Gorai know 'em good fellow Mary?" he asked in the *bêche de mer* which passed with him for English.

"Don't lie to me," I said. "You know 'em this fellow woman—or you've heard of her. Who is she?"

The old scoundrel understood me; but he pretended he did not. The strange

woman, he protested, was unknown to the Santo coast tribes.

"Talk to her, then," I told him.

Johnny Gorai clucked away at the girl, who watched him curiously. She made no response, yet I thought—and Stuart agreed with me—that she understood. It struck me that she might know what he said, without being able to answer. The old beggar amused her, for presently she burst into a peal of laughter in which Stuart joined sympathetically.

"She sees the humor in the chap's dress, I believe," smiled the lad. "Evidently naval uniforms are not the fashion in the mountains of Santo."

"How about the calico, then?" I asked him. "She must have traded that dress from the coast tribes. Yet she certainly isn't a native."

It was rather a puzzle, and we were long in solving it. Here was a girl, perhaps twenty years of age, perhaps more. She acted more like an animal of the forest than a human being. Yet she had no fear of us. We camped where we were that afternoon, making a good dinner of fruit, bread and tea. At the boy's urging, our visitor shared it with us, and I must say she did not need much coaxing.

Her table manners were original, but she did not mouth her food like Johnny Gorai. In fact she seemed more interested in us and what we did than in the meal. When it was finished we got out our pipes and the girl made herself comfortable on our blankets, watching us as she always did.

Johnny Gorai, who seemed ill at ease, came over to me and pointed at our visitor.

"No good this white Mary stop along here, Master Haskins," he said vehemently. "You send her away—eh? You send her along, plenty quick."

"Maybe," I answered. "And maybe not. We'd like a change from your company. Why shouldn't she stay?"

He would not say, except that it would be "plenty bad" if she did. The beggar knew something about her, something which he was unwilling to tell. And as I watched him, I began to realize what that was. Johnny Gorai was afraid of the companions of the girl, whoever and whatever they might be. He kept a keen outlook into the bush. I saw nothing. But once or twice the girl lifted her head attentively, as though she had caught sounds we did not hear. Later we came to know that her hearing was very acute.

The same thought must have been in the mind of Jack Stuart as in mine, for presently he turned to me.

"Do you think, Haskins," he said slowly, as if feeling for his words, "that this girl belongs to the people of Don Quiros? She might be a descendant of the white men who came here to found the new Jerusalem."

The idea had already crossed my mind.

"I don't think so, Jack," I answered. "In the first place it is hard to believe that a group of white men could have lived in the interior of Santo for nearly three hundred years without being heard of. And if members of the Quiros party are still alive and the woman is one of them, why is the sight of a white man strange to her?"

He was forced to admit the truth of what I said. Yet, like the boy he was, he did not like to give up his idea.

"She looks as if her parents might have been Spaniards, Haskins. And the rest of the party might have died."

"After dropping out of sight for nine generations?"

"Remember, they came to immolate themselves in the island—to found a kind of religious paradise."

"The coast tribes would have heard of them."

"Not if they shunned the interior."

Stuart stuck to his belief more obstinately because I did not share it with him.

"When you have lived below the line long enough to guess—you can't know—what's going on in the mind of an islander, Jack, you'll get to realize that a tribe of niggers is aware of everything that happens on an island."

"If she could only talk to us," he exclaimed and turned to the girl. She was gone.

During our talk she had slipped from the blankets into the shadows of the twilight bush. Undoubtedly Johnny Gorai had seen her go, but we had not. She had left us without as much sound as a

plantain leave falling to earth. Stuart stared. Then he whistled.

"To my mind, Jack," I told him, "Johnny Gorai is the one who can tell us about this girl. He has seen her or heard of her before. Likewise, her presence makes him uneasy. I don't think he is afraid of her, but of something about her. Get him to talk, old fellow, and he will solve your mystery."

With that I turned in, being tired. The last thing I heard before drifting off into honest slumber was the lad arguing with our wrinkled sinner, who was insisting he knew nothing about the young woman who had joined our party.

VII.

JACK STUART was awake before me, and I grumbled at making preparations for the day's march. It was a sullen, stifling morning, with the heat of a glaring sun dissipating the night's damp. Our canopy of lofty trees kept off the direct light of the sun, but underneath the branches the air was void of life.

In spite of this, the lad insisted on pushing ahead. We had calculated that we were then above the source of the Jordan, and he wished to make a circular cast across the hills. Johnny Gorai, like myself, was unwilling to go forward.

"Look here, Jack," I said firmly. "We haven't come across a trace of your missing city. If it ever existed, it is buried under this monstrous growth. We haven't a notion of where to go. Our food supply is half gone and——"

"But we can live on the stuff all around us," he protested. "Come, old man. We must give the Quiros city a fair trial—make a thorough survey of the hills hereabouts."

"We can't see a hundred yards ahead of us."

"If you and Johnny Gorai want to go back——" he said stiffly.

"You know blooming well I won't leave you, Jack," I sighed.

And then Mary dropped among us. I had christened her Mary after Johnny Gorai's first speech, having no means of knowing her real name. For that matter, I don't think she had any. And I say she dropped among us, quite truthfully. She did—from the branch of an overhanging tree, as silently as she had left us.

The face of the boy brightened at sight of the slim woman who smiled at him mischievously.

"Good morning, Mary," he said, with the gravity of an Englishman.

By way of answer she took a flower from her circlet and placed it in his hair. She did this smilingly, and by the simple action I understood that she claimed him for a friend. Actions mean much among people who live close to the earth. Stuart blushed. I felt rather sorry she had not honored me, also.

It was clear to me before long, however, that Mary's interest did not extend to me. She tripped along by the lad's side as we pushed ahead through the bush. Every now and then she touched the sleeve of his shirt, or his cartridge bandoleer curiously.

She was as artlessly happy as a kitten with a new playmate. And I don't think Stuart, in spite of his air of gravity, was much less pleased with her. She made a pretty sight, the sunlight playing across her bright face and her tangle of dark hair. And she was talking to him all the time, laughing and chattering like an excited bird.

Occasionally Mary would point out things among the trees which we did not see. Then Stuart would laugh at her, and she would skip at the sound of it. The girl was a child, playful and careless as an animal. It seemed to make no difference to her where we went. But it did to me.

"Look here, young man," I said, after a while. "If you want to walk through the bush in a circle you can. But it won't help you to find the Quiros city very much."

A squint at the sun had shown me that we were beginning to do just that. It was natural enough, as Stuart was leading, and his attention seemed to be taken up mostly by Mary.

He halted at that, with an embarrassed laugh. We three looked about, into the tangle of the bush rather helplessly, I fancy. The girl watched us curiously,

perched on a low limb of a breadfruit. I slipped my pack and sat beside her.

"I'm going to make a palaver, my lad," I told him. "It's time we tried to get some information from your comely flower girl.

"How?" he asked indifferently.

I placed the muzzle of my rifle gently under Johnny Gorai's nose ring. He had seen me insert a cartridge previously, and he winced.

"Look here, Johnny Gorai," I said plainly. "You do what I say. You make good fellow palaver along Mary, plenty quick. A big fellow bullet stops along this rifle. You do this, or you catch 'em bullet—understand?"

Where his own welfare was concerned our pilot and guide was quick of comprehension. An islander in those days had a whole-hearted respect for a gun, and had not yet learned how slow an Englishman is to shoot—judging others by themselves, I supose. I withdrew the rifle a foot from his facial ornament, and he began clucking to the girl.

Mary listened without much interest. Yet the fact that she listened showed that she understood much, if not all, of the islander's gibberish.

"What name stop along her?" I suggested.

Johnny Gorai clucked for a moment. Mary stared at him blandly.

"A misfire, old man," smiled Stuart, who was enjoying my irritation.

"What fellow tribe stop along her?" I demanded.

This time our interpreter's effort made an impression. The girl responded in a soft flow of sounds, as musical as the tinkle of a brook, and as meaningless to Johnny Gorai.

Then, accenting my observation with the gun muzzle, I inquired if there was a village of her people near at hand.

Mary flung out her shapely arms at that, in a gesture which plainly meant no such thing existed. Then she pointed to the trees, and drew her feet up under her on the branch, snuggling against the bole of the tree. It was pretty clear what she meant.

"If they are your new Jerusalem pilgrims, Jack," I said dourly, "they seem to have become tree climbers."

By painstaking work we got a certain amount of information from her. Mary was not alone in the interior of Santo. But there were no others of her kind. She lived with, and was provided for, by others. Who these others were, she did not make clear. They were certainly not the coast tribes, for they lived in the hills of Santo.

Her companions gave her food, attended to her wishes generally. They had brought her the calico which she had made into a dress. Mary would not take us to them. When Johnny Gorai asked her why, she pointed to the treetops, moving her hand quickly from branch to branch.

"What do you make of it?" Stuart asked me.

"It looks to me," I said slowly, "as if Mary's guardians were the tribes of the interior, who may or may not be dwarfs. Now we'll hear what Johnny Gorai has to say about it."

The rifle was called into play, and our pilot made a full confession. It seemed that the girl had been seen occasionally by men of the coast tribes. The young bucks had hunted for her a bit at first, until two or three had been found with arrows sticking from their throats. After that Mary had been let alone. She was watched jealously by the "small fellow boys" who held her in high esteem. She was nearly as adept as they at running through the trees.

"Long time," he said, "ship come along Santo. White man and white Mary go along hills altogether."

"That must have been the Quiros party!" cried Stuart. I stared at him blankly. How could that have been? It was hardly to be believed that white people had lived in the hills of Santo all these years. And Mary was not three hundred years old. Could she be a survivor of those who had come with Don Quiros?

A thought crossed my mind, of which I said nothing to Stuart. Later, it returned in greater force. But for the present the lad was filled with the idea of the Quiros city. He insisted on our pushing on.

To make greater speed, we gave portions of our packs to Johnny Gorai. We gave little heed to it at the time. But we had cause to regret it.

VIII.

BEFORE sunset we had covered a considerable distance, without, however, freeing ourselves from the tangle of forest. Mary kept up with us easily, slipping through the thickets where Stuart and I had to beat our way clear.

We saw the source of the Jordan below us, a small lake into which several freshwater streams emptied. The country was truly a paradise, luxuriant in growth and color. We were walking through one of the natural gardens of the earth, accompanied by the girl who seemed the embodied spirit of the beautiful place.

Halfway up a steep mountain slope we halted, Jack going on to get a view of our surroundings, he said, from the summit. It was beside one of the streams that ran to the lake and I was thirsty. I placed my rifle against a bamboo and kneeled, plunging head and arms into the delightful pool. Ten years of the South Sea Islands should have taught me better. But then every one forgets, once in a while.

I sat by the stream, allowing the sun to dry the moisture on my head and musing on the splendid handiwork of the Lord which fringed me in. It might have been several moments before I swung around, at a cry from the girl.

Mary was, perhaps, a hundred yards away. And she was struggling with Johnny Gorai. The wrinkled face of the islander was alight with evil. He had caught the girl's hair, and as I watched, he struck her on the shoulder.

She twisted strongly in his grasp, beating at his face. But the blow sent her to the ground. Johnny Gorai straightened at my startled shout, and leered.

I ran toward the two, wondering at the change which had come over the native. He was kneeling on the girl, and as I came nearly within arm's reach he picked up my rifle from the ground where he had placed it after taking it from the tree.

"You catch 'em bullet, you white fellow man," he chattered, taking hasty aim. His voice was thick, and I noticed that his eyes were inflamed. Even as he pointed the weapon at me, he swayed unsteadily.

Not until then did I recall that Captain McShea's gift of wine which we had not touched had been in the pack we gave the scoundrel. Yes, in those days, it was bad to make one mistake, such as letting your rifle out of your grasp. But I had made two simultaneously. Johnny Gorai was drunk, and therefore more dangerous than usual. And he had my gun, which, unfortunately, he knew how to work.

I was about to chance a rush, hoping that the beggar would score a miss with the rifle. I had a vague vision of Jack Stuart returning, if my rush failed of success, and receiving a bullet in his back, and of Mary at the mercy of our worthy pilot. Then I stopped in my tracks.

Johhny Gorai let my rifle fall from his hands. He swayed forward, fingers clutching his lean throat. Under his chin I saw the feathered end of an arrow projecting.

An expression of dismay crossed his evil face. Then his eyes opened staringly and he dropped full length to the ground. Mary sprung to her feet and ran swiftly into the bush.

After what had happened, I hardly blamed her for not wanting to stay. Still, I was sorry she had left me. My back tingled suggestively as I picked up the rifle and cleaned the dirt from the muzzle. The arrow had been sped silently and with great skill. From its position in the throat of its victim I guessed that the shaft had come from a tree.

Johnny Gorai was, of course, dying. I wasted no further attention on him. There was nothing visible in the trees around the spot. But I knew that the person who had sent our pilot to his last account would have no trouble doing the same to me. My rifle was useless against a hidden foe.

I sat down as quietly as I could and tried to keep my breathing at normal while I waited to see if the executioner had marked me for a second victim. Apparently he had not. I think Mary was

to thank for that. Probably she saved my life and Stuart's as well, for the "small fellow boys" who watched over her were angered at the attack on the girl, and judging by the fate of her suitors from the coast, cared little for human life.

When Jack came back, without obtaining any further information as to where we were in the mountains, I told him what had happened. We gave Johnny Gorai a burial of sorts and had dinner. Neither of us ate much. I have seen many men, white and black, go to their last account. But I never had to bury an islander before.

"Mary's friends," I told him, "are apparently not going to kill us now. But I do not think they have any love for us. With Johnny Gorai lost, we have as much chance of talking to Mary and getting information from her, as a wild pig of reading the Gospel. We haven't come across a sign of the Quiros settlement. I think you'll admit all this is true. And you'll start back to the coast with me to-morrow."

The boy was silent at that, looking up moodily to where the stars were appearing in the evening sky.

"Do you think she'll come back?" he said.

"It won't help matters if she does," I answered sharply. "And I'd be pretty careful about going near her, or putting my hand on her—if I were you. I don't want to bury you."

He sat up quickly and glared at me.

"Confound it, Haskins! I'm a gentleman."

"I know," I said, for my temper was none of the best just then. "But the beggars who act as bodyguard for our young lady are not apt to understand the difference."

"They are more likely to than you are," he growled.

We said nothing more, which was bad. The next morning was hotter, and our tempers did not improve thereby. That is often the way when two white men are isolated for a long time. I gave up trying to get the boy back to the river and the dugouts. And he treated me as if I were no better than Johnny Gorai.

It was becoming more and more clear to me that the boy was not as interested in the Quiros city as he pretended to be. Our daily marches became shorter. He walked with Mary, who rejoined us in excellent spirits the next day. I followed in the rear.

The boy was trying to make Mary understand him. For hours they would converse in the sign language, which is the same the world over. The girl was quick to perceive his meaning, and Stuart really made great progress. It got so they could communicate after a fashion.

"She has something to show me," he said once.

Not a word about Don Quiros or the new Jerusalem. I said nothing, and I think my silence troubled him. It was the second day after Johnny Gorai's death that the rain came. We sought for shelter and found a cave of sorts. We had little food.

Mary left us at the first downpour. But that night she returned, bringing with her the strange gift she had asked Jack Stuart to see.

IX.

IT was a Bible—or rather what was left of one. Mary slipped into the shelter and handed it to Stuart. We examined it by the fire we had kindled from some bamboo sticks. And it was no ordinary Bible.

All that remained of it were two worn leather covers, inlaid with tarnished silver and a dozen faded yellow pages of stiff paper. Water and age had almost obliterated the print. Stuart, however, studied the pages and turned to me triumphantly.

"Spanish," he cried. "And seventeenth century block printing. This belonged to Don Quiros."

Stuart knew more than I about books. Yet I saw that what he said was true. The heavy, black characters were those of two centuries ago. The covers were held together by massive silver clasps.

While I was looking at the book Jack Stuart was questioning Mary after the fashion the two of them had contrived. He told me what he learned, which was little. Mary had been given the relic by her friends, the hillmen of Santo. Where

they got it, she did not know. She had not, of course, any idea what it was.

Mary was pleased at the interest we showed in her gift. The warmth of the fire was grateful to her after her wetting, and she presently put an end to our inquiries by curling up beside it and going to sleep.

She slept quietly, a half smile on her full lips, light strands of her hair moving with her breathing. Stuart and I both watched her, for she made a pretty picture in our dismal shelter. I put a blanket over her, for the rain had made the cavern damp, and the lad nodded to me gratefully.

"Rather informal, isn't it, old man?" he asked awkwardly, for our quarrel was still fresh.

"I hope her friends don't take it into their heads to visit us," I answered.

He laughed and held out his hand.

"I've been a fool, Haskins, treating you the way I did. Hope you'll let me apologize."

I took his hand. Yes, Jack Stuart was a splendid chap, although inclined to have queer ideas. And we were lucky the quarrel had been no worse.

"Now you'll believe the Quiros expedition has left its traces in Santo," he said, eagerly. "This book was left by them."

"Yes and no," I admitted. "It most likely proves Don Quiros and his men came to Santo. And to my thinking it means they didn't live very long after their coming."

"Why?"

"They would have taken better care of the sacred book if they had. It bears evidence of neglect for years, if not centuries."

He stared moodily into the firelight, the strangeness of the thing heavy upon him. Here was an object that had been in the hands of the Spanish wanderers; given to us by a wild girl to whom it meant nothing. It puzzled me—the girl's having the book. But I glimpsed a reason for it.

The hillmen of Santo, generations ago, must have seen the Bible in the hands of the Quiros party. And the dwarfs had treasured it, when it came into their possession, believing it to be a "devil-devil" symbol, what we would call a talisman. And they treasured the girl Mary. It was natural, under the circumstances, that they gave her the book.

And Mary, being a woman, saw nothing desirable in the worn leather covers. Yet the hillmen had told her, repeating the tales handed down by their fathers, that it was a talisman. And she believed them. And, as a woman will, she gave it to Stuart, he being the man she loved.

Yes, there was no doubt that she loved him. Every action of the girl was a witness to that. I am a bachelor of a good many years; but I did not mistake the light in her eyes when she looked at him.

Stuart had fallen asleep where he sat. The rain had stopped. As the cavern was still damp, I put more bamboo sticks on the fire, and sat up with a pipe to pass the few hours until daylight. And I had plenty to think about.

Here was Jack Stuart, who, for all his saying that he stayed to find the Quiros city, thought of nothing but Mary. And here was the girl of the Santo forest who grieved every time she had to leave Jack, and flew back to him, almost literally, on wings.

Who was she? Where did she come from? I did not know—although at that time I had begun to have a suspicion. Jack Stuart did not know. She was no native. Even then, however, I knew that it would be useless to try to take her away from Santo. Have you ever taken a young bird from its nest? Or a fox cub from its thicket? If you have, you know the misery that fastens on your victim, and the sense of guilt which comes upon you.

The Lord has ordained that certain of His creatures may not be taken from their environment and live. Man has made bird cages and kennels. And I wonder sometimes if they are not a sin. Certainly civilized man has fashioned cages for women of other races.

Likewise, here was Mary, watched over by some vigilant tribesmen who had a nasty way of transfixing too-ardent suitors. And I had given my promise to McShea to look out for the lad.

It was rather a mess. I did not see my

way out of it. But, as usually happens, the matter was solved for me—although hardly in the way I expected.

I have a trick of remaining perfectly still when thinking very deeply. My pipe had gone out, and the fire had died to embers. Which, I think, saved me from Johnny Gorai's fate.

I had seen no movement in the mouth of the cavern, although I had been facing it. Yet within four yards of me on the other side of the fire was one of the hillmen of Santo. He had crawled in as quietly as a snake moves through water.

He was very slight in figure, small boned and with little flesh on his limbs. His body, naked except for a *lava-lava* of beads, glistened with oil, probably coconut. His small eyes darted unceasingly from the sleeping girl to Stuart and me.

For the sake of those who seek knowledge, I will say that the dwarfs of Santo are no more dwarfs than certain tribes in the interior of Africa, or the older races of Japan. They are merely exceptionally small, and being very timid, are so seldom seen that tales have sprung up about them. My visitor must have been fully four and three-quarter feet in height. He carried a slender bow, with an arrow fitted to its string.

My gun was leaning against the rock a foot behind me. I did not try to reach it. If the dwarf had intended to kill either of us, he could have done so easily before I saw him. If I made a movement I was pretty sure that the arrow he held would be in my throat before I touched my rifle.

So I waited, and saw him touch Mary gently. She wakened instantly and he gripped her warningly.

X.

WHAT passed between them I could not hear. They talked in whispers, very swiftly. The girl sat up, wide-eyed. The hillman lay beside her, watching me and the lad.

It was not hard to guess, however, what he was saying. Plainly he was urging her to leave the cavern, and she was refusing, although clearly alarmed. There was something like fear in the man's diminutive features, and he even tried to drag her away from the fire.

Mary shook his hand from her arm, and the hillman faded out of the cavern. I mean just that. Without rising from the earth floor, he disappeared. The girl sat where she was for a moment. Then she sprang to Stuart's side and touched his cheek gently. I could see her eyes grow soft as she did it.

The lad yawned and opened his eyes slowly, having slept heavily, as is the way of youth. Mary paid no attention to me. She began talking to Stuart rapidly, shaking him and pointing to the mouth of the cavern. He was wide awake now, and they began that curious pantomime which was their way of conversing together.

I replenished the fire and picked up my rifle, not wishing to be bush-whacked by another dwarf. For all they cared, I might have been back on the *Madeleine.*

Presently Stuart turned to me with a frown.

"Mary is frightened by something," he said. "And she wants us to go away from here. Says it's dangerous. What do you suppose is up?"

"Not being a mind reader," I grumbled, "it's hard to say."

With that I set about getting breakfact, while the two of them fell to talking—if you can call it that—again. She held his hand tightly, trying to pull him toward the cavern entrance, on tiptoe with eagerness, and her voice soft with love. Stuart looked at her smilingly.

"I can't make her out," he said to me. "Somebody has warned her to leave this spot. She knows what this danger is, but she can't make it clear to me. It comes along about every moon and the hillmen always flee. She goes with them, of course."

I thought of the scared dwarf who had visited us. Yes, the hillmen were undoubtedly afraid and the girl shared their fear.

"Let's breakfast, anyway," he said. "I'm uncommonly hungry."

That is always the way with an Englishman. Tell him he's to crawl into a

tiger's den and he'll ask for his breakfast first and complain because the tea isn't strong enough. Mary, however, had lost her appetite. She sat huddled up by Stuart, every now and then coaxing him softly while he stowed away a mess of tea and biscuits.

All the time I was busy thinking. There were plenty of dangerous things—more or less on Santo—not the least being the hillmen themselves. Snakes and fever, for example. Still, I could not figure out what Mary feared. It might be wild pigs—some of the boars have rather formidable tusks. But then the hillmen were tree climbers and would have no especial fear of pigs.

By the time we had finished the meal Mary was crying. Not sobbing noisily like a white woman, but silently, the tears running down her smooth cheeks. It stirred the lad mightily, and he put his arm around her, talking to her reassuringly. Whereupon she pulled his head down to hers in a close embrace.

I left the cavern. After all, Stuart's feeling for the girl was not strictly my affair. And I wanted to see what was going on outside the cavern.

Stuart joined me almost at once, Mary with him. It was broad day by then. There was nothing to be seen except the usual tangle of bush. It seemed to me, however, that on either side of the cavern the undergrowth was clear, as if a trail ran past the spot. I pointed this out to Stuart and he questioned Mary.

"She says," he interpreted, "that this is a kind of pass between two mountains, and the danger, whatever it is, is coming along here. She wants us to take to the trees with her."

"You can," I growled. "I feel safer here. You don't suppose it's the coast tribes?"

"They don't come into the interior."

That was true. I'd forgotten it for the moment. By this time Mary was almost frantic. Her cheeks were flushed and she was breathing at a rapid-fire rate. They say most women look ugly when they cry. Mary was prettier. Stuart watched her hungrily.

Why didn't he go with her? Well, I had said I would not, and of course Stuart refused to leave me. The branches near by were shaking strangely and I guessed the hillmen were hurrying by. I caught a glimpse or two of a brown body swinging from limb to limb like a monkey, at unbelievable speed.

Then Mary could stand it no longer. She threw down the old Bible—which she had brought from the cave—and fled away, pointing to the bush behind her. I heard her crying from the branches of a tree for a moment. After that a complete silence fell on the part of Santo where we stood.

The rustling in the trees had ceased. Even the cockatoos seemed to have left the grove. Stuart fingered his rifle with a queer smile.

"What do you make of it, old man?" he asked.

"Nothing," I told him. "Except that we had better keep our eyes open. It might be a big tree snake. They are sometimes as hefty as constrictors."

It had occurred to me that this was what the hillmen feared. I admit I was uneasy, standing there in the open space of the trail, looking down the sun-spotted vista of greenery. Stuart was silent for a long moment.

"Something is coming through the bush, old fellow," he said quietly after a long moment.

I was aware of it at the same time—a movement in the bushes some distance away. It was not loud, but it came toward us steadily, from the direction that Mary had pointed out to us.

Stuart and I both lifted our rifles. He kneeled in order to get a better rest. My eyes were glued to the green thicket, expecting to see the head of a snake slip through—or worse. My nerves are steadier than the average, I fancy. It only goes to show that a man can be worked up, given a little time to be afraid.

The bushes were shaking now. Stuart took careful aim and pressed the trigger. At the same instant I knocked his gun aside with my knee. It was fortunate I did so, for the boy was an accurate shot.

Through the bushes I had seen the head of a man. An old man, and a white man.

XI.

THE smoke from Stuart's shot was still eddying around us when the man stepped out of the thicket. We stared at him and he at us. I saw a very tall individual, lean and browned, with a white beard tangled with burs and thorns stretching over his bare chest. He was clothed literally in tatters, rags of garments, sacking and fibers that hung to his knees. He carried a bamboo staff.

"Ye are sinful men," he cried, in a voice resonant in spite of his age, "to shoot one who has done ye no harm."

Although his voice was strong, the words were blurred, almost mumbled. His keen eyes swept us as he leaned on his staff angrily. Stuart stepped toward him.

"I meant no harm," he said quickly. "We thought—we did not know you were there."

"Oh, aye," grunted the patriarch. "It is the way of sinful men to be quick to slay."

With that he approached us, glancing somewhat curiously at our rifles and the remnants of our packs. Stuart caught my eye and lifted his brows suggestively. But I did not think then, nor do I now, that Matthew Burnie—he told us his name presently—was insane. Stuart had not lived within the borders of Polynesia so long as I.

"You are an Englishman?" I asked, feeling for words.

"A Scot," he responded, slurring his words as before. Later, I knew it was because he had had no speech with white men for many years. "A humble servant of the Lord. Who might ye be?"

We told him our names. He seemed indifferent. Matthew Burnie was very old, and the old are not easily stirred.

"You'll take lunch with us, sir?" Stuart offered, feeling ill at ease in the presence of the man he had tried to shoot. Matthew Burnie considered his words, and the hair about his mouth moved in what might have been a smile.

"I have not partaken of such things for so long that it would not be well," he said simply.

His speech was straightforward and precise and the phrases he used were such as my father might have employed. He seemed to have little desire to speak. Yet when we questioned him he responded readily.

"How long have you been on Santo, Mr. Burnie?" I asked. I saw Stuart look at him attentively and knew that the lad hoped to learn something of the Quiros city.

"I have no means of knowing, sir," the patriarch informed me. "I was a man in the prime of life when I landed on the island."

"Why did you stay?" Stuart inquired.

"I had a reason."

"But you've been cut off from your fellows for years."

"Aye—but not from the hand of the Lord. His hand is in the far corners of the earth, even in the waters under the earth."

"There were some here before you, Mr. Burnie. Have you seen anything of the Quiros city?"

The old man meditated.

"Aye and no. I heard men speak of the Spaniard on the *Astrolabe*. I have seen no trace of the settlement in the hills of Santo, and there is little I have not seen."

I caught his arm.

"The *Astrolabe!* Then you were with D'Urville?"

"I sailed on his vessel to Vanikoro. When he left that island I felt the call of the Lord to bring the word of the Gospels to the heathen and I landed at Santo."

I thought of the words of Johnny Gorai. Here, then, was the white man who had landed from the ship "long time" before. Matthew Burnie was the missionary who had sailed on the *Astrolabe* and had not returned to Australia. But Johnny Gorai had spoken of a white woman.

"Your—your wife was with you, Mr. Burnie, at that time?"

"Aye," he said.

"She is here now?"

"The Lord has taken her to Him."

We were silent, Stuart and I. The calmness of the man belittled us. Yet we felt that much of his tale was still un-

told. The lad showed him the moldering covers of the book we had found. Matthew Burnie glanced at it inquiringly. When we explained what it was, he nodded slowly.

"They were men of another faith, aye, but Christians. No doubt they found comfort on the island. But they could not have lived long. Life is brief, sir, on Santo."

The statement of Matthew Burnie ended for us the idea of finding traces of the lost city. It was as I supposed—the men died off or were slain by the islanders, the settlement overgrown by underbrush. Matthew Burnie had not seen it. And he knew every spot in the hills of Santo. Our visit to Santo made this clear. The remains of the Bible we found are now at the Brisbane Museum. They are, I think, the last link of the Quiros legend.

XII.

MATTHEW BURNIE remained with us during the afternoon. He was quiet, with the tranquility of those who have lived close to the earth and who are meditating on the end of existence without fear. His habitation in the hills had been undisturbed by the coast tribes, and the hillmen, he explained, feared him because of his custom of singing psalms aloud.

"It is my habit every evening," he said slowly, "to lift my voice in praise of the Lord. No doubt they think I am mad."

Others than the hillmen would have called him mad. Yet not if they had seen the very austere face, lined and sallow. He had lived on fruit, yams, fish and the oysters that are found in mangrove swamps.

"No one has come to look for me," he observed, after we had sat in silence for a while, "because the coast tribes fear to tell of my presence. That is because they think the white traders will avenge Esther. I know not. Esther, who was my wife, was murdered by the coast tribes of Santo and eaten."

Stuart and I sought for words and were silent. The patriarch spoke calmly. Time had removed the bitterness from his sorrow. From time to time he lifted his head, listening to sounds in the trees near by. I heard them as well and I guessed that Mary was not far away, coaxing Stuart, after her fashion, to come away from the danger that was Matthew Burnie.

Clearly the girl had absorbed the fear of the hillmen for the missionary.

The tale of Burnie was soon told. He and his wife had landed among the tribe that we knew was Johnny Gorai's. They had been well received, and had passed months in some comfort. Esther had fallen sick, and once when he was away from her the savages had clubbed her to death. They had intended to do the same to him, for they did not wish word of the deed to reach the white men outside Santo.

At that time there had been a raid by the hillmen and some confusion, in which the missionary was left to his own devices. His misery had taken him to the hills where he had wandered several days. He had returned to the coast village, expecting to share the fate of his wife. Believing him mad, as no doubt he appeared to be at the time, they had spared him.

He had gone back to the hills. The coast tribes, he said, took care that he did not reach the shore or talk with any white men. But he had little desire to rejoin his own kind after what had happened. Instead he remained in the hill garden of Santo.

"I believe, sir," he said, "the hand of the Lord is nearer to us in the lonely spots of the earth than in the crowded marts of men."

XIII.

STUART and I had nothing to say when he ended. It is hard to be polite about the tragedies of life. To my thinking we try to forget them as soon as we can. Matthew Burnie seemed not to expect us to reply. He sat full in the glare of the sun, which did no more than give vitality to his thin blood.

"I have gone at times," he said, "to try to save the souls of the heathens who killed my wife. They will not heed me. It was hard at first—for two months before Esther died a daughter was born to

us. The Lord has given, and He has taken away."

He nursed the bamboo staff between his thin knees. There was no weakness in his lean back or the poise of his fine head. When Stuart leaned toward him he glanced at the lad inquiringly. Already something of his distrust of us had vanished in conversation, as is the way with those who are old.

"Your daughter!" Stuart exclaimed. "Was she killed by the islanders?"

Matthew Burnie shook his head slowly.

"That is not given to me to know. In my sorrow I tried to learn the truth. But the heathen, fearing my wrath, would not say. I have not seen the girl since I left her with her mother."

Stuart's eyes met mine. Matthew Burnie had had a daughter. Born perhaps twenty years ago. She had disappeared, possibly slain by the islanders, possibly——

"You said there was a raid by the hillmen at that time?" I asked.

"Aye. That is their way. They are a timid folk. I have tried to be friends with them in vain."

"Then," said the lad, "might not the child have been carried off by them?"

The patriarch considered this, stroking his beard.

"I once heard an islander tell that a white girl had been seen in the hills. It gave me great hope, and I praised the Lord. But I have looked and seen naught. I think the heathen meant to torment me."

I would have told the man slowly what we had seen in the hills—that Mary was alive and in most excellent health. There was little doubt in my mind that Mary was the child stolen from the coast village by the hill tribe. The hillmen did not seem to be cannibals. They were great thieves, however, and I have found many instances where children were stolen by such people. Especially might they take a white child which would be something of a curiosity.

"Did your wife—Esther—have dark hair and eyes?" blurted out the lad.

"Aye, that she had. Brown eyes, and hair a shade darker. There was French blood in her. She was as pretty as the morning flower."

He said this quietly, almost with an air of meditation.

"Man," cried Stuart, "your daughter is living! I have seen her, talked with her."

Matthew Burnie shook his head tolerantly. No answering fire showed in his deep-set eyes.

"She died with her mother, lad."

"But I have seen her. You know the islander fellow said there was a girl child alive in the hills."

"I have not seen her. She is dead."

I had looked for the man to be powerfully moved by the news he heard from the boy's lips, not realizing the strength of the idea bred into his mind by years of solitude. I added my word to that of Jack Stuart. For just a second the eyes of the old man fastened on me keenly. Then he returned to his musing.

"I'll get Mary," cried Stuart, springing to his feet, supremely confident that the girl could not be far away.

"Be careful, lad," I warned him, "of the hillmen. They will not let you set hand on her."

Matthew Burnie needed little persuasion to stay with me while Stuart departed on his search. The castaway, I found, had little interest in what had transpired away from Santo. He had lived in the hills for so long that the place had become an all-sufficient home. Although he did not say it, I understood that he had found solace in the silent beauty of the spot.

He said it was not strange to him that Quiros and the others had sought for their paradise here. It was a country, he said, as lovely as the shores of Galilee.

I have heard much about the spell of the islands. It has crept into the abominations which are guidebooks and tourists' schedules. Yet I know this much. I returned after an absence of several years to the islands. You can say that the spell was on me, if you like. But the garden of Santo had woven its tendrils around the heart of Matthew Burnie.

He would never leave the spot, he said. I suggested that it might have sorrowful memories for him. But he said that sor-

row has its claim upon us, and it is hard to leave a place where the last of our memories are.

Then Jack Stuart emerged from the bush, leading Mary by the hand.

How he persuaded her to come I know not, except that she would obey his least wish. She stared at Matthew Burnie with a round-eyed fear that made me smile.

"Here is your daughter," said Jack Stuart. "She was taken by the hillmen and brought up by them. When we came here she made friends with us."

Matthew Burnie got to his feet quickly and advanced toward the shrinking girl. His eyes glowed under their thick brows.

"She is a little afraid of you," said Jack Stuart. "She does not know you are her father."

The patriarch seemed not to have heard.

"It is Esther's face," he muttered, "aye, those are her eyes. How can that be?"

"This is your child," said the lad, smiling, and speaking as if he were talking to a child. He glanced at Mary reassuringly. I was afraid we would receive an arrow from her guardians.

It was a long moment that the two of them faced each other, the old man's countenance tense, and the girl still uneasy. She conquered her fear. It may be that the ties of blood are stronger than we know. Or the lad's voice, vibrant with love, may have calmed her.

Matthew Burnie took his child's hand and touched her face. She watched him wonderingly. She had seen him before only from a distance. Already she was at ease.

"The Lord is kindly," he said, and his voice quivered. Then—"Twenty years she has lived beside me and I knew it not."

Stuart and I felt decidely awkward. When the old man dropped to his knees to pray we walked away a short distance into the bush.

Hardly had we done so than Mary rejoined Stuart. She was smiling again and she put a flower into his hair as she had done several days ago. Youth passes lightly over the solemn moments of the aged.

XIV.

A WEEK passed and we were still in the garden of Santo. Matthew Burnie remained with us now. Stuart had managed to make clear to Mary that the old man was her father. It meant little to her, yet she grew to like the patriarch.

It was not a cheerful week for me. Here was the lad. head over heels in love with the girl, who only lived for his glance on her. Matthew Burnie saw this, and said nothing.

"I shall not leave Santo," he told me one night when we were watching the moonlight sift through the lacework of leaves overhead, and Mary and the lad were chattering a short distance away. "I shall die here, where Esther died."

"And Mary?" I asked, for he had grown to call her that.

He did not reply for a long time.

"She would fare ill if she went from here," he said, and his deep voice showed that he was moved.

"I'm not so sure," I replied, although I knew he was right. "Jack has taught her a dozen words of English. She learns quickly. In Australia——"

"She would not be happy. Twenty years of life cannot be done away with. The hand of the Lord has placed her in Santo."

I said something about living on the schooners among the islands, for I knew that Jack Stuart loved her, and being the kind of man he was, wished her for his wife.

"I know that is the truth," said Matthew Burnie firmly. "A flower cannot be cut and kept alive in a vase, sir. Mary must not leave Santo."

That night Jack Stuart told me he had heard what we said, and asked if I believed as the missionary. I could not lie to Jack. I told him that books have been written about people who have lived in the wild returning to civilization. Yet it always works sorrow with them. Mary Burnie might not even live, if she were taken from Santo, to the English climate and cities.

The boy said nothing, going away alone for a walk. As I have said, he was little

inclined to speak his feelings. And Burnie made no effort to influence the lad, believing rightly or wrongly that the problem was out of his hands.

"But I have already taught her some simple words," remonstrated the lad the next day. "And she understands half what we say."

"Nature has made her, lad," I said, "and she cannot be changed. Mary must not leave Santo."

The girl seemed to guess what was in my mind. She did all she could to keep Jack Stuart from me. I think if she had known what I told the lad she would have had her friends the hillmen send an arrow my way. Yet I did the only thing I could. I had promised McShea I would bring the lad back with me.

By that time McShea's schooner must have been off Santo two or three days, if he had waited. I saw that there was no good in lingering—a great deal of harm in fact.

Matthew Burnie passed his days quietly, eating the food we got for him. I noticed that Mary brough us quantities of fruit and yams with an occasional roast pig that she had certainly not contrived to catch and guessed that her friends had not forgotten her—and that they still visited the coast villages.

But the tranquillity of the hills of Santo did not lessen my desire to take Jack Stuart away with me. I felt like a brute when I urged him to come, for the three of them seemed completely happy.

"You must not take the girl away, Jack," I told him one night during a heavy rain. "And the longer you stay, the harder it will be to leave."

He went for a walk that night in the rain. At dawn the next day he routed me out of my blankets.

"Take your gun and some food, old man," he said soberly. "We are going back to the coast."

As I said, the lad was a gentleman. That isn't the word, however. He was a thoroughbred. Said we would leave without disturbing Mary and her father, who occupied a cavern adjoining ours.

Yet we did not succeed in escaping the girl. She was at Jack's side before we were out of the clearing.

"We are going for a hunt, Mary," he said. Then he whispered to me to drop the food I was carrying, for she was staring at it suspiciously. She let us go at that, watching us out of sight. That was the first and only time I heard her speak English.

"You come back?" she cried after us.

Jack Stuart choked. He waved his hand to her, and we passed out of sight. We traveled fast down to the Jordan and the dugouts. I don't think either of us spoke during the trip which we made in two days, aided by the current.

We found McShea waiting.

That was the last I saw of Santo. We took Jack Stuart back to Maryborough. The lad was moody during the trip, but it was his way to be quiet, and beyond dosing him up with quinine, McShea paid him no attention.

That cruise was my last as government agent. I had to go to England and during my absence the labor trade was given up rightly

As I have said, I returned to the South Seas eventually. Few stay away for long. I chartered a schooner at Maryborough, and was lucky enough to sign on McShea as skipper. He had been knocking about, since the trade was given up, doing some pearl trading and odds and ends. He grunted when I told him all I wanted was to get out to the islands again.

The first night out, with the old spell of the stars and the night sea upon me, I asked after my old friends.

"Where is Jack Stuart?" I asked.

McShea spat over the side and took time to light his pipe. He was ever a dour soul.

"Dead, most like," he said.

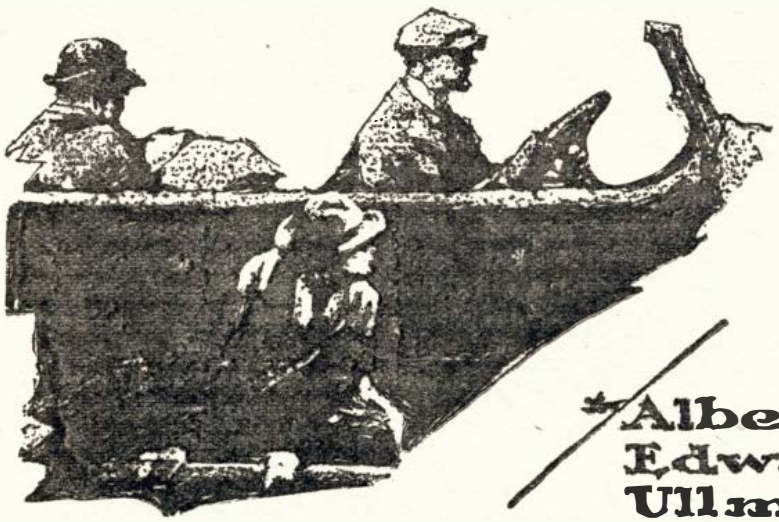
"How?" I inquired.

"Just after you sailed for London, he bought a small schooner and left for the islands. He dropped out of sight, since."

McShea went on to say that the schooner had been found half wrecked off Santo and the lad had probably been massacred by the islanders.

"Perhaps not," I said, remembering the two we had left in the hills of Santo. And I think I was right.

A Woman's Weapon



The Petticoat Boss No. XIII

By Albert Edward Ullman

A WARM heart, a clear head, a ready tongue, and the happy faculty of doing things without fuss soon make Rosie Maroney a power in municipal affairs. At eighteen, a stenographer for old Judge Reese, she outwits the political boss of Belleville and lands a city job. Cronin, the boss, rules by right of craft and graft, and rarely misses a trick in the game. Rosie has a fine feminine scorn of crooked methods, but even the boss cannot teach her anything when it comes to getting results. She never lets her ideals of what things ought to be interfere with her shrewd, practical sense of what things are. An inveterate busybody, when it is a matter of seeing justice done, Rosie finds herself up against the intrenched forces of viciousness and privilege familiar to every community. Though not lacking in the charms of her sex, Rosie claims no special consideration on that account. She has no time for "isms," but by race and temperament she is a born fighter for what is right and human.

DETECTIVES Wright and Hurley made their unobtrusive way through that part of Belleville known as the Tenderloin, two clean-built, smooth-shaven young men, sans square toes, sans derby hats, sans rubber heels. Politically strong under a civil-service system where keen headwork had begun to replace strong arms, they had grown a little sleek in pleasant office details; perhaps their wits were quicker at intrigue than at action.

"Well, I guess we've sewed things up to please the old stiff," said the latter of the two, as they waited at the corner for a car to take them to headquarters.

"Don't know about that," answered his companion dubiously, "Barney's been catching the devil from the mayor's office about this business—and you know, Hurley, he doesn't like the pair of us any too much."

"He gave us the detail, didn't he?"

"Sure!" agreed Wright. "Appointed us a dope squad! But you never can tell what is going on in that bone head of his."

"Well," breathed the other easily, as the car hove into sight, "all I have to say is that he'll not find an ounce of the stuff planted in the regular places if he turns the whole force loose."

"That's right," agreed Wright with a knowing smile. "It was some clean-up, wasn't it?"

"You said it," opined the taller man, as they swung aboard the car and settled down unnoticed among the passengers, as ordinary and businesslike a pair as ever melted into a crowd.

Though they spoke in undertones on the way uptown, an occasional word of their refrain showed that it had to do with the derelictions of the department in general and the head of the department in particular.

Between these two sharp-faced, slim-built young men and their rough-and-

ready superior there stood a gulf of years, for Chief Barney Quinn was a survivor of the good old days when the third degree was administered by officers in need of exercise, and a man held down his beat until his nightstick broke—and then trusted to handcuffs as a substitute for brass knuckles. He belonged to a distant decade, they felt, a decade when stool pigeons were wont to clutter up the corridors about police headquarters—when a man didn't waste his time shadowing crooks, but hammered his information out of some shuddering denizen of the underworld and then went out and got the criminal—while they were satellites of the modern system, a system of card indexes, finger prints, morning show-up, and a third degree where you had to use your wits instead of your fists.

Quinn was in his office writing out some report when they crossed the outer room—they could see that as the green baize doors swung open and shut to let out a subordinate. The chief was sprawled over the desk, his full-jowled face a deep crimson from his exertion, the end of his tongue protruding from a corner of his mouth under the grizzled, rusty mustache, his thick fingers hiding the penholder.

"It's a pick he ought to be handling—not a pen," Wright growled under his breath.

"If he didn't have enough low-down stuff tucked away in that bone head of his to blow up the organization, he would be swinging a pick, or driving a truck——" Hurley checked himself as the door swung open before them.

"Afternoon, chief!" both men saluted in unison.

From behind the wide, polished oaken desk the police chief acknowledged the salute with a heavy, careless gesture such as a trained bear might make, while he favored them with a keen look from beneath shaggy brows.

"Be wit' you in a minute, boys," he said, sprawling over the desk once more while he laboriously added his signature to the paper before him. Then he straightened up with a grunt. "And what have the gold-brick twins got to report?" he demanded with a heavy humor that caused the two young detectives to shift resentfully.

"The town's as tight as a drum," said Hurley, while his partner nodded vigorously.

"Is ut now?" asked the chief in a flat voice.

"Yes," spoke up Wright, a look of half-concealed resentment in his eyes. "There isn't enough stuff loose to put a baby to sleep."

"Well, now, that's what I call fine," complimented the big man, "and ut's a nice lot of dope you must have gathered up."

"Not so much," admitted Wright, his tone a little weaker.

"And how is that?"

"I think, chief, the tip must have gone around," the young detective defended. "Though we raided a hop joint and caught a couple of peddlers——"

"There was no tip that came from this headquarters," bellowed the chief suddenly, and then stopped. "Outside of Mayor Galway and the two of you," he went on in a significant tone, "there was no one wise to th' move." He swallowed with an effort and his eyes glared. "No, there was no tip-off for them who sell dope to wimmin and teach childer to sniff the coke——"

The trilling of the telephone interrupted him. With one hairy hand he pulled the instrument toward him. Then his bulletlike head bent over the transmitter as he spoke.

"Yus, show the lady in," he ordered after listening for a moment. "This might interest you," he added with a dark look at his two subordinates. Then he rose clumsily to greet a pink-faced, determined young woman who swung through the green baize doors with a nervous stride.

"Miss Ma-roney," he said, his head ducking toward the men. "I've asked Detectives Wright and Hurley"—he rolled the names from his tongue—"to remain so they could hear a little more of what you told me over the phone this afternoon."

"Are these men members of the drug squad you formed two weeks ago?" asked the girlish city auditor, after a quick glance at the pair.

"They are," answered the chief of police.

"Then all I have to say," flashed Rosie, "is that they have failed to stamp out the drug evil so far. The girl I told you of," she went on in a hard voice, "has managed, despite her mother's watchfulness, to obtain cocaine on three different occasions during the past week."

"Then she must have gone across the river——" stated the discomfited Hurley.

"She did nothing of the kind," retorted the city auditor forcefully. "At no time was she missing for more than fifteen minutes. The first time she slipped out of the house, the second occasion she evaded her mother while marketing downtown, and the last time she leaped from a moving street car not a block from this very building. And each time," she went on in a voice fraught with meaning, "she returned or was discovered under the influence of the drug, and more of the same in her possession."

During this speech from Rosie Maroney both Hurley and Wright treated themselves to supercilious smiles, but the burly police official merely shoved his grizzled, cropped head a little forward with a bull-like movement and stared intently at the flushed face of the girl.

Hurley was the first to break the silence. "She got it at none of the regular places," he asserted.

"I don't care where she got it," flared Rosie. "The fact remains that she would be getting it now if she were not under lock and key in her home."

While Quinn said nothing, it was evident from the quick, sidelong movement of his small eyes that he was observing the two detectives. Finally he turned with that same bull-like thrust of the head.

"Out of th' room, th' two of you, and on th' job if you want to hold it," he ordered in a rasping tone. "I would have words wit' Miss Maroney."

"Those two young dicks," he added confidentially, as the detectives left the office, "are either fools or worse. They let the tip get out!"

Rosie said nothing, but the look in her eyes inspired the chief to further confidences.

"This civil service is the ruination of them," he opined. "You can't discharge them wit'out such a trial as a defaulting bank president might have." He wagged his head vigorously. "Well, I've been waiting to show up some of these young smart Alecks in our new de-tective bureau for some time," he continued, with a shrewd look at her. "And I'm thinkin' that I'll just try a hand meself."

"That's just the thing, chief," she encouraged. "You can't do any worse"—she smiled mischievously—"than these young dicks."

"'Tis no job, I'm a-thinkin'," he observed, "compared to other days. I remimber th' time now—and you was a tot then, young lady—when I went out to cop old Ching Lee, the hop king. He had a hand laundry, did Lee, but little of the washee-washee did he do. Why, the smell of the stuff—the opium," he explained, noting the puzzled expression on the girl's face, "was so thick you could cut it wit' a knife. A bad one was that Chinaman, but I brought him in—a copper had to in them days. And sure he shoved a rod under me nose before we started to mix it up," he ended in the confident belief that he was lightly entertaining his visitor, "and th' thing went off wit' him tryin' to drill me, the slant-eyed snake, and I had to clout him alongside of the jaw mebbe two or three times before he gives in."

"I think you're right, chief," said Rosie; "a good man, a man who is on the level, can stamp this horrible evil out." Her eyes flashed dangerously. "I only wish I were in your shoes."

"You wouldn't now," he grinned, "if you knew how much my feet hurt me. I'd have to use a flivver to follow a man nowadays." Then his tone sobered. "I would like to have a word wit' that girl—mebbe we could get a line from her," he added craftily.

"I don't think you can," Rosie answered slowly, "as long as she is suffering from the drug or the craving for it." She hesitated. "If Mary Conor was her own sweet self," she added in a pitying

voice, "she would be the first to expose such devils. She's a good girl, chief."

"And so are you, my dear," returned the veteran police official huskily, "and the devil is afraid of a good woman."

"I don't know about that, chief," remarked Rosie with a forced smile as the interview ended. "I know I have trouble making him keep behind me."

II.

WHILE Rosie Maroney had heard the usual tales of the drug evil and its addicts, its terrors had never been brought home to her until that evening when young Wesley Saunders had come pounding at her door to lead her to the Conor tenement, where Mary, the sweet, tender, pretty Mary of her school days, lay a white and writhing thing on the little plush sofa. Mary, whom she had loved for her very helplessness, had looked at her with stark and staring eyes, her lips ghastly and twitching, her thin voice making the whining noises of some caged and tortured thing, while young Wesley, the love light shining through the horror in his eyes, hovered over her. And a captive and tortured creature she was, for the drug vampire was tearing at her very nerves with its cruel talons, besieging the ear of its victim's mind with its never-ceasing calls, leaving her in a delirium of desire.

It was a sight that almost stopped the beating of Rosie's heart, and it was long after she had summoned her old friend, Doctor Victor Metcalf, from Audubon Hospital, and that energetic practitioner had ministered to the raving girl, that the city auditor was anything like her normal self. Then she learned from the lips of the medical authority things that had hitherto been undreamed by her, things that a short hour before she would not have believed possible in this world, and she learned from his quiet questioning of the mother and young Wesley the pitiful story of Mary Conor's plight.

It must have started, Mrs. Conor thought, after the girl had been injured in a collision between excursion steamers. In any event, it was not long after Mary had left the hospital—she should have known better than to leave her child in such an institution, wailed the mother, for had not her husband died in one?—that the girl had begun to act strangely. This Mrs. Conor had attributed, as did Mary's fiancé, young Wesley, to the shock to her nerves. One moment she would be dull and listless—yes, that was it!—and a moment later a creature of joy and brightness.

These changing moods, at first infrequent and remarked with no alarm, began to occur at such regular intervals and so often that the mother was at last frightened. And that occasion but a few evenings before, when the three of them had sat in the parlor, a storm raging without, and Mary had aroused from one of her dull and listless spells to announce that she was going out, was the evening of their awakening. Despite the protests of mother and sweetheart, despite their hands held out in gentle restraint, the weak and slender girl had thrust them aside with a strength that seemed unbelievable and dashed out into the downpour before they had recovered from their astonishment.

Though young Wesley had dashed after the girl, she had eluded him, but when he returned to the Conor flat, wet and bedraggled, it was to find a merry, laughing Mary making light of his appearance and his perturbation. And then had come the last attempt, although the girl had not succeeded in altogether eluding the watchful Wesley this time. True, she had disappeared for ten minutes, but he discovered her as she rounded the corner returning to her home, nervously sniffing at something she held in her hand.

The young man was by no means as guileless as the mother, and his strong grasp seized Mary's shaking hand in his own. From her clasp a paper, containing a mite of powdered substance, fluttered to the ground, and the next instant the girl had flung herself on the sidewalk in an attempt to recover it. Thwarted in this, the hapless girl was seized with convulsions until the young man, with such aid as the frantic Mrs. Conor, now on the scene, could render, managed to get the struggling Mary back to the little

flat. Her feverish request, whispered in his ear, whispered in a lucid moment when her mother had dashed after a glass of water, had revealed to him the terrible hold that the drug had already gained.

All of that night Rosie had sat at the bedside of the girl, following the physician's orders, watching this mumbling, tossing victim of the curse of cocaine. They had pleaded with Mrs. Conor to permit her removal to the hospital, but that good woman had almost lost her head at the bare suggestion; so it fell to the city auditor's lot to hold that vigil until Doctor Metcalf arrived in the morning to renew his ministrations. Of nurses neither would the mother hear any more than of the dreaded hospitals—she would nurse her child, herself—and the weary Rosie had taken her leave with the physician to plan the best thing to be done under the circumstances.

Thrice the wretched girl had escaped from Mrs. Conor during the second week of her treatment, which embraced gradually reduced doses of morphia and a short walk in the fresh air. Mary's docile actions during the first week, when the doses were sufficiently large to hold the victim to some extent, had caused the distracted mother to be overconfident of her ability to manage the girl. Of course, the treatment had been set at naught by these occurrences, and the resistance of the victim weakened, but now that Mary was under restraint and closely guarded every hour of the day and night—for a cousin had come to relieve the mother and young Wesley—Rosie was confident that the doctor's treatment would end in saving the patient.

For five days, now, Mary had been undergoing the treatment without any interruption, and Rosie was returning from the office of Chief Barney Quinn in the hope that she might elicit some information from the girl as to where she had been able to procure the drug so readily. Behind her stalked a man from headquarters, for the city auditor was convinced that she had been followed to and from the Conor home for the past two days.

As she mounted the dingy flight of stairs leading to the little flat the man took up his post on the other side. Her knock at the door brought the cousin, and then she entered the bedroom, to behold Mary gay, laughing and chattering like a magpie with her delighted mother. One glance at the girl told Rosie that something was amiss, and she was about to summon Doctor Metcalf when the heavy tread of the physician sounded along the hallway. A glimpse of his face, as he caught sight of the girl, confirmed Rosie's worst suspicions.

For a moment the doctor studied the chattering girl, while he felt her pulse, and then he dropped her wrist and turned to the two womenfolk.

"Why did you allow her to go out?" he demanded sharply.

"Go out?" echoed Mrs. Conor vacantly. "Why, the blessed dear ain't never been out of the bedroom—and she feels so much better, too."

"Then who has been here?" he asked after a glance at the frank, open face of the cousin.

"Why, only an old friend of Mary's—what was his name, dearie?" she queried, with a pleased smile at the daughter.

"I—I——" Mary's gaze shifted nervously, her joyous look was succeeded by one of cunning—"I don't remember," she lied.

Doctor Metcalf said nothing, but drew the startled Rosie into the narrow hallway.

"We must get this poor girl out of here," he muttered hoarsely. "Some one has given her cocaine!"

III.

"CHARLIE THE COKE" no longer followed his regular drug-peddling route, a route which took in the back rooms of the saloons in mid-afternoon. Though his adroit methods of slipping the dope to purchasers and of getting their money in return—a game involving dexterous sleight of hand for both operations—as well as his ability to spot the "signals" of drug addicts, had earned him the sobriquet which placed him in the front ranks of his evil kind. He had abandoned the old methods for a new

one, made necessary by the changed conditions.

For years Charlie the Coke had had caches for the peddlers' "decks"—little paper parcels containing various-priced quantities of the drugs—and tubes and bottles, but word had been received, and a word he dared not disobey, to abandon all these until the police hue and cry was over. These "plants" for the drugs provided so that the peddler would never have to carry any of the "stuff" on his person, were usually placed ingeniously in the washrooms of the saloons, with the knowledge or connivance of the keeper of the saloon, or the head bartender, who got a "rake-off" for extending this "planting" privilege. They were the result of long and painstaking work upon the part of the dope distributer, and he was loath to give them up, but orders were orders.

After all, he was but the ill-paid tool of a greater and far more evil scoundrel, as well as victim of the very drugs he peddled, and he lay off the route until his master summoned him to follow another avenue that would lead to the drug fiends now clamoring for the stuff. True, this method reduced business to a minimum, and, while prices were higher, Charlie did not eke out much more than enough to pay for the rather large quantity of the drugs he required for personal consumption.

Something of this the ghoul of a man must have been thinking, as he walked along the thoroughfare crowded with seekers after dubious pleasure, for his pallid lips moved as he talked to himself and his faded eyes held the look of one hunted. That many knew Charlie the Coke was evident from the constant nods aimed in his direction as he passed —from a loudly dressed parasite, a sunken-faced lookout for a gambling den, a pair of wide-shouldered, big-footed patrolmen, stationed on duty in this free-fight zone, and here and there a slinking dope fiend who signaled him or sought to reach his side with a whining whisper for some form of oblivion-begetting drug.

Not to one of them did the peddler give heed or recognition this evening. Instead, he made his way through this artery of the underworld until his slouching feet turned into a dark side street. As he passed a lone street light a block away, his pasty face was averted, and his gait hurried. After that his step seemed to falter until he came to a halt in front of a neat brownstone house. For an instant the peddler hesitated while he cast a darting glance about, and then he let himself through a gate of iron grille-work and beat a light tattoo upon a basement door.

Five minutes later Charlie the Coke stood in the presence of one who was evidently the master. And if the man's face was pasty and his eyes dull, the master's face was ghastly and his eyes almost colorless. It was like some death mask, composed and set, and even his voice seemed dead as he addressed the peddler.

"You're late," he said in a monotonous undertone.

"I know it, professor," defended Charlie, "but I had to be careful, you know."

"I suppose so," remarked the master in the same listless tone. "And how did things go?"

"No better'n yesterday, professor," answered the peddler apologetically, his eyes fixed nervously upon the other's face.

Not an expression came into those eyes of the master, that might have been albino but for the absence of pink; not an expression came to move the set and passive features. "And how is that?" he queried.

Though the question was directed at him in the same dead and listless tone, Charlie the Coke plainly showed some apprehension, some fear of the speaker. "Well, you see, professor," he offered weakly, "I can't reach them all the new way and—and—the bulls are on the job for fair, now. Why, the chief, hisself, is on the job, they tells me."

"You don't mean Quinn?"

"Yes, I do," insisted Charlies the Coke. "I see him meself to-day in that tin lizzie of his, beatin' it away from the Casino."

For a moment the other man remained absorbed in thought. "It looks dangerous," he said, and then paused. "That one case," he added, "may lead to the ruin of the business."

"I thought she was fixed."

"Only temporarily. If she should recover to any extent I think that Quinn could make use of her. It was a mistake," he continued, "my having anything to do with her."

"I thought she would make good peddlin' the stuff," reminded Charlie, "specially among the dolls, professor—and you did, too!"

"Well," came the impersonal reply, "she refused—she was stronger-willed than we thought—and that was your and my mistake." He stopped as if to mull over the matter while Charlie the Coke watched him with a fascinated eye. "Yes, something must be done."

Though the words were uttered in the same monotonous undertone, they seemed to bring a light of fear to the peddler's eyes.

"And what is that, professor?" he faltered.

"That is for me to decide, and you to do," come the quiet reply.

IV.

FOLLOWING that discovery in the modest Conor flat, Rosie Maroney had applied herself to the running down of the drug ring as if her own life were the object at stake. That such a monstrous thing existed—even flourished—and that its head was fearful of what revelations the girl might make, she was fully convinced. The visitor—the mysterious friend who had given Mary cocaine at that most critical period—had been no other than the one Chief Quinn suspected of being the leader of the drug traffic. There was no need for Rosie to repeat the description of the strange-appearing caller that she had gleaned from Mrs. Conor, for the veteran police official was on his feet with a muttered oath before she had half finished it.

"Ut's the professor—the dirty dog!" he shouted.

"Who?" she demanded.

"Weir—Doc' Weir," he explained. "He's a dope, himself, and was a physician once, before they cast him out. I—I've been after that bird these many years," he continued sputteringly, "and, by heavens, he'll be my meat now or me name's not Barney Quinn!"

Forthwith the burly chief had set out—in his flivver, as he had threatened—and applied all his great energy to the task of getting the goods on the mysterious professor. Many an ex-convict did the chief interview, many a helpless wight of the gutter did he drag into the car with his heavy hand, but at the end of a month he had to confess that he was no more advanced than at the start.

Rosie, too, had been indefatigable during this same period, and when the two compared notes it was to learn that but few clews had rewarded their tireless search. True, the chief was concerned with a number of packages that had entered the Weir house, as well as a gray car which had made several appearances at its door, but he seemed to drop this aspect as time went on.

One thing cheered the two of them, though, and that was Mary Conor's gradual recovery. The girl had been removed to the little cottage occupied by Rosie and her widowed father—*not* to a hospital because of the frantic entreaties of the mother—and there Doctor Victor Metcalf had resumed his treatment. The girl became incoherent at times and the struggle was on. From that time on a nurse and the cousin began to stand watch over the victim, twelve hours for each woman, unless relieved by Rosie.

Never did the plump and pink-cheeked Rosie want to see such a sight again. Like a mute she sat for nights waiting for the arrival of the supreme crisis which would reveal whether Mary Conor was to recover from that which was worse than death.

Then came the turning point, the crisis, and Mary Conor passed through a land of drug dreams into the world of sunlight again.

"It's all a question of will now," stated the doctor, as he walked to the gate with Rosie, "and I think the little girl has that. You see," he added at sight of the city auditor's swimming eyes, "she started as an unconscious victim of drugs and grew into it because the temptation was put in her path. All that need be done now, in my opinion, is to keep her away

from that temptation until her will—and body—both grow in strength."

Something of this did Rosie tell Chief Quinn, and that official was noticed to perk up immediately.

"And have you learned anything from her yet?" he demanded.

"No," Rosie admitted. "The doctor did not think it advisable to broach the matter to her. However, if she touches on the subject, herself, he thought it would be all right to question her."

And with that Barney Quinn had to be content while he returned to the task of tracing the drug trail to the elusive professor—and showing up the young dicks—with redoubled fury.

It was now dark, and she set out for home at a vigorous pace. It was a good, stiff walk of two miles, and when she turned the corner nearest her home, with swinging arms and color heightened by the exercise, she was breathing hard. She had traversed another rod at the same swinging pace when she was brought up stock-still by the sight of a chugging gray car in front of the Maroney cottage. Even as she looked she was galvanized into action by another sight, the sight of two men half dragging, half carrying the muffled figure of a weakly struggling girl toward the car.

With a gasp of dismay Rosie took in the purport of that scene and the next instant she was dashing in the direction of the auto. When she was within a dozen feet of the car, it started with a jerk, turned with a whir, and was bearing down on her. Only her agility saved the city auditor, and that same agility served her in leaping onto the running board of the machine.

For an instant the driver looked back over his shoulder, and then the voice of the man holding the struggling figure of the girl in the rear seat spoke up.

"Go on! Go on!" it cried. "T' hell with the skirt."

On two wheels the gray car took the next corner and then continued its mad career at a mile-a-minute clip until the city lights were left behind.

"I guess you'll be glad to get off of this when we stop," yelled the man who held the figure of Mary Conor in his arms.

Another mile they sped at this reckless rate, and then there came a slight hissing noise, followed by a report like that of a revolver.

With an oath, the driver looked backward and then brought the car to a grinding halt. At the same moment the man in the rear seat abandoned the now unconscious figure of Mary Conor and attempted to seize the hand of Rosie, the hand nearer the rear tire. A shriek of pain followed the attempt, and the ruffian drew back, holding his shoulder in a clutching hand.

For the first time then did any of the actors in this strange scene become aware of a new arrival, a small car which came to a rattling stop but a few yards away.

"Hands up, me buckos!" roared a raucous voice, and Rosie turned to behold Chief Quinn looming up in the road—thick-bodied, thick-necked, with the inevitable square-toed shoes. In one hand he held a bulldog revolver and he was breathing like some giant porpoise out of water.

In front of that formidable figure and that redoubtable weapon the two cowed men permitted the handcuffs to be snapped on them and the chief's massive hand to search them for weapons.

"I knew this gray car would lead to something," Barney Quinn breathed heavily as he turned to Rosie, engaged in reviving the unconscious Mary. "I was just in the nick of time!"

"You wouldn't have been," she returned shortly, "if it wasn't for my hatpin working on that rear tire!"

"Wot's that?" inquired the chief as he bent down to look at the blow-out. "Wot! Wot!" He sniffed the air suspiciously and then drew out an old Barlow knife, which he proceeded to plunge into the rubber with a ripping noise. "Holy Moses!" he gasped. "And this is the place they've been carryin' the dope! Fillin' the inner tube with it," he went on, "and a neat job of vulcanizing the rascals made of it."

He turned to look up at Rosie, who was supporting the revived girl.

"I've hooked the professor this time!" he chortled.

"Yes," answered Rosie dryly, "on a bent pin!"

Charlie the Coke sat in a lonely cell, the picture of despair.

"Overdose nothing! The professor never made that mistake," he complained bitterly. "He did it a pu'pose, that's what he did, the minute he heard I was pinched! No, he couldn't stand the gaff." Here the peddler stopped and felt his arm painfully. "Lions mebbe," he opined, "and Gatlin' guns mebbe, an' tigers mebbe, but never no woman, not even baby ones, for mine."

Rosie will be with us for the last time in our next issue, out February 25th, 1919.

Synopsis of Previous Chapters.

BARBARA FAWN, a young girl of Spanish extraction, repudiates a claim to a large tract of Florida land made in her behalf by her unscrupulous guardian, who is also her uncle. She declares the land belongs to the Seminole Indians. There is a conspiracy to exploit the claim by real-estate sharks. Richard Brant is a government agent who seeks to protect the Indians. Bertram Jade, one of the conspirators, is the leader of a gang of outlaws. Barbara is brought by her uncle into the Big Cypress Swamp on his yacht, and is met there by another boat carrying the man her uncle wishes her to marry. Jade seeks a share in the real-estate deal, and plans, with his gang, to create trouble with the Indians.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LAUREL AND WILD FIG.

BRANT then and thereafter was getting a gradual survey of some of the things that had happened to the girl herself since last he had seen her. He could merely harden himself—that was all—harden himself against this other sort of a blow, as he had already hardened himself against Jade's blows and insults. At present he was helpless. He took cautious note of this—not without the lurking hope that he could free himself, right matters without too great delay. But, wounded as he was, he had been tied hand and foot—with wet fish-lines that cut into his flesh like wire, and were as strong as wire.

He managed to get some sort of a sig-

nal to the girl with his eyes. It was a signal for patience, hope, fortitude—the qualities that have always won against mere brutality in the long run.

"So you thought I was lying to you, did you?" sneered Jade, placidly enjoying his triumph. "No, no. The little girl's my wife, all right."

"I am not," said Barbara Fawn.

"You go and get that coffee made," Jade commanded, "or it will be the worse for you—and the worse for him," he added, with a contemptuous jerk of his hand toward Brant. "And mind what I say. I'm not going to tell you again. At the first sign of any monkey business on your part I'm going to tie this friend of yours to a stake and burn him. As for your trying to slip away, I'll track you—you won't go far—and it won't be long, either, before you'll go down an alligator hole."

Brant listened.

He knew only too well that there was plenty of power back of Jade's threats. Jade held the power of life and death. The country was full of alligator holes. Jade's threat was an old one in this part of the country, one that often enough had been executed. In those muddy caves of the dark swamps, where the great saurians built their dens, thus insuring themselves a watery retreat when the dry season came, there was an ideal hiding place for such evidence as might hang a man. So could a victim be made to disappear as completely as if he had never existed.

Jade may have read a portion of Brant's thought. Jade was finding added enjoyment in the situation.

"Why, yes," he said. "Being as how I was a bachelor, I thought I might as well splice up, and get control of this little tract of land that way. Wasn't hardly worth it, I admit," he said, with heavy sarcasm, "to sacrifice my liberty for that—nothing but fifty thousand acres or so over and above the two hundred thousand in the Seminole tract."

Brant, so far as outward appearances went, listened as coolly as if he were listening to the gossip of a trading station; but he was straining his senses to add to such information as Bertram Jade was giving him.

He saw that he had been brought to another camp of Jade's—that there was a tight log cabin off to one side of a small clearing, and that the plank door of this cabin, though now open, could be fastened with hasp and padlock. This must have been some permanent way station of Jade's, set up for his convenience while he traveled to and fro in his lawless empire. Out of this cabin certain supplies had evidently been brought. There was a fire with a leaning pole over it. To this pole there hung a slab of meat. On the hot coals raked out at one side of the fire was the coffeepot to which Jade had indirectly referred. At the side of the fire knelt Barbara Fawn.

"She's not much as a wife at that," said Jade, with a willful desire to provoke Brant into an open outbreak; "but she'll come around. She'll come around. First off, I thought I was going to have to keep her tied up, too, but as soon as I dragged your carcass out of the water and saw that you weren't dead—she saw it first, otherwise I might have left you for the crabs—as soon as I dragged you out and saw that you were alive, I knew that I had her good and safe."

"How was that?" Brant asked, stifling his anger and hate.

"Why, she's got a tender heart," laughed Jade. "And I told her that I was going to untie her and tie you, and if she got gay I'd make you pay for it. That brought her around, all right, just as it did before."

"How do you mean—before?"

Jade laughed with the pleasure of the recollection.

"I refer to the wedding," he said, with easy insolence. "First, I was just going to kidnap her and use her as a sandbag to bring her uncle, old Cleet, around to my way of thinking; but when I found out that Cleet was dead——"

"Murdered!"

"Murdered, maybe—not that it makes any difference—why I saw right away it was up to me to marry the girl. It all came to me like a flash of lightning. My men had already pulled off a fake raid on the *Gar*. That was Colonel Claxton's idea—intended merely to pull the wool over Senator Cleet's eyes. So I took the

girl over to the *Gar* and put the proposition up to Colonel Claxton, and the girl appealed to him, and Claxton—the soft old muttonhead—felt sorry for her, so I had my men jump Claxton and tie him, too. You should have heard him bleat. He was frightened to death."

Jade paused to shout an order over his shoulder to the girl at the fire: "Make that coffee good and strong! Don't let the meat burn!"

Inwardly Brant groaned, but he kept his face like a mask. He was searching his soul. What could he do? Nothing—as yet! He was wrapped in pain, as he once had been back in the days when he was being initiated into the tribal life of the Seminoles. Curiously, now, as then, he was almost grateful for the pain. For, was there not truth in that old Seminole teaching that out of pain comes strength and wisdom?

"Where was I?" asked Jade, ready to resume his narrative. "Oh, yes. Well, the colonel was bleating with fear as soon as we got him tied up, especially when I threatened him with the torture if things didn't go along the way I wanted them to. Your Seminoles can't teach me anything along those lines."

"The Seminoles never tortured any one," said Brant gently.

"Well, maybe I can teach you something about that then, myself," Jade returned, with an evil grin. "Anyway, it wasn't a minute before I had old Claxton pleading for his life, and for me not to blind him. And then the girl joined in, and she consented to marry me—or at least to sign the wedding papers that Claxton would draw up. Nothing lacking. Claxton's a magistrate—especially on board his own yacht—and so the girl and I were married fit and proper, just like going to a church—and she signed over her property to her hubby—and Claxton signed sworn statements, with plenty of witnesses and everything, that all was made out with the bride's full consent."

Even while Brant listened to this lurid tale, and heard details of it that sickened him, yet details that told him as no sworn statement could better have done, how the girl had sacrificed everything but her womanhood on behalf of the wretched Claxton, his brain was otherwise at work.

Without appearing to do so, he surveyed also the surroundings of the camp. There was much laurel and wild fig. The very ground on which he lay helped him further in locating the geography of the camp. He had hunted over this very site with his Seminole comrades years ago—six or seven miles back to the northeast from Moccasin Bay; this tiny island in the midst of an all but impenetrable barrier of saw grass; eastward, nothing but the trackless Everglades until the east coast was reached. Not one chance in a thousand—or ten thousand—that any one would come near this place except at the invitation of the man who held him captive.

Not unless—and he labored with the thought, trying to get it back out of sight—he could get a signal to the Seminoles.

"But she was showing herself so toplofty," said Jade, "that I was bringing her here where I could tame her a bit when I heard a cursed auto back in the woods—and then firing—and those drunken fools I'd left on the yacht went back on me—and you showed up." He paused to sneer, then gloated. "Why, there isn't anything or anybody in this part of Florida who can touch me," he bragged. "I'm one of these fellows the Germans call a superman. Get me? Looked like everything was going against me. Didn't it? And how has it turned out? All to the good. That old sheep of a Claxton can go anywhere he wants to. He won't dare say anything—not against me. I put the fear of God into him. Indians! I can hear him yelp. We'll have the biggest clean-up of Indians this county's ever seen, as soon as his story gets out—posses forming— attlemen and lumbermen, real-estate promoters and the bad crackers who are just spoiling for a little old-fashioned gun practice."

Brant was passive. He couldn't be otherwise. He was in a penumbra of unconsciousness now from loss of blood and pain. But again his mentality flickered up.

It was a poetic little spot—this tiny island with its minute forest of laurel and wild fig. And here were he and Barbara

Fawn together on it. For a moment he had a drift of vision. It was a vision of what might have been. And then he forced his weakness from him. This was no time for weakness of whatsoever sort.

Then his ears caught the faint—very faint—sound of a distant canoe.

CHAPTER XXIX.

REENFORCEMENTS.

IT was only a little later that Brant became certain that, whoever the newcomers should prove to be, they wouldn't be Indians. There was an irregularity of movement, a hesitation, a lameness of effort, that struck him as at once strange and familiar—something that he somehow recognized yet couldn't locate.

Not until he had arrived thus far in his deductions did Jade even so much as hear the sounds. He had been talking too much—too deafened by the sound of his own boasting—to hear much else. But Jade was no amateur in the woods, whatever his other shortcomings might have been. He was instantly on his feet with a muttered curse.

"Try any funny business, and it'll be death for both of you," he threatened darkly.

He slipped away.

No sooner had the underbrush swallowed him up, however, than the girl had left the fire, had run swiftly over to Brant's side.

"Are you badly hurt?" she whispered.

She was acting with desperate haste. Even while she spoke her hands were busy. She worked at the strands and knots of the tough brown twine that held Brant's wrists behind his back.

"No," he answered. "Haven't you a knife? Has he left any guns lying around?"

"None," whispered the girl. "I was looking, searching, all the time that he was talking to you. Fire!" she cried softly. "I should have thought of that at first. I can never untie these knots."

She was almost weeping, but her tears would have been for her baffled eagerness to help rather than any other form of eagerness.

"Look out," Brant warned. "Don't worry about me. Take care of yourself as long as you can. We'll find a way."

In spite of his warning, the girl had gone back to the fire, but she couldn't find anything at first that suited her purpose. Jade had built the fire. It was such a fire as any woodsman would have built, a fire to economize the effort of gathering fuel. There was one large log. Against this had been thrust a number of palmetto roots. There were no glowing twigs or other pieces convenient to the girl's hand. Finally, she seized one of the palmetto roots, dragged this toward Brant's prostrate form.

"Careful!" he warned.

"I'll try not to burn you."

"Careful, I meant, lest Jade catch you at this—make you suffer for it."

There were other warnings that crowded up from his breast for expression. But he did not have very much breath. He wasn't even sure that she had heard what he had said just now. But there was another voice, one which he himself could hear with perfect distinctness—an inner voice that was telling him that this girl was risking her life for him—risking more than her life for him—just as she already had risked all that she had for others.

There was a glow of pain—of sharper pain where all was pain—at his wrists.

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried Barbara Fawn compassionately, "I didn't want to burn you."

"Quick!" urged Brant. "Get back to your fire. Cover your tracks. I hear them coming."

The girl also had heard that shout off to one side of the island, and she was now acting with a more desperate speed than ever. She returned her palmetto root to the fire. She seized a palmetto frond that had been used to fan the fire into flame and with this fanned away as much as possible of the tracks she had left in Brant's immediate vicinity. Meantime she talked.

"We'll outwit this devil yet," she whispered.

"Yes."

Brant reflected that she had said "we." That was in itself enough to set a man out

to the conquest of the world against whatever odds.

"You understand?" she asked.

"About our getting away?"

"No—about that marriage."

What was it she had wanted to say? Suddenly she had sprung away. Not a moment too soon. There had still been—was yet—a confusion of sound down toward the place where the canoe was making its landing. But Jade, with that dangerous cunning that marked so much of his activity, had counted precisely on this sound to mislead his prisoners. Jade had come creeping back through the underbrush to see what he might see. That would have been much, possibly, had it not been for the girl's swift presence of mind, her quicker senses.

As for Brant, he lay there with that extra burning at his wrists, his position barely changed.

Jade cast a sharp look about him.

Both Brant and Barbara Fawn must have understood that he was bluffing. In any case, neither showed any sign of surprise or guilt. The girl merely turned somewhat, gave Jade a cold look. Perhaps had Jade been less preoccupied with the news he brought he would have been more keen on discovering whether or not his prisoners had been in conference during his momentary absence. He advanced to where Brant lay, stirred him with his foot.

"Are you asleep?"

Brant had twisted over on his back. His open, flaming eyes were answer enough to Jade's question.

"I'm afraid you are in for it now," said Jade, "whatever I might have wanted to do for you." The mockery of this struck his own sense of humor. "Do you know who've come to visit us?" he pursued.

Brant spoke no word.

"Well, I'll tell you," said Jade. "It's a couple of cripples—Beebee Evers and his friend—and they're feeling right grateful to you, too, seeing the suffering that you've let them in for."

But Brant hardly heard. He wasn't listening. There was something more important, just then, than this announcement of the arrival of yet two more enemies.

It was a perception that had come to him when he turned—a perception that had reached him through his pain as a gleam of light might have come once to the bound and blinded Samson.

His hands were almost free.

He didn't dare try just yet to see whether he could free them altogether. There must have been twenty strands of that unbreakable twine which had held him a little while ago. Through most of these the girl had succeeded in burning her way with her clumsy torch.

Jade was gone again, but not for long.

Up the sloping path through the bushes there appeared the haggard, savage, unshaven face of Beebee Evers. Beebee came supported by an improvised crutch and the shoulder of Bertram Jade. Just behind Beebee came that wounded friend of his whom he had introduced to Brant as "William Brown," and the face of William also was haggard, savage, unkempt, while William's wounded arms were dressed across his chest in an attitude of unwilling piety.

"There he is," cried Jade, indicating Brant to the newcomers. "And maybe you'll be wanting him to pay you what he owes."

Brant didn't care—didn't care so long as they let the girl alone—and himself alone, for yet a little while. He was certain now. Not more than one solid strand of twine was still holding his hands together. With this broken—even with his feet still tied—but no, there was the girl. It was she whom he would have to save, and save before another night went past. But how?

There came into his struggling mind the ray of a plan.

It was as if his mind were something apart from himself—or detachable, able to go forth into the surrounding swamps, where he had spent so much of his life, come back again.

CHAPTER XXX.

WILD HEMP.

THERE was a mysterious plant out there in the swamp, not very far from here, which had often occupied a place in Brant's thought at odd moments throughout many years. Once, when he

was a boy, and there had been some idea of apprenticing him to Solo Pathee, the Ghost, that he also might become a medicine man, he had accompanied Solo Pathee into this part of the wilderness in search of this particular plant. In memory he saw it now—rough-stemmed, with deeply lobed leaves, a small, fine resin exuding from the stem of it. Also he remembered the effects of this resin when swallowed. By its means, Solo Pathee not only deadened pain; it gave him the gift of some of his greatest dreams, some of his greatest visions.

"Wild hemp!" So Brant had later identified it in his own mind. Or it was some variant of hemp—the plant from which the hashish users of the Orient obtained their *bhang* or *charas*.

Queer bits of wisdom return to men in time of pain, just as Solo Pathee himself taught.

Brant knew that one of Jade's more immediate needs, after he had eaten, would be sleep. From what he had already heard he was pretty certain that Jade had not slept during the preceding night, and now the sun was westering. Not more than an hour or so of daylight remained. Both Beebee Evers and his mate were groaning with pain. When Jade finally did sleep, as he would, leaving these two unfortunates on guard, wouldn't it be possible to buy the friendship of the two sufferers with a little of this precious drug?

The girl defied Jade to the extent of getting both food and coffee to Brant.

"Do you want him to die?" she demanded.

"You've got brains, all right," Jade laughed. "Go ahead."

Jade's humor had mounted higher than ever with the arrival of his two followers. Everything was going his way. Wounded though they were, Beebee was still fit to handle a gun, Bill Brown could mount guard. And, apart from the satisfaction that came to Bertram Jade from this reënforcement, there was no telling what black plans were not still cooking in his crooked soul. He primed Beebee and Bill with liquor, although he touched none of it himself. He laughed loudly. He sought to cheer them up with stories of the riches that he would throw their way.

Brant whispered to the girl, who knelt over him:

"Will you be afraid—to run away with me?"

She also whispered. Her voice was a mere breath.

"No."

"Not in the dark?"

"No."

"Then keep yourself ready."

Jade came striding over. He had the brutal effrontery to say something to the effect that he hadn't married a trained nurse—wouldn't allow his "wife" to be a servant for any man. Barbara recoiled from his touch.

"Get into the cabin!" he commanded.

She recoiled again, looked at him with a flashing scowl.

Jade knew how to handle her, as he himself would have said. He lifted one of his heavily booted feet, poised it for a kick against the man on the ground.

"Don't!" she panted.

Jade laughed as he followed her to the cabin. He thrust the door shut behind her. He put the hasp into place, snapped the padlock shut. The cabin, built as a stronghold against thieving marauders, was a perfect pen of its kind. Jade returned to the fire where he resumed his interrupted meal.

But in some respects the drift of circumstance was as Brant had foreseen. Finally, Jade yawned and stretched. He announced that he was going to get a couple of hours of sleep, and all that Bill Brown and Beebee Evers would have to do was to keep watch on Brant.

"If he moves or speaks," he said to Beebee, "shoot him in the legs the way he shot you. He's got that coming to him, anyway."

Beebee nodded assent, but Brant was pleased to see that both Beebee and his companion, despite the coffee and the solid food they had consumed, were low in spirit. Jade slept. And Brant, dipping deeper—to unremembered depths—into the hitherto forgotten wisdom that had come to him from his association with Solo Pathee, was practicing some of the rudimentary hypnotism that the Ghost

had taught him. He concentrated his thought on Beebee, and Beebee was a shining mark, for Beebe already had had his single-track brain directed to Brant.

Beebee groaned. There was a fever in his wounded leg. Bill Brown cursed. There was a fever in his arms that Beebee's groans made worse. And Brant, with his Indian training, spoke as a Seminole hunter speaks when there is a comrade a dozen rods away through the thickets and yet a herd of deer close by that must not be frightened. Brant's voice crept out like a whisper, but it was a whisper that crept over the intervening space as distinct and nimble as a lizard.

"Why suffer? I know the stuff that will cure your pain."

There was no answer. Brant repeated his words, amplified them. He said that he had a secret of the Seminoles; and among many of these old swamp rats there was a greater faith in Seminole remedies—with reason, perhaps—than the remedies of such white doctors as they had known—such untutored surgeons as might be found around prison camps, or harum-scarum fugitives themselves hidden because of misdeeds back in the towns.

The hypnotism was beginning to work. Beebee had a gleam of hope.

"Listen well," said Brant in his traveling whisper. "There is a plant—something like the gumbo—at the far end of the island. Bill can find it. On the stalks, near the bottom, are beads of resin. Let him get a few of these beads and bring them to us."

"Maybe it's poison," said Beebee in a fair imitation of Brant's whisper.

"It is poison—like most medicines," Brant replied. "But a little of it won't hurt you, and it will take your pain away."

"We could make him take some of it himself," whispered Bill.

Little by little, as slowly and as noiselessly as any Seminole would have gone in the stalking of a bear, old Tom Cunliffe, the moonshiner, whom Brant had so recently visited, crawled through the swamp toward that very point to which Brant had directed Bill Brown as a place where the medicine plant was most likely to be found.

It was almost sundown. In the neighboring woods—vine-hung, thick with moss—it was almost dark. The owls were beginning to call. The sand-hill cranes were whooping as they rose for those mysterious night cruises of theirs through the upper darkness. Frogs and insects were tuning up for the billion-numbered chorus. And yet old Cunliffe found that it was still too early for that work he wanted to do.

Then suddenly, Cunliffe heard a shambling step that drew near his hiding place, hesitated, drew nearer yet.

The old moonshiner shifted his rifle. His wounded hand wasn't bothering him greatly. He lay in wait. But it wasn't long before he uttered a soft cry, stepped forward with his finger to his lips.

It was in the delay that followed that there came a swift change in Brant's dimly formulated plans. Back in the laurel and wild fig there had been a sound that Brant had heard even before Beebee Evers heard it—some sort of a colloquy—a pause to make sure—a colloquy between white men. Then Beebee also had heard the sound, had stiffly turned to peer through the fading light.

Brant didn't wait.

There was one straining jerk, and his hands were free. Hobbled as he was he flung himself over and forward. He struck as a snake strikes—throwing his body forward.

"A word," he jerked out, "and I'll kill you."

Beebee was sick. Once already this day he had stood in the shadow of death—had felt the sting and the substance of death as much as he would ever feel it, perhaps—and Beebee went over back, nor even let out a gasp as his wounded leg crumpled under him. From Beebee's belt, Brant jerked a hunting knife and sliced the bonds about his feet.

"You heard me?" he demanded.

Beebee let out an inarticulate affirmative from his open mouth. And Brant, with his eyes on the shadows that had swallowed Beebee's friend a minute before, stepped over to where Jade lay. He slipped Jade's gun away, and just then

Jade started up. He awoke with a curse that came as promptly as a dog will bark under similar circumstances.

But Brant was in no mood for blasphemy.

Anyway, he had seen that swift move of Jade's in the direction of his hidden automatic. Brant used the end of the gun that was closest to Jade's head. This happened to be the butt. With the butt he knocked Jade down—and out—and began to search him for the key to the padlock that kept Barbara Fawn a prisoner.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE GET-AWAY.

BRANT found the key that he was after. By good luck, it was the only key on a chain that Jade carried. Brant jerked the chain loose and ran to the door of the log cabin. He still had the gun in his hand. But at the door of the cabin there began a fresh succession of events which were unforeseen. Not even all of the present could be visualized in the swift turmoil, let alone anything of the future.

The padlock was stubborn. Inside the cabin he heard the movement and the voice of Barbara Fawn. He may have called out to her, but whether his call was aloud, or merely a call from the heart, he didn't know—didn't stop to inquire. But she must have heard him. He put down the gun and brought both hands to the task of getting the padlock loose. The door swung open, and the girl pushed out. She gave him a glance of her dark eyes. Then, at the same instant, she had uttered a warning cry.

Brant turned to see Jade almost upon him.

Jade's attention was on the gun. To seize it was his first reflex on recovering from Brant's blow. His own weapon must have been jammed or empty. Into Brant Jade had butted like a charging bull, and then Jade's hand was out for the gun. It was Barbara Fawn who seized it. Simultaneously, Brant and Jade had clinched.

They went down together. They straightened out, doubled again, locked, thrusting this way and that, exerting all the force that was in them.

All this was going ahead so swiftly that it was as if everything were happening at once.

All at once the night was thickening, the stars coming out, and Beebee Evers trying to get himself, wounded though he was, into the conflict. And, likewise all at once, there were Tom Cunliffe and the fellow known as Bill Brown back from their end of the island—standing there on the outskirts of the camp like evil spirits conjured up by the violence of what was taking place, or like jackals come in to witness the fight of a pair of rival lions.

Beebee Evers, somehow, had hobbled toward the girl. She thrust the muzzle of the gun in his direction.

"Stay back, or I'll shoot!" she ordered.

Then, at the same moment that Barbara Fawn had put Beebee Evers into place—at the same moment so it seemed—the girl had swung the gun onto Bill Brown and Tom Cunliffe.

Now it is fair to say that had Tom Cunliffe cared to, he could most likely have dropped the girl in her tracks with a shot from his own very efficient weapon. Yet he didn't. Nor was it chivalry that held his hand, either—not precisely. But Tom wasn't a clear thinker. Right then he couldn't make up his mind clearly to which side he adhered in this life-and-death struggle. For him there was no morality or immorality in this affair at all. He had profited much—or believed he had—from Bertram Jade in the past; yet he didn't like Jade. He did like Brant, yet he had followed Brant up with some idea of making Brant pay, in money or blood, for the still that Brant had restroyed. So, as Barbara Fawn swung her rifle in Cunliffe's direction, the old moonshiner just stood there, nor made any move to interfere.

Not yet. Cunliffe's activities were to develop later.

Brant, in the stifling embrace of his enemy, was calling on all that was in himself to come to his aid for a speedy triumph.

Instead of throwing all the work on the muscles of his back and arms, which

were already straining to the utmost, he used his hands. His right hand gripped his left wrist, his left hand had a grip on Jade's side. Slowly, slowly—like a snake swallowing a rabbit—Brant's right hand advanced higher—a little higher—from wrist to forearm, and at every advance his constraint on Jade tightened. No relaxation. A tightening band. So could a python have stifled an ox.

There was no telling how long it lasted—long enough for the increasing darkness to have been a blurred smear of red, the free air of the great wilderness to have become as tight as a coffin.

But in reality it was very swift.

Just time enough had elapsed for Barbara Fawn to give pause to the three spectators—each and every one of whom had been wounded by this man that Jade was fighting now; just time enough for the girl to have given a glance and a thought to the possibility of her interfering in the struggle, and to have recognized the impossibility of this. For the time being, Jade and Brant had been as if welded into a single piece—a single body; and it would have been as impossible not to hurt Brant while hurting Jade as to hurt a man's arm and not hurt the man himself.

Then Jade and Brant had somehow reared together, right on the edge of the little clearing where the camp had been pitched, and over they went into the jungle fringe of lush foliage and grass, vines and bush, shadows and dangers unseen. There was water down there, and mud, and clogging aquatic growth—saw grass and smothering "bonnets."

What was happening now?

Tom Cunliffe may have believed himself a prophet.

"Mr. Jade's killed him," said Tom.

That quick shot by which Brant had disarmed him over there at his old moonshine still, must have been fresh in his mind. From the hip Tom now shot to disarm the girl by the cabin.

She scarcely knew what had happened to her.

As she stumbled around the cabin with an instinct for cover, Barbara found herself face to face with something that very well might have been a ghost.

But it was a ghost of Brant, if it were a ghost, and hence consoling to her fugitive spirit to some extent.

This ghost of Brant—pale and staggering—covered with mud and water, and strangely garlanded with water lilies—received her in its arms, and she surrendered herself to it—all that there was left of her—and she felt that she was being borne away—but borne away at last, to safety.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THROUGH THE NIGHT.

BRANT believed that he had killed Jade. He didn't know. He didn't care. Jade he had left back there in the fringe of the swamp. And even now, in the thick of it all, surrounded by dangers he knew and dangers he could only guess, there was a feeling of triumph in the background of his thought. So it was as he came staggering up back of the cabin in quest of Barbara Fawn; and then, suddenly, as if his wish were father to the fact, there she was reeling into his arms. He thought that she had merely fainted. Still, she had come to him with the rifle still in her hand. He seized the rifle. He lifted the girl. He slipped and staggered off in the direction of the place where he knew Jade must have left his boat.

He had the girl safely into the boat before there was any further attempt to interfere with him.

Three, four shots.

But the darkness and the cover were too thick. His enemies did not dare to show themselves. He decided that ammunition was too precious, and his comparative concealment was too precious, to risk any return shots.

Still he hesitated a moment. He could go back now, single-handed, and win the camp—kill Cunliffe, Brown and Beebee Evers. The power was in him. He may even have had a glint of himself and the girl established there, with abundant supplies, while he regulated the greater conflict of which all this was merely a part.

But how about the girl?

While he still hesitated—and his hesi-

tation at most was a matter of seconds—he saw that she was wounded.

Had she been wounded elsewhere he might never have known—not known, at any rate, until it was too late. But not even the darkness, nor the excitement, nor the whirling speed of events, could prevent him from seeing that widening blur of darkness that crept out over the pallor of her white forehead, her temple and throat. He touched the place. Blood.

"Oh," cried Brant to himself, " if they have killed you!"

And there came to him a flash of greater wisdom. There would be time enough for fighting later on. These men could not escape him. They weren't going to get away. They were as incapable of leaving these their native swamps as the alligators were.

He pushed the boat into deeper water. He knew the channels hereabouts—knew them with a detail of information that was both reminiscent and instinctive. He did not try to enter the boat. He was wading in water up to his waist. There was a barely visible rift in the saw grass here. It was a rift that twisted, disappeared, opened up again. The saw grass slashed away the sleeves of his shirt like razors. With all his care and training it sliced into the flesh itself at times.

There was no hesitation now, though, nor doubt. He was as sure of his direction as he would have been out on an open highway. The noises that came to him from the direction of the camp were as good as a compass so far as that was concerned.

It was not until he had been in the water for almost half an hour that he finally entered the boat. By this time, there was no longer any danger of pursuit, and for some time he had been tortured by the thought that possibly the girl was bleeding to death. And what would all this pain and trouble he was undergoing be worth if she should die? And, close upon this came another question: What was there of truth in what Bertram Jade had said about this girl being Jade's wife? And again: What if the girl should die and Jade survive?

But these questions also, poignant though they were, existed only in the background of his consciousness, so to speak.

In the boat he took the girl's wrist. Her pulse was irregular and feeble. Brant now thrust the boat forward with renewed energy in the direction of a wall of greater blackness that arose before him. Presently he was in the midst of trees and following a channel so narrow and shallow that the fish pounded the thin planking like importunate visitors hammering at a door. There was a flipping scurry as something came over the side. He could tell by the shine that it was a bass, not a snake, and he never slowed his steady work at his single oar—sculling, poling, he was as swift and deft in waters like these as a marauding alligator would have been.

He dared not go too far on the girl's account. He dared not stop too soon for fear of being followed. There was no telling when further reënforcements would not be gathering at Jade's camp back there. And he would have to make a fire.

Brant finally brought the boat alongside the platform made by the wide roots of a dead pine. He hissed, and the splotch of darkness that was a coiled moccasin disappeared. A moment later he had lifted the unconscious girl from the boat. He followed. He carried her up a slope where the thorns were so thick that he had to bow low to protect himself and her he carried. There was a pungent sweetness in the air that told of a wild lemon grove.

He kicked a place clear while he still held the girl in his arms. He put her down on the clean sweet earth. With tinder he started a fire. Light was the needed thing.

His knowledge of bullet wounds was almost as great as that of any medical man. But a head wound is always a difficult thing to gauge. The human skull is a fragile thing, and how infinitely more fragile that thing the skull contains. He moved her matted hair aside. There was no evidence that the bullet had done more than cut the scalp. Still this long coma and the fluttering pulse filled him with a great fear that was almost despair.

He brought water in his hat and laved

the wound as best he could. He searched in the neighboring brush and collected certain fat and tender, sweet-smelling leaves, themselves filled with water to spongy saturation, and made a compress of these. At any rate, there was no further bleeding.

With palmetto fans he made a narrow couch as clean and elastic as any bed in a private hospital could have been. He removed her shoes. With other fans he covered her as with a sheet, for the night was cool. But it was mercifully free from mosquitoes and other insects, as all this part of Florida so often is—where water is never stagnant, far enough back from the mosquito-breeding coasts.

All this before he paid any attention whatsoever to his own hurts.

But he was about at the end of his own strength. He was warned of this as he prepared a dressing of the spongy leaves for certain of his own wounds, particularly the neglected wound on his shoulder where the man Bill Brown had shot him.

He returned to the fire.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

WHITHER?

BRANT surveyed the earth—his part of it—and the past, the present, and the future of it, like a man in a watch tower. There for a time as he sat by his fire in the swamp, with the night and the jungle thick about him, he was like some primitive ancestor of the human race. So had all things had their beginning—a man and a woman alone in a wilderness—their own problem of survival the only problem in the world.

Once more his eyes were on the girl. Noiselessly he went over and looked at her in the diminishing light of the fire. There for a second or two it looked as if she had died, and the fear smote him so that it was his own heart that stood still. Then he noted her feeble breath. It couldn't have been the wound she had received. Wounds he could understand. But he guessed that there was here some graver danger—some lesion of a delicate and overwrought spirit.

His mind went back to the island from which he and she had fled earlier in the night. Back there was the only place in all this wide region where grew that plant he had recommended to Beebee Evers. He dreaded to go back there, but this was on the girl's account. He would have to leave her here by herself—leave her here alone in the night while she was helpless, on the verge of that which the Indians called the Big Sleep—the sleep that was like an ocean separating the known world from a newer, greater America that lay ever beyond the setting sun.

There was no choice. Brant went his way.

Not very long after Brant had disappeared into the night—although Barbara Fawn knew nothing of his recent presence or departure—the girl was obsessed by a feeling of fear. That was the first glimmer of her returning consciousness.

She strove to cry out. but the only sound that passed her lips was a childish whimper. Then, as if by a tremendous effort, she had opened her eyes. She lay there staring up into the encompassing shadows, although there was no realization of her surroundings even then. Only that figment of fear remained—a feeling that there was something creeping up through the darkness—something that could see her, but which she could not see. Again she uttered that cry of hers. Then her cry was answered.

It didn't matter greatly, for whether dream or reality, that answering cry had driven her fear away. And she closed her eyes again. But, before she did so, she was convinced that she had seen the Indian youth she had seen on that first day of hers in Moccasin Bay—the youth who had passed in his canoe—he who, as she now was certain, had sent her that woeful little note bidding her not to be afraid—he who had signed himself Young Tiger.

So quietly that he might have been a phantom, even as Barbara Fawn had figured him to be, the son of Solo Pathee had glided from the darkness. His bare feet and legs were streaming with water and blood, for he had been traveling hard and giving no too great thought to his own comfort. But he paid no more attention to these slight hurts and fa-

tigues of his than would a wild broncho or a young elk.

Sounds, lights, his own highly developed though savage powers of deduction had brought him here. He knelt at the girl's side, invoked an Indian blessing upon her.

He lingered until he heard the faint sounds that told of Brant's return. And all this time Barbara Fawn quietly slept, dreamless, safe. She opened her eyes; and, although she did not stir, yet she had a perception of many things.

She was very comfortable. She was free from pain. She felt rested. She could not explain it, but this bed upon which she lay was springy and fragrant, smooth and clean.

She wasn't dead. This was earth, and life on earth. There was no longer any room for doubt as to that.

For, with that faint smell of cooking there had come to her such a pang of hunger that the very pain of it was a delight, an overwhelming desire. Such hunger had she felt only when she was very young. What was the perfume of the orange trees compared with this other perfume—a simmer of meat, the sweet pungency of burning cypress.

She changed the position of her head ever so slightly.

There was a movement in the greenery beyond the fire, and there stood Richard Brant. In his hand was one of those rough bowls, but she saw now that it was a terrapin shell and that it was filled with water. She could see that he himself had been into the water. His hair was wet. His eyes were bright. They were dark and cavernous eyes. For a time—a long time it seemed—she was looking into them deeply, trying to divine what they signified, and then she saw appear in them a look of such kindly intelligence that the last of her dreaminess was gone from her altogether and she was wide awake.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

"Fine," she answered.

And again they were looking at each other; as if each were trying to get information rather by telepathy than by ordinary means of communication.

He put down the thing he carried. He came over to where she lay. He knelt at her side, put his hand on her forehead, touched her wrist.

"You are fine," he confirmed, with the glint of a smile.

"What happened?" she asked.

"You're a soldier," he said. "You were wounded."

"Badly?"

"No, but, being a soldier, you must follow orders, not talk too much, or get excited, and I think I'll order you to eat something."

"I'm starving," she said.

Without a word, he quietly arose and went over to the fire. He came back with one of the terrapin shells.

"I'm not much of a cook," he said simply; "and I've heard that a lot of people don't like terrapin."

"Is that what it is?"

"Terrapin," he answered; "fresh, cooked in the Seminole style—almost—not quite."

She was to understand the grim humor of this also—but only a long time afterward—when she saw the Seminoles cooking terrapin alive, as their white brethren sometimes cook lobsters.

"It smells delicious," she said.

He furnished her with a couple of pointed palmetto stems like chopsticks. Her head was heavy as he helped her up to her elbow. But there was no pain. It was only when she put her hand up that she discovered that her head was bandaged. While she used her primitive fork, he briefly explained that a bullet had grazed her head, and that he had brought her here where she now was in the course of two days—that they were safe, for the time being at least, that she had nothing to worry about.

"This is heavenly," she said. "When I first opened my eyes I imagined that I was in heaven."

Brant was thoughtful and did not speak. She wondered why.

He helped her bathe her face and hands as tenderly as if she were a child. Yet, all the time that he was doing this there was that same shadow of preoccupation about him.

"This," said Brant, "is a famous old council place of the Seminoles. They

say that their forefathers met here long before there were any white men in the world—in this part of the world. They hold the place to be sacred." He reflected a moment. "So do I."

To Brant there came a strong memory of that council in which he himself took part here in this very place so recently. There was something of this memory in his face—something that Barbara Fawn possibly noticed there.

"You also consider it sacred," she said softly, "and yet you brought me here."

"I brought you here," said Brant steadily, "because here you are safe—from red enemies—or white."

The sunlight was still almost horizontal—the few rays of it that could penetrate the green tapestry of the jungle, but there was the glimmer of a later and another sort of dawn in Barbara Fawn's thought just then.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE ANCIENT CALL.

IT was the dawn of a realization that she was on the verge of a new existence—a new scheme of life, with a new outlook, new aspirations, new activities—as surely as if she had died and as surely as if she had just opened her eyes in that undiscovered country "from whose bourne no traveler returns."

It was a conception which came to her on the wings of what Brant said, and yet had apparently no connection with his words whatsoever.

"Take this," said Brant, as he held to her lips a cuplike leaf.

The leaf cup was filled with water as clear as dew, but on the surface of this there floated a little mass of vegetable dust.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I don't know," he answered gravely. "I think it is something like wild hemp—only they say that wild hemp doesn't grow in this country. All I know is that it will do you good."

She accepted the potion without further questioning. He hadn't told her that he had gone back dangerous miles to seek this remedy while she slept, that it was largely thanks to this, no doubt, that she could answer him—when he had asked her a while ago—that she was feeling fine. The drink had a slightly sweetish taste. It wasn't long afterward that she again felt that lethargy stealing over her to which she had awakened in the dawn. She yielded to it. She closed her eyes, and again she slept—as tranquilly as she could ever have done in the shelter of the convent back in Paris.

When she slept, Brant himself ate of the terrapin he had prepared. There is a variety of meat in the Florida terrapin—meat to suit almost any taste. There is meat like beef, meat like that of chicken, meat like that of the green turtle, such as has made the fame of aldermanic banquets in London. But Brant wondered if there would come a time when he could prepare for this strange guest of his a nobler game—turkey or deer, or the broiled ribs of that greatest favorite yet of the Seminole epicure, the honey-fed young black bear. But as yet he dared not use his rifle to this end. There were too many enemies about.

He composed himself with his back to a tree. He was dead for sleep, but he dared not let himself go into the depths of sleep.

The spectacle of the girl asleep over there on her couch of palmetto fans was like a dream in itself; and yet it was on her presence that rested all the actuality of his universe just now.

He wondered if she realized. She was a fugitive in the woods. She was a waif. She had no home. She was without money. She was without relatives. She was dependent now for life and sustenance of every kind, and for protection, for society—dependent for all these things on himself, a stranger—not only a stranger, but one who should be her sworn enemy.

Why?

Because the ownership of certain lands had been thrust upon her. She was an outcast, and yet she owned an empire. She owned this almost unlimited realm of forest and meadow, river, bay, and cypress strand, and yet, literally, had she no place to lay her head except that place he himself had provided for her.

What would the Seminoles say—and

do!—when they found that they had her in their power?

Who could tell? Probably no Seminole himself could tell, for opinions were as apt to be divided among the Seminoles as they often are among the white folk. And even now, as Brant was certain, runners were going north and east to notify the scattered bands—Cow Creek, Lauderdale, Miami, these but the low-born kinsmen of the red aristocrats who peopled the Big Cypress—that their presence was required for a Great Council. And wouldn't these tribesmen from the north and east do exactly as they were bidden to by the Big Cypress men? Most likely. And whose counsels were more likely to prevail among the Big Cypress men themselves than those of Solo Pathee, the Ghost? And what would Solo Pathee have to say about the destiny of this girl? Would Solo Pathee hesitate to say that it were better that the girl be made to die and disappear?

So much for the red men. And yet, where could Brant carry her for safety elsewhere than here? He asked himself. Had not the white men who frequented this part of the world shown themselves to be as ferocious as red men could ever be?

Senator Cleet; dead!

Colonel Claxton; fugitive after having compounded a felony!

Bertram Jade; still there perhaps where Brant had left him, stifled in the trampled mud and water growth where their fight had ended.

But the disciples of these men were still active and alert—old instincts flaming—like wolves having tasted human blood.

Then, as a man closes a book and looks out on a world familiar, Brant closed the book of his dreams, did it with a noiseless snap, and he was sure that he heard again something that he had heard before.

Without sound of his own, he dropped over on his side and rested there motionless for a long moment with his ear to the ground.

That was it. Some one was coming. And the newcomer was no white man. There were some great hunters among the white men in this part of the world, but that was no white man out there now, walking with this padded tread, through the thick forest and making no more noise than a fox. But who could he be, this red intruder who came to the sacred place alone? And what could bring him here?

Brant was more troubled by these questions than he would have been by the positive knowledge that he was being stalked by enemies known or unknown. Then he would have understood. Now he was in the presence of something that he could not understand. Common enough it was for Indians to go off into the woods by themselves and there seek communion with the fairies or ghosts, or even with the Big Man himself. But it was something new—new to his experience, at any rate—for a solitary Indian to come thus wandering close to the red holy of holies.

Brant softly dropped behind a screen of young palmetto. Still wondering, he waited.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A RED ROMEO.

HIS wonder grew, rather than lessened, when he saw that the newcomer was Polytee, Solo Pathee's son, him whom white men knew as Young Tiger. Brant's astonishment was such that he paused a moment or two before making his presence known. He and Polytee had always been good friends, though not intimate. Brant was more intimate with the father than he was with the son. There was a shyness, a reserve about Young Tiger that had always held the young Indian much to himself. It was for that Brant hesitated. What had brought Polytee here? Had he come to this place in a fit of absent-mindedness? It could hardly be that. Was it a game trail he had followed? No. An instant's survey had been enough to tell him that Young Tiger was not hunting. Anyway, no Indian would be hunting so far away from his people, and the other members of the tribe were now far back in the Big Cypress.

Then Brant had some swift inkling of the truth—an intuition that gave him a momentary touch of something like sick-

ness, a sickening pity, this followed by incredibility.

It was a feeling thrust in upon him by the look that had swept over Young Tiger's face at the sight of the girl sleeping there—a look not limited to the young Seminole's face, but extending to the whole visible presence of him. There was a surprise in the look, yet a satisfied expectancy, a terrible joy, a still more terrible yearning; and yet all this exalted and raised above the common things of life by a certain religious note.

Young Tiger was a son of the great medicine man of the Big Cypress in more than a merely physical way. The youth was something of the medicine man himself—as he had shown more than once, as he had shown again, for example, when he did the snake trick with a piece of wood. And it was that way now. He was the woodland mystic. He was the native priest. Into his make-up there had gone countless centuries of nature worship. And all this was going into the fleeting impression he gave out now—as he looked at the sleeping girl, as he threw out his hands in an impulsive gesture of thanksgiving.

Very subtle is the language of gestures, and very complete—the oldest language of the world, perhaps. By a gesture, the turn of an eyebrow, the curl of a lip, any man can say many things—say things that it would take a page of print or more to set forth.

Said Young Tiger in this ancient language of gesture:

"*Lo, I have thought of thee! Thou wert in danger. I came in quest of thee. And I talked betimes to the Great Spirit. Lo, he hath listened to my voice!*"

And more, infinitely more—with a hue lent to it by all of that ancient tragedy which makes one race unlike another race and wills that there shall be a barrier between them. All this in a mere flashing of seconds—such time as a loose leaf might shiver twice in the sunshine. And then Brant had spoken:

"Little brother!"

He had spoken in Seminole, used that traveling whisper of the Seminoles, so soft that it wouldn't have awakened a sleeping bird.

Young Tiger turned. In the brief fraction of a second he had become master of himself. It was like the touch of darkness that comes to a landscape at night when a light in a window goes out. His face, so full of meaning just then, had become the mask of his kind.

"Ho, Hasee-hotkee," he cried, calling Brant by his boyhood name of "White Moon."

It was a long time since Brant had heard that name, and the Tiger's use of it now was somehow in key with all that Brant had seen in the youth's face, and all that that look of the boy had stirred in his own heart. So would the boy have spoken to him had they been brothers. Polytee was indeed the "little brother" he had called him a moment ago.

"You have come far," said Brant.

They gazed at each other. It would have been as impossible for them to lie to each other as to have conversed in Greek.

"From my father's camp," the Tiger answered.

"And you have come to a holy place," said Brant.

The Tiger did not shift his eyes. He merely changed the focus of them. Instead of gazing at Brant he was gazing off, very far off, into the distance.

"I followed my spirit," said the Tiger.

"What news do you bring?" asked Brant. He was willing to change the drift of the talk for a little while, give Polytee time to reflect.

"My father is still for war," the Tiger replied. "He and the other men are drinking the black drink and going into the sweat houses. My father has not eaten for two days. He begins to talk with a tongue that is not his own."

Brant made a motion to the fire, where there was still ample food. The Tiger went to the fire and helped himself. He must have been ravenous, for there were signs to show that he had traveled far and hard and it would not have been like him to stop, on a special trip like this, to kill meat and eat it. Not now, not once since that first look of his, had Polytee let his eyes turn in the direction of Barbara Fawn. The girl slept there, now unconscious of pain or other earthly

troubles—lips parted, her cheeks flushed, her dark hair loose and wavy under the rough bandage that Brant himself had drawn about her temples.

"What says your father when he talks with the tongue that is not his own?" Brant asked, when he and the youth were withdrawn from the tree.

"The voice says this: 'Woe to you, Solo Pathee! There is a great trouble to come upon you and your people!' "

"Does the voice say what the trouble is?"

"No; but the interpreters say that it means the Big Sleep."

"Death!" whispered Brant.

"I think also that I shall die," said the Tiger without a tremor.

Brant also was careful to show no emotion. But he was able to examine the Tiger without appearing to do so. The boy had changed, in some indefinable way; and yet so young, so supple, so muscled and unspoiled, it was impossible to think of death getting its claws into him.

"If you should die," said Brant calmly, "my soul shall go looking for you over there"—and he nodded to the west—"even as if I were the Hound-of-the-Sad-Eyes."

There followed a long minute of silence—silence so far as they themselves were concerned; but this silence was curiously filled and made vocable by the warbling, muffled lament of a sand-hill crane. They both understood the language of the bird. This was the nesting season. The bird was mourning for a lost mate. Such tragedies were common enough among the wild things of the swamps. But the sound was evidently an influence on the Tiger's veiled mood. He slowly turned his face and looked at the sleeping girl and made no attempt to disguise the movement.

"When White Moon made his first camp back there,"—and he pointed in the direction from which Brant had brought the girl—"was he aware that I, his brother, watched him?"

"I was sick," said Brant. "On the morning after I made the camp, I thought I saw traces on the ground, as if some one had been there, but the tracks were faint, and the girl had not been disturbed, so that I thought that maybe I was mistaken."

"You were not mistaken," said the Tiger. "It was I who came into your camp the moment you were gone, White Moon."

Brant concealed his anxiety.

"And why did you come?"

"Because I knew medicine. Because I didn't want the girl to die."

"But you went away again," said Brant.

"I had to be in two places at once," said the Tiger, with a slight increase of visible emotion. "If my people knew that I was occupying myself with this daughter of the white people they would kill me. If they knew that she was where she now is they might kill her. The white bad men would do her injury. If you should die—as you nearly did—then there would remain only myself."

"Why did you not let me know all this before?" asked Brant.

"It is because you loved this white girl," said the Tiger softly.

There was a long period of silence again—a silence which was again broken only by the purling note of the sand-hill crane that mourned its mate.

"My brother has not yet spoken his whole thought," said Brant.

"I have not done so," said the Tiger, "because my whole thought makes me sick. I wished that you were dead. I feared that you would die. I wished that I myself might die. And yet never was I less ready. White Moon, you are my brother. And yet I tell you this: Either you or I must die before another moon, and the cause of it is this daughter of the strangers."

CHAPTER XVI.

AS BETWEEN BROTHERS.

BRANT paused for thought. Young Tiger had made his amazing announcement in a voice as quiet as a white man might have ventured the opinion that on the morrow it might rain. It was in a voice as quiet that another Seminole friend had come to him one afternoon and announced: "At the Little Moon of June

I die. The Council has so decreed." At first it was in his thought to deny the Tiger's presumption that he loved this girl. It was something that he had not even admitted to himself. And yet he dared not lie to the Tiger; to himself he might.

"By the coming of another moon there may be many of us dead," he announced quietly.

"What you say is true."

"It isn't lawful for a man to think only of himself," said Brant.

"There is a time," said the Tiger, "when there is only one law in the whole world, as you have seen for yourself, and this is spring."

"If you should kill me," Brant said, "and this girl refuse to look on you with favor; what then?"

There came a look of fierce cunning and unmitigated savagery into the Tiger's face. It remained there an instant before he could stifle it, drive it back.

"My people are among the noblest people of the whole world," said the Tiger. "We are poor in horses and cattle, but the world we walk on and the whole sky is ours. We are kings and workers of magic. I am Solo Pathee's son. I am strong. I can run down a deer. I can throw a wild steer. I can call a turkey better than any one in the tribe. I don't say these things to boast. I say them because they are true. And there is no girl of any tribe in Florida who would not be honored by having me among her people."

"There is a tribe that you do not understand," said Brant.

"Which is that?"

"This girl's tribe—the *Yot-hotkee.*"

"Haven't you and I always lived like brothers? Are we different?"

"Ask your own heart," returned Brant quietly.

"I have asked it."

"And ask your father."

Polytee did not speak for an interval. His handsome face was as if cast of bronze. Only his liquid eyes showed the depth of his feeling.

"My father has always said," the Tiger spoke at last, "that my people are the oldest in the world—that we are the chosen of the Hesuketameese. But why should I go to ask my father about this? I am a man. I am master of myself. If I chose to take this knife and thrust it into myself"—he drew his hunting knife and held it to his breast—"there would be none to stop me. Why, then, should I not settle this thing for myself—settle it with you—when we're both men?"

Brant sighed. He recognized the murderous mood that the Tiger was in. At the same time he knew that treachery on the boy's part was impossible. Had treachery been in the Tiger's heart, the boy could have shot him from ambush a hundred times over. He could have spirited Barbara Fawn away while she was unconscious.

"When a man's a man," said Brant, "and his people are on the edge of battle, he doesn't go about talking of his love for a woman. You also seem to be speaking with a voice that is not your own."

"I spoke as I had to," said the Tiger desperately.

"Another thing. You speak of your people as the greatest people in the world. I have reason to agree with you. You yourself said it—we are brothers. And yet, now that your people are in danger, you are talking not only of removing yourself, but of removing me, of destroying your people's chief support."

"My heart says this," the Tiger declared; " 'Give me what I demand,' says my heart, 'and you will become a greater leader than Osceola.' "

"You spoke a while ago that you yourself were like to die," Brant argued. "If you should kill me, then you'd die surely enough. If your people go to war and kill many white men, then they will kill you not for killing a white man, but for killing a member of the Council. Should your people keep the peace——"

"But they won't keep the peace," said the Tiger. "They'll go to war. My father says so. There isn't a chief in the south who can say *no* when he says *yes.*"

"Should your people keep the peace," said Brant steadily, "then they will kill you for killing a white man."

Young Tiger started.

"What white man?"

"Me."

"I think of this girl," said the Tiger. "She is like a light seen in the swamp at night. I can see her still when all the rest is dark. I could not forget her when my people went north. I could not forget that she was still back here at Moccasin Bay. So I slipped away and came here. I found her wounded in the camp where you brought her. I went away again—went away to my people—a day's run distant. When I was there, I was unable to remain. So I ran off into the woods again. And all the time that I ran I could see her, I could hear her voice. When a man is like that do you think that he can listen to words? There is no penalty under the sky that I wouldn't suffer to have my way."

"Once more, my brother," Brant pleaded, "let me have my say. Whether you kill me or not is of small importance in the long run except to yourself. For a man doesn't count when he is reckoned by himself. As for myself, it matters little whether the Big Sleep take me to-day or to-morrow. So has your father taught me and it is true teaching. But I repeat that there is trouble enough in this part of the world at the present moment without your adding to it. The red people are threatening war on the white people. The white people are threatening war on the red people. From both, this girl is in danger. On the other hand, peace may come—peace! —peace!—by the grace of the Great Spirit!—and find my adopted people, the Seminoles, safe and happy in this land of their ancestors. Let us wait until that time. Then, if you desire to kill me, we will go into the woods together and settle this thing as brothers should."

Young Tiger gazed into the distance. But he suddenly shifted his eyes to Brant's.

"I hear white men coming now," he whispered.

Brant listened. There was nothing unexpected in the announcement. It was about now that he had looked for it—time for some of Jade's former followers to be getting together again, whether Jade was there to lead them or not. A brief interval, then he himself was hearing the sound, or succession of sounds, that Polytee had heard. But there was a suggestion of strangeness and wildness about the racket these white men were making even when heard at the present distance.

"Drunk, perhaps," Brant ventured.

"They are many," said the Tiger.

"They are drunk or they are mad," said Brant.

There was no mistaking it now, the strangeness of those sounds that came drifting across the wide silences of the wilderness. They were sounds to frighten the birds. Even the mourning sand-hill crane had left off its lamentations.

"White Moon," said Young Tiger, "the madness was in me when I was speaking just now. Let us pretend that nothing was said—let us be brothers indeed. You are one. They are many. But you and I together——"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

HASHISH.

QUEER things had been taking place on that island to which Bertram Jade had brought Richard Brant and Barbara Fawn as his prisoners, and from which Brant and the girl had subsequently escaped.

"Is it poison?" Bill Brown asked.

That was after Brant and the girl were gone—gone somewhere out there in the impenetrable night of the swamp. And Bill showed the grains and nodules of the pale resin he had found on the plants Brant had described for him.

"What is it?" asked Cunliffe.

Beebee Evers explained:

"It's some sort of an Injun remedy fer pain. Mr. Brant, he told us about it. And he ought to know. Dern ef I don't believe he's part Injun hisself."

All this while the fate of Bertram Jade was still in doubt. They were obsessed with fear and pain of their own without adding to this a consideration for what might have happened to others. While they talked, they cast hunted stares about them into the darkness. There was no telling when a shot might drill in upon them from out there. It may have explained Beebee's use of the title "Mis-

ter" in speaking of Brant. It certainly explained Cunliffe's "Sh!" as he cast a sharp glance about him.

"If Mr. Brant told you somethin'," he averred in a rather loud voice, "you can lay to it as bein' the truth."

"Then you try it," said Bill Brown, holding out his hand.

Cunliffe took a grain of the stuff and contemplated it. There was a burning in his hand. Fatigue and little food had brought him a degree of physical desperation. He had long been deprived of alcohol; and of this, so he had been already informed, there was none in the camp.

"I'll try it," said Cunliffe, and he put the grain in his mouth.

"Look out," blurted Brown. "He said it was poison."

Into Cunliffe's face came a grim look of added consternation.

"He said it was only pizen if you took too much," cried Beebee Evers. "Here, I'll take a dose myself. I'm dern near crazy with the pain in my leg."

"There ain't much taste to it," said Cunliffe. "Jest a little sweetish." He made a face and swallowed the resin which he had pulverized into dust. He stood there rather breathless and awaited results. "Give me a little more of it," he suddenly demanded, and he thrust out his hand.

"Wait a minute," said Brown. "Go git some yerself."

Bill was watching the change that was coming over Beebee Evers. His preoccupation was such that he had failed to notice the change that was already visible in the face of the old moonshiner. Over Cunliffe's pain-seamed features there had come a gentle smile. He let out the first ripples of a contented chuckle.

But if Tom Cunliffe was affected by the strange medicine, even more so was Beebee Evers. Beebee Evers was one of those men who have a reckless belief in their own good luck, so far as life and death are concerned—at least, when some one had shown him the way. It was not one grain he had taken but several—large ones—going on the theory that if a little of something was good, more of it would be better yet. He had been quick to catch the trace of sweetness—almost as quick to catch a certain heady quality of the gum. He had chewed it rapidly, swallowed it. Then, into his face had come a look of dazed delight. His eyes flickered. He looked at Bill Brown with a look of profound love.

"Give me a little more," he cooed.

But Bill Brown had seen enough to sweep all his doubts away. He had been counting the pulses of pain in his wounded arms all the time that he had been watching for the development of effects in the person of Beebee.

"Wait," he cried. "I guess I been sufferin' as much as you fellers have."

He backed away. He spilled half of the resin that remained to him into his own gaping mouth, began to chew it.

That guess of Brant's as to the nature of the stuff may have been wrong, as he himself had been ready to concede. It may not have been the plant that furnishes the hashish of the Orient. But there are many uncatalogued plants in the swamps of southwest Florida—toxic, anodyne, floral and vegetable cousins and counterparts of the more famous herbs. Whether this was the wild hemp or not, it was worthy to rank with that valuable but terrible plant.

While Bill Brown was just coming into a sense of numbing elation that was different from any sensation he had ever experienced before in his life, he reeled a little and looked down at Beebee Evers seated on a log. He listened to Beebee's plea.

"They's two of you and you're both talkin' at once," he declared. "Here, both of you take some."

And at that, he was trying to hand the stuff that remained to him to both of the cripples seated there. At that, Tom Cunliffe tried to help himself, and thus spilled it; whereupon Beebee Evers let out a cry of grief and began to search for the particles on the ground, retrieving a nodule here and there and promptly eating it.

Cunliffe, with the light of omniscience now in his brain, escaped the blow that Bill Brown good-naturedly aimed at him and himself disappeared over the edge of

the clearing and down into the swamp where he had seen Bill Brown collect the medicinal treasure. There was nothing mean about Cunliffe. The old moonshiner had never felt so charitable in his life. How beautiful was the world! How beautiful and gallant was himself. He trod the air. He wasn't a day older than twenty. He found the plants ready to his hand. It was as if they had grown for him particularly. He was about to confer a measureless gift on humanity. He began to pull the plants up by the root. He gathered a staggering armload of them, meantime keeping up his strength and joyfulness by such grains of the stuff as came ready to his hand.

Around the rim of a beautiful park went Cunliffe, in no great hurry, sure that his friends were enjoying themselves. He staggered into the water and out again. His spraddling foot kicked a moccasin, and the moceasin struck him; but Cunliffe's life was charmed—as he would have been ready to tell you himself—and the fangs of the snake got no further than the cowhide uppers of his boots.

But what was this? Oh, what was this?

Surely, not Mr. Bertram Jade!

Cunliffe reached down into the mud and water and tugged something forth. Just what it was he wasn't sure at first, for a strange night was falling, and all the light that was left in the world was red and black, like the face of a checkerboard. And now the face of the thing he had retrieved was red and now it was black, depending on the way you looked at it. Or was it a contrast of blood and the ooze of the marsh? Not that, for such brutal things had ceased to exist in the world. This wasn't an island in a swamp on the edge of the Everglades. This was a park in some undiscovered country—perhaps a white man's corner of the red man's happy hunting grounds—beautiful *Poyafitsa!*

It made Cunliffe laugh. Whether this was Mr. Jade or not, it was quite evident that he was, as yet, in ignorance of the manifold blessings of the situation in which he found himself. Cunliffe therefore dragged the unconscious figure with him. But Cunliffe still held his sheaf of medicine plants. And finally, by a circuitous path he came back to the fire, where Beebee Evers was singing and where Bill Brown was weaving through the mazes of a gliding, swaying dance.

There, by the light of the fire, they administered of the medicine to Bertram Jade; and gradually Jade recovered. He not only recovered, he was almost as good as new. The only difference seemed to be that he, who had never been precisely the hale fellow well met, had now lost all pretense to superiority. He called out joyously to those about him—and also to others who seemed to be lurking back in the shadows where none but Jade himself could see them and who were too bashful to come in.

It was Beebe Evers who made the next great discovery. For discovery, like invention, is also a child of necessity; and upon Beebee there had fallen a need for more of the blessed stuff he had taken. But Beebee was handicapped by his bad leg, and the others were more active than he, and their needs also were great and not to be denied.

So, also with his hint of omniscience, Beebee's eyes fell on the top of one of the plants that Cunliffe had brought back from his foraging tour, and he saw that this top—a combination of small leaves and berries—had long been dry and was capable of yielding smoke. He kept his great idea to himself while he was stuffing his ancient pipe with the strange stuff. Surreptitiously he lighted up.

It was a night when stars were moons, and when the moons waved in the breeze like daisies in a field.

Yet the night was not without its old-fashioned, more familiar forms of humor. For presently it dawned upon them that Jade was trying to spoil the picnic for those who had ceased to be his underlings, so they set upon him—the three cripples did, just as if they were not cripples at all—and they beat him for the good of his soul. Then, just to show him that there was no ill humor back of their chastisement, they plied him with more of the stuff, and Beebee made Jade smoke his pipe.

Beebee could do this, for, by this time, Beebee could have reached down, had he

cared to, and plucked a moon from the daisy fiield and put it in the lapel of his purple satin coat.

A new chapter of strangeness came to pass on the morrow. For, in the course of the day, a dozen wild and famished men reached the island from a long trek through the swamps whither they had been driven by Sheriff Jim Crawford and his deputy. These men were frightened. Each and every one of them believed that his time had come, for one or two of them had been foolish enough to shoot at the sheriff and his aid. And, when that happened and the shooter had absurdly missed, it meant sure death for all concerned. There were those in the dozen who would have fled—fled back to the sheriff and young Dewey Slade with an offer to turn State's evidence—turn a new leaf, even—anything to escape this bearded Nemesis and his aid. But the gang had gone watchful, hateful, murderous to their own kind, and none could escape from the others. So they had stuck together and beat, by strange passes through saw grass, mud and water, to this hidden camp of Bertram Jade. He had helped them before. He would have to help them now. It surprised and angered them to find Jade and his companions asleep while they were in the midst of acute suffering, so they kicked the sleepers awake.

To be Concluded.

Unseen—Unfeared

By Francis Stevens

I HAD been dining with my ever-interesting friend, Mark Jenkins, at a little Italian restaurant near South Street. It was a chance meeting. Jenkins is too busy, usually, to make dinner engagements. Over our highly seasoned food and sour, thin, red wine, he spoke of little odd incidents and adventures of his profession. Nothing very vital or important, of course. Jenkins is not the sort of detective who first detects and then pours the egotistical and revealing details of achievement in the ears of every acquaintance, however appreciative.

But when I spoke of something I had seen in the morning papers, he laughed. "Poor old 'Doc' Holt! Fascinating old codger, to any one who really knows him. I've had his friendship for years—since I was first on the city force and saved a young assistant of his from jail on a false charge. And they had to drag him into the poisoning of this young sport, Ralph Peeler!"

"Why are you so sure he couldn't have been implicated?" I asked.

But Jenkins only shook his head, with a quiet smile. "I have reasons for believing otherwise," was all I could get out of him on that score. "But," he added, "the only reason he was suspected at all is the superstitious dread of these ignorant people around him. Can't see why he lives in such a place. I know for a fact he doesn't have to. Doc's got money of his own. He's an amateur

chemist and dabbler in different sorts of research work, and I suspect he's been guilty of 'showing off.' Result, they all swear he has the evil eye and holds forbidden communion with invisible powers. Smoke?"

Jenkins offered me one of his invariably good cigars, which I accepted, saying thoughtfully: "A man has no right to trifle with the superstitions of ignorant people. Sooner or later, it spells trouble."

"Did in his case. They swore up and down that he sold love charms openly and poisons secretly, and that, together with his living so near to—somebody else—got him temporarily suspected. But my tongue's running away with me, as usual!"

"As usual," I retorted impatiently, "you open up with all the frankness of a Chinese diplomat."

He beamed upon me engagingly and rose from the table, with a glance at his watch. "Sorry to leave you, Blaisdell, but I have to meet Jimmy Brennan in ten minutes."

He so clearly did not invite my further company that I remained seated for a little while after his departure; then took my own way homeward. Those streets always held for me a certain fascination, particularly at night. They are so unlike the rest of the city, so foreign in appearance, with their little shabby stores, always open until late evening, their unbelievably cheap goods, displayed as much outside the shops as in them, hung on the fronts and laid out on tables by the curb and in the street itself. To-night, however, neither people nor stores in any sense appealed to me. The mixture of Italians, Jews and a few negroes, mostly bareheaded, unkempt and generally unhygienic in appearance, struck me as merely revolting. They were all humans, and I, too, was human. Some way I did not like the idea.

Puzzled a trifle, for I am more inclined to sympathize with poverty than accuse it, I watched the faces that I passed. Never before had I observed how stupid, how bestial, how brutal were the countenances of the dwellers in this region. I actually shuddered when an old-clothes man, a gray-bearded Hebrew, brushed me as he toiled past with his barrow.

There was a sense of evil in the air, a warning of things which it is wise for a clean man to shun and keep clear of. The impression became so strong that before I had walked two squares I began to feel physically ill. Then it occurred to me that the one glass of cheap Chianti I had drunk might have something to do with the feeling. Who knew how that stuff had been manufactured, or whether the juice of the grape entered at all into its ill-flavored composition? Yet I doubted if that were the real cause of my discomfort.

By nature I am rather a sensitive, impressionable sort of chap. In some way to-night this neighborhood, with its sordid sights and smells, had struck me wrong.

My sense of impending evil was merging into actual fear. This would never do. There is only one way to deal with an imaginative temperament like mine—conquer its vagaries. If I left South Street with this nameless dread upon me, I could never pass down it again without a recurrence of the feeling. I should simply have to stay here until I got the better of it—that was all.

I paused on a corner before a shabby but brightly lighted little drug store. Its gleaming windows and the luminous green of its conventional glass show jars made the brightest spot on the block. I realized that I was tired, but hardly wanted to go in there and rest. I knew what the company would be like at its shabby, sticky soda fountain. As I stood there, my eyes fell on a long white canvas sign across from me, and its black-and-red lettering caught my attention.

SEE THE GREAT UNSEEN!
Coms in! This Means You!
Free to All!

A museum of fakes, I thought, but also reflected that if it were a show of some kind I could sit down for a while, rest, and fight off this increasing obsession of nonexistent evil. That side of the street

was almost deserted, and the place itself might well be nearly empty.

II.

I WALKED over, but with every step my sense of dread increased. Dread of I knew not what. Bodiless, inexplicable horror had me as in a net, whose strands, being intangible, without reason for existence, I could by no means throw off. It was not the people now. None of them were about me. There, in the open, lighted street, with no sight nor sound of terror to assail me, I was the shivering victim of such fear as I had never known was possible. Yet still I would not yield.

Setting my teeth, and fighting with myself as with some pet animal gone mad, I forced my steps to slowness and walked along the sidewalk, seeking entrance. Just here there were no shops, but several doors reached in each case by means of a few iron-railed stone steps. I chose the one in the middle beneath the sign. In that neighborhood there are museums, shops and other commercial enterprises conducted in many shabby old residences, such as were these. Behind the glazing of the door I had chosen I could see a dim, pinkish light, but on either side the windows were quite dark.

Trying the door, I found it unlocked. As I opened it a party of Italians passed on the pavement below and I looked back at them over my shoulder. They were gayly dressed, men, women and children, laughing and chattering to one another; probably on their way to some wedding or other festivity.

In passing, one of the men glanced up at me and involuntarily I shuddered back against the door. He was a young man, handsome after the swarthy manner of his race, but never in my life had I seen a face so expressive of pure, malicious cruelty, naked and unashamed. Our eyes met and his seemed to light up with a vile gleaming, as if all the wickedness of his nature had come to a focus in the look of concentrated hate he gave me.

They went by, but for some distance I could see him watching me, chin on shoulder, till he and his party were swallowed up in the crowd of marketers farther down the street.

Sick and trembling from that encounter, merely of eyes though it had been, I threw aside my partly smoked cigar and entered. Within there was a small vestibule, whose ancient tesselated floor was grimy with the passing of many feet. I could feel the grit of dirt under my shoes, and it rasped on my rawly quivering nerves. The inner door stood partly open, and going on I found myself in a bare, dirty hallway, and was greeted by the sour, musty, poverty-stricken smell common to dwellings of the very ill-to-do. Beyond there was a stairway, carpeted with ragged grass matting. A gas jet, turned low inside a very dusty pink globe, was the light I had seen from without.

Listening, the house seemed entirely silent. Surely, this was no place of public amusement of any kind whatever. More likely it was a rooming house, and I had, after all, mistaken the entrance.

To my intense relief, since coming inside, the worst agony of my unreasonable terror had passed away. If I could only get in some place where I could sit down and be quiet, probably I should be rid of it for good. Determining to try another entrance, I was about to leave the bare hallway when one of several doors along the side of it suddenly opened and a man stepped out into the hall.

"Well?" he said, looking at me keenly, but with not the least show of surprise at my presence.

"I beg your pardon," I replied. "The door was unlocked and I came in here, thinking it was the entrance to the exhibit —what do they call it?—the 'Great Unseen.' The one that is mentioned on that long white sign. Can you tell me which door is the right one?"

"I can."

With that brief answer he stopped and stared at me again. He was a tall, lean man, somewhat stooped, but possessing considerable dignity of bearing. For that neighborhood, he appeared uncommonly well dressed, and his long, smooth-shaven face was noticeable because, while his

complexion was dark and his eyes coal-black, above them the heavy brows and his hair were almost silvery-white. His age might have been anything over the threescore mark.

I grew tired of being stared at. "If you can and—won't, then never mind," I observed a trifle irritably, and turned to go. But his sharp exclamation halted me.

"No!" he said. "No—no! Forgive me for pausing—it was not hesitation, I assure you. To think that one—one, even, has come! All day they pass my sign up there—pass and fear to enter. But you are different. *You* are not of these timorous, ignorant foreign peasants. You ask me to tell you the right door? Here it is! Here!"

And he struck the panel of the door, which he had closed behind him, so that the sharp yet hollow sound of it echoed up through the silent house.

Now it may be thought that after all my senseless terror in the open street, so strange a welcome from so odd a showman would have brought the feeling back, full force. But there is an emotion stronger, to a certain point, than fear. This queer old fellow aroused my curiosity. What kind of museum could it be that he accused the passing public of fearing to enter? Nothing really terrible, surely, or it would have been closed by the police. And normally I am not an unduly timorous person. "So, it's in there, is it?" I asked, coming toward him. "And I'm to be sole audience? Come, that will be an interesting experience." I was half laughing now.

"The most interesting in the world," said the old man, with a solemnity which rebuked my lightness.

With that he opened the door, passed inward and closed it again—in my very face. I stood staring at it blankly. The panels, I remember, had been originally painted white, but now the paint was flaked and blistered, gray with dirt and dirty finger marks. Suddenly it occurred to me that I had no wish to enter there. Whatever was behind it could be scarcely worth seeing, or he would not choose such a place for its exhibition. With the old man's vanishing my curiosity had cooled, but just as I again turned to leave, the door opened and this singular showman stuck his white-eyebrowed face through the aperture. He was frowning impatiently. "Come in—come in!" he snapped, and promptly withdrawing his head, once more closed the door.

"He has something in there he doesn't want should get out," was the very natural conclusion which I drew. "Well, since it can hardly be anything dangerous, and he's so anxious I should see it—here goes!"

With that I turned the soiled white porcelain handle, and entered.

The room I came into was neither very large nor very brightly lighted. In no way did it resemble a museum or lecture room. On the contrary, it seemed to have been fitted up as a quite well-appointed laboratory. The floor was linoleum-covered, there were glass cases along the walls whose shelves were filled with bottles, specimen jars, graduates, and the like. A large table in one corner bore what looked like some odd sort of camera, and a larger one in the middle of the room was fitted with a long rack filled with bottles and test tubes, and was besides littered with papers, glass slides, and various paraphernalia which my ignorance failed to identify. There were several cases of books, a few plain wooden chairs, and in the corner a large iron sink with running water.

My host of the white hair and black eyes was awaiting me, standing near the larger table. He indicated one of the wooden chairs with a thin forefinger that shook a little, either from age or eagerness. "Sit down—sit down! Have no fear but that you will be interested, my friend. Have no fear at all—of anything!"

As he said it he fixed his dark eyes upon me and stared harder than ever. But the effect of his words was the opposite of their meaning. I did sit down, because my knees gave under me, but if in the outer hall I had lost my terror, it now returned twofold upon me. Out there the light had been faint, dingily roseate, indefinite. By it I had not perceived how this old man's face was a mask of living malice—of cruelty, hate

and a certain masterful contempt. Now I knew the meaning of my fear, whose warning I would not heed. Now I knew that I had walked into the very trap from which my abnormal sensitiveness had striven in vain to save me.

III.

AGAIN I struggled within me, bit at my lip till I tasted blood, and presently the blind paroxysm passed. It must have been longer in going than I thought, and the old man must have all that time been speaking, for when I could once more control my attention, hear and see him, he had taken up a position near the sink, about ten feet away, and was addressing me with a sort of "platform" manner, as if I had been the large audience whose absence he had deplored.

"And so," he was saying, "I was forced to make these plates very carefully, to truly represent the characteristic hues of each separate organism. Now, in color work of every kind the film in necessarily extremely sensitive. Doubtless you are familiar in a general way with the exquisite transparencies produced by color photography of the single-plate type."

He paused, and, trying to act like a normal human being, I observed: "I saw some nice landscapes done in that way—last week at an illustrated lecture in Franklin Hall."

He scowled, and made an impatient gesture at me with his hand. "I can proceed better without interruptions," he said. "My pause was purely oratorical."

I meekly subsided, and he went on in his original loud, clear voice. He would have made an excellent lecturer before a much larger audience—if only his voice could have lost that eerie, ringing note. Thinking of that I must have missed some more, and when I caught it again he was saying:

"As I have indicated, the original plate is the final picture. Now, many of these organisms are extremely hard to photograph, and microphotography in color is particularly difficult. In consequence, to spoil a plate tries the patience of the photographer. They are so sensitive that the ordinary dark-room ruby lamp would instantly ruin them, and they must therefore be developed either in darkness or by a special light produced by interposing thin sheets of tissue of a particular shade of green and of yellow between lamp and plate, and even that will often cause ruinous fog. Now I, finding it hard to handle them so, made numerous experiments with a view to discovering some glass or fabric of a color which should add to the safety of the green, without robbing it of all efficiency. All proved equally useless, but intermittently I persevered—until last week."

His voice dropped to an almost confidential tone, and he leaned slightly toward me. I was cold from my neck to my feet, though my head was burning, but I tried to force an appreciative smile.

"Last week," he continued impressively, "I had a prescription filled at the corner drug store. The bottle was sent home to me wrapped in a piece of what I at first took to be whitish, slightly opalescent paper. Later I decided that it was some kind of membrane. When I questioned the druggist, seeking its source, he said it was a sheet of 'paper' that was around a bundle of herbs from South America. That he had no more, and doubted if I could trace it. He had wrapped my bottle so, because he was in haste and the sheet was handy.

"I can hardly tell you what first inspired me to try that membrane in my photographic work. It was merely dull white with a faint hint of opalescence, except when held against the light. Then it became quite translucent and quite brightly prismatic. For some reason it occurred to me that this refractive effect might help in breaking up the actinic rays —the rays which affect the sensitive emulsion. So that night I inserted it behind the sheets of green and yellow tissue, next the lamp, prepared my trays and chemicals, laid my plate holders to hand, turned off the white light and—turned on the green!"

There was nothing in his words to inspire fear. It was a wearisomely detailed account of his struggles with photography. Yet, as he again paused im-

pressively, I wished that he might never speak again. I was desperately, contemptibly in dread of the thing he might say next.

Suddenly he drew himself erect, the stoop went out of his shoulders, he threw back his head and laughed. It was a hollow sound, as if he laughed into a trumpet. "I won't tell you what I saw! Why should I? Your own eyes shall bear witness. But this much I'll say, so that you may better understand—later. When our poor, faultily sensitive vision can perceive a thing, we say that it is visible. When the nerves of touch can feel it, we say that it is tangible. Yet I tell you there are beings intangible to our physical sense, yet whose presence is felt by the spirit, and invisible to our eyes merely because those organs are not attuned to the light as reflected from their bodies. But light passed through the screen which we are about to use has a wave length novel to the scientific world, and by it you shall see with the eyes of the flesh that which has been invisible since life began. Have no fear!"

He stopped to laugh again, and his mirth was yellow-toothed—menacing.

"*Have no fear!*" he reiterated, and with that stretched his hand toward the wall, there came a click and we were in black, impenetrable darkness. I wanted to spring up, to seek the door by which I had entered and rush out of it, but the paralysis of unreasoning terror held me fast.

I could hear him moving about in the darkness, and a moment later a faint green glimmer sprang up in the room. Its source was over the large sink, where I suppose he developed his precious "color plates."

Every instant, as my eyes became accustomed to the dimness, I could see more clearly. Green light is peculiar. It may be far fainter than red, and at the same time far more illuminating. The old man was standing beneath it, and his face by that ghastly radiance had the exact look of a dead man's. Beside this, however, I could observe nothing appalling.

"That," continued the man, "is the simple developing light of which I have spoken—now watch, for what you are about to behold no mortal man but myself has ever seen before."

For a moment he fussed with the green lamp over the sink. It was so constructed that all the direct rays struck downward. He opened a flap at the side, for a moment there was a streak of comforting white luminance from within, then he inserted something, slid it slowly in—and closed the flap.

The thing he put in—that South American "membrane" it must have been—instead of decreasing the light increased it—amazingly. The hue was changed from green to greenish-gray, and the whole room sprang into view, a livid, ghastly chamber, filled with—overcrawled by—what?

My eyes fixed themselves, fascinated, on something that moved by the old man's feet. It writhed there on the floor like a huge, repulsive starfish, an immense, armed, legged thing, that twisted convulsively. It was smooth, as if made of rubber, was whitish-green in color; and presently raised its great round blob of a body on tottering tentacles, crept toward my host and writhed upward—yes, climbed up his legs, his body. And he stood there, erect, arms folded, and stared sternly down at the thing which climbed.

But the room—the whole room was alive with other creatures than that. Everywhere I looked they were—centipedish things, with yard-long bodies, detestable, furry spiders that lurked in shadows, and sausage-shaped translucent horrors that moved—and floated through the air. They dived here and there between me and the light, and I could see its brighter greenness through their greenish bodies.

Worse, though, far worse than these were the *things with human faces.* Masklike, monstrous, huge gaping mouths and slitlike eyes—I find I cannot write of them. There was that about them which makes their memory even now intolerable.

The old man was speaking again, and every word echoed in my brain like the ringing of a gong. "Fear nothing! Among such as these do you move every hour of the day and the night. Only you

and I have seen, for God is merciful and has spared our race from sight. But I am not merciful! I loathe the race which gave these creatures birth—the race which might be so surrounded by invisible, unguessed but blessed beings—and chooses these for its companions! All the world shall see and know. One by one shall they come here, learn the truth, and perish. For who can survive the ultimate of terror? Then I, too, shall find peace, and leave the earth to its heritage of man-created horrors. Do you know what these are—whence they come?"

His voice boomed now like a cathedral bell. I could not answer him, but he waited for no reply. "Out of the ether—out of the omnipresent ether from whose intangible substance the mind of God made the planets, all living things, and man—man has made these! By his evil thoughts, by his selfish panics, by his lusts and his interminable, never-ending hate he has made them, and they are everywhere! Fear nothing—they cannot harm your body—but let your spirit beware! Fear nothing—but see where there comes to you, its creator, the shape and the body of your FEAR!"

And as he said it I perceived a great Thing coming toward me—a Thing—but consciousness could endure no more. The ringing, threatening voice merged in a roar within my ears, there came a merciful dimming of the terrible, lurid vision, and blank nothingness succeeded upon horror too great for bearing.

IV.

THERE was a dull, heavy pain above my eyes. I knew that they were closed, that I was dreaming, and that the rack full of colored bottles which I seemed to see so clearly was no more than a part of the dream. There was some vague but imperative reason why I should rouse myself. I wanted to awaken, and thought that by staring very hard indeed I could dissolve this foolish vision of blue and yellow-brown bottles. But instead of dissolving they grew clearer, more solid and substantial of appearance, until suddenly the rest of my senses rushed to the support of sight, and I became aware that my eyes were open, the bottles were quite real, and that I was sitting in a chair, fallen sideways so that my cheek rested most uncomfortably on the table which held the rack.

I straightened up slowly and with difficulty, groping in my dulled brain for some clew to my presence in this unfamiliar place, this laboratory that was lighted only by the rays of an arc light in the street outside its three large windows. Here I sat, alone, and if the aching of cramped limbs meant anything, here I had sat for more than a little time.

Then, with the painful shock which accompanies awakening to the knowledge of some great catastrophe, came memory. It was this very room, shown by the street lamp's rays to be empty of life, which I had seen thronged with creatures too loathsome for description. I staggered to my feet, staring fearfully about. There were the glass-doored cases, the bookshelves, the two tables with their burdens, and the long iron sink above which, now only a dark blotch of shadow, hung the lamp from which had emanated that livid, terrifically revealing illumination. Then the experience had been no dream, but a frightful reality. I was alone here now. With callous indifference my strange host had allowed me to remain for hours unconscious, with not the least effort to aid or revive me. Perhaps, hating me so, he had hoped that I would die there.

At first I made no effort to leave the place. Its appearance filled me with reminiscent loathing. I longed to go, but as yet felt too weak and ill for the effort. Both mentally and physically my condition was deplorable, and for the first time I realized that a shock to the mind may react upon the body as vilely as any debauch of self-indulgence.

Quivering in every nerve and muscle, dizzy with headache and nausea, I dropped back into the chair, hoping that before the old man returned I might recover sufficient self-control to escape him. I knew that he hated me, and why. As I waited, sick, miserable, I understood the man. Shuddering, I recalled the loathsome horrors he had shown me. If the mere desires and emotions of man-

kind were daily carnified in such forms as those, no wonder that he viewed his fellow beings with detestation and longed only to destroy them.

I thought, too, of the cruel, sensuous faces I had seen in the streets outside—seen for the first time, as if a veil had been withdrawn from eyes hitherto blinded by self-delusion. Fatuously trustful as a month-old puppy, I had lived in a grim, evil world, where goodness is a word and crude selfishness the only actuality. Drearily my thoughts drifted back through my own life, its futile purposes, mistakes and activities. All of evil that I knew returned to overwhelm me. Our gropings toward divinity were a sham, a writhing sunward of slime-covered beasts who claimed sunlight as their heritage, but in their hearts preferred the foul and easy depths.

Even now, though I could neither see nor feel them, this room, the entire world, was acrawl with the beings created by our real natures. I recalled the cringing, contemptible fear to which my spirit had so readily yielded, and the faceless Thing to which the emotion had given birth.

Then abruptly, shockingly, I remembered that every moment I was adding to the horde. Since my mind could conceive only repulsive incubi, and since while I lived I must think, feel, and so continue to shape them, was there no way to check so abominable a succession? My eyes fell on the long shelves with their many-colored bottles. In the chemistry of photography there are deadly poisons—I knew that. Now was the time to end it—now! Let him return and find his desire accomplished. One good thing I could do, if one only. I could abolish my monster-creating self.

V.

MY friend Mark Jenkins is an intelligent and usually a very careful man. When he took from "Smiler" Callahan a cigar which had every appearance of being excellent, innocent Havana, the act denoted both intelligence and caution. By very clever work he had traced the poisoning of young Ralph Peeler to Mr. Callahan's door, and he believed this particular cigar to be the mate of one smoked by Peeler just previous to his demise. And if, upon arresting Callahan, he had not confiscated this bit of evidence, it would have doubtless been destroyed by its regrettably unconscientious owner.

But when Jenkins shortly afterward gave me that cigar, as one of his own, he committed one of those almost inconceivable blunders which, I think, are occasionally forced upon clever men to keep them from overweening vanity. Discovering his slight mistake, my detective friend spent the night searching for his unintended victim, myself, and that his search was successful was due to Pietro Marini, a young Italian of Jenkins' acquaintance, whom he met about the hour of two a. m. returning from a dance.

Now, Marini had seen me standing on the steps of the house where Doctor Frederick Holt had his laboratory and living rooms, and he had stared at me, not with any ill intent, but because he thought I was the sickest-looking, most ghastly specimen of humanity that he had ever beheld. And, sharing the superstition of his South Street neighbors, he wondered if the worthy doctor had poisoned me as well as Peeler. This suspicion he imparted to Jenkins, who, however, had the best of reasons for believing otherwise. Moreover, as he informed Marini, Holt was dead, having drowned himself late the previous afternoon. An hour or so after our talk in the restaurant news of his suicide reached Jenkins.

It seemed wise to search any place where a very sick-looking young man had been seen to enter, so Jenkins came straight to the laboratory. Across the fronts of those houses was the long sign with its mysterious inscription, "See the Great Unseen," not at all mysterious to the detective. He knew that next door to Doctor Holt's the second floor had been thrown together into a lecture room, where at certain hours a young man employed by settlement workers displayed upon a screen stereopticon views of various deadly bacilli, the germs of diseases appropriate to dirt and indifference. He knew, too, that Doctor Holt himself had helped the educational effort along by

providing some really wonderful lantern slides, done by micro-color photography.

On the pavement outside, Jenkins found the two-thirds remnant of a cigar, which he gathered in and came up the steps, a very miserable and self-reproachful detective. Neither outer nor inner door was locked, and in the laboratory he found me, alive, but on the verge of death by another means than he had feared.

In the extreme physical depression following my awakening from drugged sleep, and knowing nothing of its cause, I believed my adventure fact in its entirety. My mentality was at too low an ebb to resist its dreadful suggestion. I was searching among Holt's various bottles when Jenkins burst in. At first I was merely annoyed at the interruption of my purpose, but before the anticlimax of his explanation the mists of obsession drifted away and left me still sick in body, but in spirit happy as any man may well be who has suffered a delusion that the world is wholly bad—and learned that its badness springs from his own poisoned brain.

The malice which I had observed in every face, including young Marini's, existed only in my drug-affected vision. Last week's "popular-science" lecture had been recalled to my subconscious mind—the mind that rules dreams and delirium—by the photographic apparatus in Holt's workroom. "See the Great Unseen" assisted materially, and even the corner drug store before which I had paused, with its green-lit show vases, had doubtless played a part. But presently, following something Jenkins told me, I was driven to one protest. "If Holt was not here," I demanded, "if Holt is dead, as you say, how do you account for the fact that I, who have never seen the man, was able to give you an accurate description which you admit to be that of Doctor Frederick Holt?"

He pointed across the room. "See that?" It was a life-size bust portrait, in crayons, the picture of a white-haired man with bushy eyebrows and the most piercing black eyes I had ever seen—until the previous evening. It hung facing the door and near the windows, and the features stood out with a strangely lifelike appearance in the white rays of the arc lamp just outside. "Upon entering," continued Jenkins, "the first thing you saw was that portrait, and from it your delirium built a living, speaking man. So, there are your white-haired showman, your unnatural fear, your color photography and your pretty green golliwogs all nicely explained for you, Blaisdell, and thank God you're alive to hear the explanation. If you had smoked the whole of that cigar—well, never mind. You didn't. And now, my very dear friend, I think it's high time that you interviewed a real, flesh-and-blood doctor. I'll phone for a taxi."

"Don't," I said. "A walk in the fresh air will do me more good than fifty doctors."

"Fresh air! There's no fresh air on South Street in July," complained Jenkins, but reluctantly yielded.

I had a reason for my preference. I wished to see people, to meet face to face even such stray prowlers as might be about at this hour, nearer sunrise than midnight, and rejoice in the goodness and kindliness of the human countenance—particularly as found in the lower classes.

But even as we were leaving there occurred to me a curious inconsistency.

"Jenkins," I said, "you claim that the reason Holt, when I first met him in the hall, appeared to twice close the door in my face, was because the door never opened until I myself unlatched it."

"Yes," confirmed Jenkins, but he frowned, foreseeing my next question.

"Then why, if it was from that picture that I built so solid, so convincing a vision of the man, did I see Holt in the hall before the door was open?"

"You confuse your memories," retorted Jenkins rather shortly.

"Do I? Holt was dead at that hour, but—*I tell you I saw Holt outside the door!* And what was his reason for committing suicide?"

Before my friend could reply I was across the room, fumbling in the dusk there at the electric lamp above the sink. I got the tin flap open and pulled out the sliding screen, which consisted of two sheets of glass with fabric between, dark

on one side, yellow on the other. With it came the very thing I dreaded—a sheet of whitish, parchmentlike, slightly opalescent stuff.

Jenkins was beside me as I held it at arm's length toward the windows. Through it the light of the arc lamp fell—divided into the most astonishingly brilliant rainbow hues. And instead of diminishing the light, it was perceptibly increased in the oddest way. Almost one thought that the sheet itself was luminous, and yet when held in shadow it gave off no light at all.

"Shall we—put it in the lamp again—and try it?" asked Jenkins slowly, and in his voice there was no hint of mockery.

I looked him straight in the eyes. "No," I said, "we won't. I was drugged. Perhaps in that condition I received a merciless revelation of the discovery that caused Holt's suicide, but I don't believe it. Ghost or no ghost, I refuse to ever again believe in the depravity of the human race. If the air and the earth are teeming with invisible horrors, they are *not* of our making, and—the study of demonology is better let alone. Shall we burn this thing, or tear it up?"

"We have no right to do either," returned Jenkins thoughtfully, "but you know, Blaisdell, there's a little too darn much realism about some parts of your 'dream.' I haven't been smoking any doped cigars, but when you held that up to the light, I'll swear I saw—well, never mind. Burn it—send it back to the place it came from."

"South America?" said I.

"A hotter place than that. Burn it."

So he struck a match and we did. It was gone in one great white flash.

A large place was given by morning papers to the suicide of Doctor Frederick Holt, caused, it was surmised, by mental derangement brought about by his unjust implication in the Peeler murder. It seemed an inadequate reason, since he had never been arrested, but no other was ever discovered.

Of course, our action in destroying that "membrane" was illegal and rather precipitate, but, though he won't talk about it, I know that Jenkins agrees with me—doubt is sometimes better than certainty, and there are marvels better left unproved. Those, for instance, which concern the Powers of Evil.

A Full House

by Achmed Abdullah

Author of "Royalty in Disguise," "Pro Patria"

MR. HARRINGTON shivered.

People usually did when Professor Herschel W. Giddens turned upon them the full battery of his brain, which, beneath a number eight-and-a-quarter, neat bowler hat, topped a wizened body of five feet four.

Not that, from an intellectual angle, he was a bravo, a peripatetic swashbuckler who crushed his antagonists with his knowledge, like a very juggernaut of brilliancy and learning and withering, merciless logic. For, while he argued didactically, even brutally, about the subjects he knew, he was a good listener when it came to those with which he was unfamil-

iar. He respected the other fellows' specialties and, by the same token, expected a similar courtesy for his own pet domain: psychology; the practical, applied, constructive end of it.

It was there that Mr. Jerome Harrington had made his mistake.

Had he been satisfied with holding forth about galena ore, the percentage of carbon in the Kootenai coal outcroppings, the reason why the Hood River spitzenburg apples were superior to the Wenatchee jonathans and inferior to the Alberta skookums, or any other of the many details connected with the Northwestern development in which he was a prime factor, Professor Giddens would have listened attentively, his head a little to one side like an intelligent coot, his thin lips lifting sympathetically at the corners, his bright, shrewd eyes glistening underneath bushy, white brows, his pertinacious brain registering and dovetailing the facts as he heard them.

But Mr. Harrington had been rash enough to challenge the other's statements when, over the excellent cigars of the Seattle Civic Club, their conversation had turned to certain aspects of modern civilization and the influence of the science of psychology thereon.

"It was us rough pioneers made this great and glorious Northwest. We just kept on going because your effete Eastern civilization sort of hobbled our hind feet." Mr. Harrington had stated, sublimely oblivious of the fact that his personal pioneering had commenced with his popping across the Washington State line three yards west of a deputy sheriff's spluttering six-gun, squatting on somebody else's undeveloped real estate with a rifle in the crook of his elbow, and selling firewater to the guileless Siwash. "Yes, sir! There wouldn't be nothing at all this side of the Divide, if it wasn't for the number forty-eight chest measures of guys like myself."

"Yes, yes, yes," the professor had replied in his carefully punctuated voice, looking, for all his white hair and wrinkled face, like a precocious child. "Of course, civilization needs brawn—to mulch the ground, so to speak."

"Mulch?" The agricultural allusion had touched Mr. Harrington on the raw. "What——"

"I said—mulch!" repeated the other, nowise intimidated. "Like dung, you know."

"Like——"

"Dung. Right. But the day of it is past. We know that it is there, that we can use it when we need it."

"Who's we?"

"Men like myself, scientifically educated and trained. To-day brawn is the slave of brain."

Mr. Harrington had snickered. He had poked a stumpy thumb at the professor's thin chest.

"Say, little man," he had exclaimed, "I don't mean to be personal, but——"

"I get you—to quote the regrettable, though expressive slang of my freshmen. I weigh ninety-eight pounds. I suffer from anæmia, pyorrhea, chronic rheumatism, sinus trouble, varicose veins, and soft corns. But," he had said it unblushingly, yet unboastingly, "I have a mind, and I have made a thorough study of the turns and twists of other people's minds."

"D'you mean to say you back up that precious mind of yours against——"

"Anybody. Anything. A thousand years ago, I would have been trampled upon, would have gone under. To-day, I, the man of brain, am the king of the man of brawn. For I am an expert at psychology."

Mr. Harrington had stuck out his large, pink chin that passed directly into the strong, full neck.

"Sure, little man," he had said soothingly, as he might to a child. "You want to save your face, as my Chinese cook calls it. But let's talk sense. There's you—and say, I couldn't improve on the description you give o' yourself—and here's me, two hundred and fifteen pounds of meat stripped to the buff. Muscle, strength, guts—that's me! And that's how I made my way. I guess brains are O. K. in their place, but they're no darned good when you're up against the raw thing. Now, between you and me and the lamp-post, I cleaned up a cool half million out o' that gold mine up the Elk River, and I wouldn't have found that mine if I hadn't been able to

outwalk and outwork the rest o' the bunch that was headed in the same direction when Ben Williams comes down here with the news o' the pay streak. Why, you poor, dried-up little Boston shrimp, if you'd been up here in the early days, you wouldn't have developed as much as a patch of secondhand peanuts."

"I am speaking of actual conditions, not of what they were twenty years ago."

"Say! Ain't that mine up the Elk an actual condition? Look at the money I have in the bank. Why, I could buy and sell you a dozen times over."

"All very interesting, but not germane to the subject," said the professor.

"Not—what was that word?"

"I mean that your observations are jejune in the extreme. They are flaccid and adynamic."

"They are—*what?*"

"Don't you understand plain English? All right. I shall put it more simply."

He did. And—we repeat—Mr. Harrington shivered.

II.

HE spoke of it, a few minutes later, to a small but select gathering of leading citizens who were supporting the club bar, financially as well as physically.

"Ding-dong his ding-donged little, warty, rusty hide!" he said. "He——"

"Who's he?" asked Charlie Baxter, the lumber king from Port Angeles way.

"That there measly professor of psycho somethin' who's been lecturing up at Seattle University for the last three months."

"What's he gone and done to you, Jerome?"

"Nothin' much." Mr. Harrington was heavily ironic. "Just stepped on my face and bit me in the chest—that's all. Yes, sir. Treated me as if I was a dirty-nosed, pap-fed brat of a schoolboy. Told me I——" He choked into his whisky glass.

"What?" demanded Clyde Humphreys, his partner and brother-in-law.

"He told me I didn't know what the hell I was talking about!"

"Surely he didn't use those words?" smiled Clyde Humphreys.

"He did, too. 'You don't know what the hell you're talking about!' Them were his exact words. There he sat, like an abridegd edition of a giant, with a contemptuous sneer wrinkling that little knobby, chilblained button of a nose of his, and he sez to me: 'You don't know what the——' "

"Never mind, Jerome," Charlie Baxter cut in soothingly, "he's going back to Boston the end of the week."

"Who told you?"

"He did himself. Said he had learned all he wanted to about the Northwest——"

"All he wanted to!" Mr. Harrington's wrath surged up again. "All he wanted to—in half a year!"

"From a psychological angle, he added, and he said, speaking from that same angle, that it wasn't so different from the East after all."

A minatory glitter came into Mr. Harrington's pale-blue eyes. "Say," he inquired, "did he say anything about brain bein' better than brawn?"

"He sure did. He allowed that a fellow who's familiar with psychology——"

"Meaning himself," cut in Clyde Humphreys.

"Sure. That such a fellow doesn't need anything else. Got my goat good and plenty, he did."

"Mine, too!" from Mr. Harrington.

"And mine!" Clyde Humphreys commented. "Well—let's forget him. He's off to Harvard end of the week. I was at the C. P. R. office when he got his ticket."

"Why don't he take the U. P.?" demanded Mr. Harrington to whom, by this time, the professor's most harmless action was suspicious. "Roundabout way of going to Boston—over the C. P."

"He's going to break his journey at Nelson and go up the Elk River for a week or two. Just to get a bit of mountain air, he says."

"Up the Elk?" Mr. Harrington mused. Then, suddenly, he laughed.

"Brothers!" he said, raising two fingers and a thumb and giving the high sign of a certain lodge which is powerful in social and business circles from Nome to Cheyenne. "I got *a* idea!"

And to the barkeeper:
"Set 'em up, Jim!"

An hour later, he returned to the library where the professor was still sitting, peacefully absorbed in the pale, innocuous mazes of the "Esoteric Review."

"Professor," he asked, leaning above the other, "I hear you're going up the Elk."

"I am."

"Taking a guide?"

"No."

"Darned lonely up there."

"That's all right. All I need is a map, a compass and——"

"That great, grinding brain of yours, eh?" Mr. Harrington curled his lips in a lopsided smile. "Mebbe you're right. But tell me, d'you know anything about cooking?"

"I have a certain rudimentary knowledge, enough for my own modest needs."

"Well, take my tip and go down to the Alaska Grill and ask the chef to give you a few private lessons. Take my tip, little man!"

And Mr. Harrington departed with a crude, untrimmed guffaw which the other, his knowledge of psychology forsaking him for once, blamed on the rich potency of the club's famous special reserve bourbon.

III.

TEN days later, Professor Giddens was well on his way up the Elk.

It was evening, and far on the edge of the ragged horizon a flush of gold and scarlet was fading into twilight, while above Goat Peak the oncoming night was beginning to spread stealthy fingers of purple and black that trickled down to the valley where the Elk lay like a glittering, yellow ribbon across the sooty smudge of the underbrush.

There was no sound except the occasional call of a wild bird that came out of the nowhere with a whirring of brown wings then vanished into an eddy of cloud, and the dim stir of brittle, fox-red leaves, blown about on the lap of some vagabond wind, chill with the snow of the upper range; and Professor Herschel W. Giddens slung his blanket roll and his knapsack with its compact, scientifically condensed food supply from his back.

He sat down with a sigh of tired satisfaction.

His feet were sore, his shoulders stiff and galled through the rubbing of the knapsack straps, his eyes smarted with the wind that had blown all day; but he was happy and contented.

For he liked the great, gray loneliness of the hills. It swept his mind with the sucking strength of a vacuum cleaner, dusting each last, tiny, cobwebby corner and ironing out the wrinkles in his brain against the coming Harvard semester, when once more he would take up written and spoken cudgels against Professor Elmer T. Blakeslee, his colleague, his best friend, and his chief opponent in matters psychological, and bear down upon him with all his invincible logic in which the truths stood one behind the other, neatly marshaled and irreproachably labeled.

"*Linger—longer—Lucy*——"

He whistled a long-forgotten song of his student days, those far-away days when, the which was hard to believe, he had been less interested in philosophic psychology than in that distinctly psychological game, called draw poker.

"*Linger—longer—Loo*——"

But it sounded just a little out of place, here, in the immense, majestic, breath-clogging silence of the mountains, and so he broke off the slangy melody, stretched out his pipestem legs, and lit a mild cigar.

Presently he would prepare his simple supper; a couple of bouillon cubes dissolved in water, with which he had filled his canteen down at the river earlier in the day, heated over his collapsible sterno outfit, a few dry biscuits, and a bar of chocolate, studded nourishingly and engagingly with the humble peanut.

Then he would roll himself in his blankets and doze off, with the twinkling, yellow stars above him, and the clean scent of the pines in his nostrils. And an early start to-morrow morning—back to Nelson, thence to Boston, to his Alma Mater and the chair of applied psychology——

"Hullo, little man!" a sudden voice

boomed out of the trooping, blotched shadows in back of him where a narrow trail, sole memento of some dead and forgotten prospector, twisted up through the gnarled pines and toward a sweep of ragged, fantastic basalt peaks.

Professor Giddens turned, startled, just a little nervous to hear a human voice here in the clogging silence of the hills, and he felt distinctly relieved when he saw that the speaker was Mr. Jerome Harrington, accompanied by his brother-in-law, Charlie Baxter, and Clyde Humphreys.

They were dressed in serviceable Mackinaws and elk-skin boots, rifles in their hands, packs across their shoulders, like men out for a long, rough hike; and the professor was really glad to see them after his first start of surprise had passed. For, when all was said and done and in spite of his occasional squabbles with them and other members of the Seattle Civic Club when the talk had turned on the everlasting comparison between the mutuals merits and demerits of *homo sapiens Atlanticus* and *homo sapiens Pacificus*, he had become fond of the West, and he said so now, adding with hospitable intent:

"I am about to prepare my modest evening repast," opening his knapsack and bringing out biscuits and chocolate bars and bouillon cubes. "If you gentlemen would care to join me——"

"We'll join you all right, all right," cut in Mr. Harrington in a basso voice whose timbre was slightly tainted by a plug of Macdonald's chewing tobacco. "Ain't that so, fellows?" to his two companions, who inclined their heads. Then, again to the Bostonian:

"By the way, little man, did you take my tip?"

"Your tip?"

"Sure. About getting a few lessons in swell cooking before you hit the trail!"

He grinned like the cat that has stolen the cream, his friends joined noisily in his merriment, and the professor, too, smiled, though rather in a puzzled way, since he had no idea what the joke was about.

But, looking up, he read something in the other's chilly, pale-blue eyes which made him feel uncomfortable, which even made him feel afraid.

And instantaneously—for he was just that type of man—his pugnacity rose and bristled.

"Why should I?" he demanded, sticking out his wrinkled old chin like a miniature prize fighter.

"Oh, gee! Why should you?" mimicked Mr. Harrington, and he burst into Gargantuan cachinnations.

IV.

THE professor reflected for a moment; then, from his meager store of slang which he owed to undergraduate repartee overheard in campus or hall, he chose what he considered the most appropriate rejoinder:

"What's the joke, you big, fat slob? Go on. Come through."

Mr. Harrington turned an angry red. "As fresh as ever, ain't you, you dried-up little pimple on the face of humanity?" he asked thickly. "But," musing, then returning to his first proposition. "I wish you *had* taken my tip and *had* asked that Frenchy chef back in Seattle to give you a few lessons in high-class hash slinging. For you're going to need it, see?"

"Why?"

"'Cause you're going to cook for us!"

"For—whom?"

"For us—meaning me myself and them two able-bodied citizens with me. And may the Lord have mercy on your soul if you burn the flapjacks or don't fry the bacon crisp enough!"

A steely gleam came into the professor's myopic eyes.

"I believe this jest has gone far enough," he said, "and——"

"Aw—shut your trap! This ain't a jest. It's the sober, sad truth. For today it's me who's going to do the talking!"

He laughed again, then demanded, apropos of nothing in particular:

"Say, little man, how you feeling about brain and brawn? How you feeling about East and West? How you feeling about psy-cho something?"

The professor raised his bushy eyebrows.

"I have had no occasion so far to alter my opinion in the slightest degree," he replied.

"You haven't, have you? Well, you will in about two shakes of a lamb's tail. You see, little man, our first lesson in brain and brawn, East and West, and psy-cho-hickamadoodle is for you to get busy right smart and fix us up a whole lot of supper. Hey there, Clyde! Open that pack of yours and take out the raw materials. And now," taking the professor by the neck and shaking him as a terrier shakes a rat, "attend to me!"

The professor twisted and strained and struggled—which did not help him at all.

"This is outrageous!" he cried in his piping, high-pitched voice. "I demand an explanation!"

"Don't understand yet?" guffawed Mr. Harrington. "All right!"

And, quoting the professor's words of ten days earlier with more or less fidelity, he said, "I shall put it more simply. You're going to find out in your own shriveled-up person if it's us guys with the forty-eight chest measure that are needed by civilization to—what did you allow civilization needs us for?"

"To mulch the ground of progress!" cried the professor obstinately, still struggling in the other's iron grip.

"Sure. That was the word. And didn't you say a few kind words about us being dung?"

"I did—and I repeat it!"

"Good enough. And didn't you let drop something about the gink who's an expert at psy-cho-maggugin——"

"Yes. And I uphold what I said! Most decidedly so!"

"Sure you do. Well, we'll settle that little argument right now. You see, you're going to be our maid of all work—mine and Charlie's and Clyde's—and I tell you Clyde's mighty fussy. You're going to fry and boil, make coffee and wash up, clean our pipes and lace our boots, and generally try and make yourself more useful than you're ornamental. You're going to find out how much you can do with your brain alone when you're up against nature in the raw."

"Meaning yourself by—nature in the raw?" demanded the professor.

"You got me. And don't you harbor any foolish or rash thoughts, my lad, for we're going to watch you all right, all right. Why, you miserable, wrinkled-up ball of secondhand sausage meat, if that brain of yours is half as great as you say it is—and personally I think you're a liar—you ought to be able to give us the slip in no time!"

"To be sure," said the professor, in quite a matter-of-fact voice. "I can, and I shall!"

"You won't!" roared the other. "We aren't going to take any chances. At night, when we turn in, we're going to hog tie you. And during the day, well"—he chuckled disagreeably and patted his rifle—"we got our little persuaders all cocked and primed. We aren't going to kill you, and I hope it won't be necessary to cripple you for life. But if ever you attempt to skip we're going to pump you so full o' holes that people behind you'll complain of the draft. I give you fair warning, and I just go you a little bet—let's say"—with a grandiose gesture—"twenty thousand dollars!"

"What is the bet?" inquired the professor gently.

"That with all your brain and all that there darned psy-cho-rot of yours, you aren't going to get away from us until you go down on your bended knees and confess the error of your ways—that you aren't going to get away from us until we give the word!" and he released the professor.

The latter smiled. "I'll take that bet," he said simply, and Mr. Harrington and his two friends looked at him and at each other open-mouthed, doubting that they had heard aright.

"And what's more," said Charlie Baxter later on to Clyde Humphreys, while the professor, under the meticulous and blasphemous supervision of Mr. Harrington, was learning how to make coffee which, to quote the latter gentleman, had some guts to it and didn't taste like hog wash, "what's more, I don't think the

little runt is bluffing. He means to win that bet. I see it in his eye!"

During the next few days Professor Herschel W. Giddens worked as, physically, he had never worked before.

Between spreading and airing the blankets, gathering firewood, drawing fish and feathered game, washing, cleaning up, oiling boots, and cooking for three husky men whose appetites were in keeping with their bodily dimensions, he had hardly enough time to call his soul his own.

He made no attempt to run away. And it would have been useless.

For Mr. Harrington had been in grim earnest. All day the professor was watched by one, or two, or the whole three, while at night he was neatly trussed up.

Mr. Harrington bullied and abused and dragooned him; but the professor, through it all, kept his philosophic equanimity and his faintly ironic ease of manner.

He neither complained nor begged. He rarely spoke. He just attended to his manifold duties—and thought.

Too, he smiled, a maddening, slightly supercilious, entirely self-centered and self-satisfied smile—even when Mr. Harrington baited him on the subject of their old misunderstanding, or when, with a great deal of picturesque profanity, he voiced the hope that the other wouldn't welsh when it came to settling the bet.

V.

THUS two days passed, three, and still the professor slaved until his hands were blistered and scratched and cut, his back strained, and all the muscles in his body sore and stiff.

Of course, his three jailers missed the delights of their club and, to make up for it a little, they played draw poker every afternoon, putting the professor between them so that they could watch him during the play; and Giddens rather enjoyed it.

For, as mentioned above, he had been an expert at the great American game during his student years and, even now, every once in a while, he sat down to a modest little penny ante with some of his colleagues and their wives.

It was on the fifth day of his captivity that, looking at Mr. Harrington's hand and seeing him exercise very poor judgment in drawing to his cards, he broke into curt, withering, saturnine laughter.

Mr. Harrington dropped the cards and glared at him.

"Say," he demanded, "with all your other wonderful achievements, d'you perhaps imagine that you can give me a lesson in poker, too?"

"I shouldn't wonder at all," came the mild reply.

"Some more psy-cho-bunk, I guess?"

"Exactly. Poker is not a logical game. It is a *psych*ological game. That's why I am so good at it," he wound up, yawning a little.

Mr. Harrington swallowed. "Look-a-here, you little runt," he demanded thickly, "got any money with you?"

"Yes."

"All right. Buy some chips. Charlie is banker. I'm going to trim you and trim you good, you darned little sucker!"

And so the three-handed game changed into a foursome.

All afternoon they shuffled and dealt and drew, and the professor won steadily from the very first.

It would be doing him an injustice to say that it was luck. It was simply that he could play the game. Perhaps he was right; perhaps poker *is* a psychological game; or, on the other hand, there may exist a distinct genius for poker, not registered by Lombroso, as there exists genius for music and writing.

At all events, Professor Herschel was one of those exceptional men who can split a pair of aces and draw to a flush, and never change a muscle. His wrinkled old face, when he picked up his cards, showed less emotion than a Chinese cemetery on a rainy day in late autumn; and his voice, when he asked for cards, was as void of human emotion as an ossified bagpipe played by a Presbyterian Highland Scot in a dry county. His strategy was worthy of General Foch. It was never twice alike; and when, once in a while, the others abandoned a pot to him without calling his hand and, after-

ward, with the spirit and voices of early Christian martyrs inquired what he had, he could lie like a stockbroker with a Levantine mother.

He centered his attacks on Mr. Harrington's steadily diminishing pile, and added insult to injury by insisting on being paid in cash for the three or four piles of chips he sold to him.

"Don't trust me, eh?" demanded Mr. Harrington, grieved, just as, having lost another pot to the professor, the latter mentioned gently that there were five dollars more coming to him.

"Don't trust me?" he repeated, opening his sadly depleted wallet; and then, quite suddenly, he rose, spluttered, and roared like an angry bull. His curses came thick and fast.

Clyde Humphreys pulled him by the sleeve. "Sit down, Jerome, and behave," he said. "Don't be a bad loser!"

"Bad loser—hell! I don't mind losing money in a straight game, but——" and he stammered forth that, two seconds earlier, he had discarded the queen of spades, and that:

"Look! The runt won that last on a full house—three queens and a pair of dooces! And—look! Darn it all—look!" He pointed at the professor's cards which lay face up: "The queen of hearts, the queen of diamonds, *and the queen of spades!* And he himself dealt the cards! You—you miserable, ornery little cheat! You—you——"

He choked, became incoherent. He took the professor by the neck, shook him, then sent him sprawling into the thick undergrowth that surrounded the camp. "Get out and keep away!" he shouted. "We don't want anything to do with people who cheat at cards!"

He picked up his rifle.

The professor ran down the trail toward the Elk River as fast as his thin legs would let him.

Six days afterward, a telegram dated from Boston was delivered into the hands of Mr. Harrington at the Seattle Civic Club. It read as follows:

Kindly deposit bet wagered to my account Boston National Bank. Take off amount of last pot. GIDDENS.

And be it said, in justice to Mr. Harrington, that he laughed and paid—*and* telephoned to the nearest bookstore for whatever tomes on applied psychology by Professor Herschel W. Giddens they kept in stock.

Piecrust's Holiday

by Joseph Hall

THE time when he was familiarly known as "Piecrust" was almost forgotten by Mr. Augustus Richardson Wegg. He was accustomed to think of himself as he was in the Piecrust era of his history as a mythical personage, a sort of fairy-tale hero, a being of fancy and dim dreams.

A whiff of the damp pavements coming up and through the open window of his comfortable apartment found Mr. Wegg's nostrils imaginatively sensitive to

its suggestion. It was a spring morning, the snows had all melted, the green was coming coyly out in the parks and so were the nursemaids. The beat of Clancy, the copper, the handsome, the godlike, lay along its graveled walks.

Unrest filled the soul of Mr. Wegg. For the first time his surroundings of comfort and modest luxury failed to satisfy him. He wanted something that Bennington, his man, six feet, muscular and capable, could not furnish. It was not something to eat, nor to drink, nor to smoke—Mr. Wegg's three appetites. His reading went no further than the morning paper. He cared not for speed, beauty—in harmony, picture or woman—nor new sights to be experienced in travel. His tastes, as he himself said, were simple.

The smell of the street sent itself again through his open window and found his expectant nostrils. And Mr. Wegg, being alone, thereupon smiled broadly. For he recognized the thing he wanted. In which it must be admitted that Mr. Wegg was among those favored of tlie gods.

For fifteen years, as Piecrust Wegg, he had daily occupied a position upon the edge of the sidewalk with a dirty and decrepit derby in his hand extended to the passing throngs. Piecrust Wegg had been a part of the city, as much a part as the City Hall or the Stock Exchange. He had a cheerful smile and no legs. He existed upon the bounty of his hurrying fellow men, and did very well indeed.

Piecrust—we now refer to Mr. Wegg in the mythical era—was a dreamer. He was in addition a student of finance. The market pages of the newspapers and the blackboards of bucket shops were his textbooks. In a small, a very small way, he had been a plunger, for he had saved half of the pennies and nickels and quarters that fell into the dirty and decrepit derby and had indulged his one obsession. He had even won, in one or two rare instances, a very little. But there was always before him the big hope, the great time when he could ensnare sufficient of the goods of earth to buck the market once, just once, on a fairly sizable scale.

And then—came along the old gentleman. It was a cold, rainy, winter day and the old gentleman was a dreamer, too, or a philosopher. At any rate, he didn't watch his step. Mr. Wegg's hurried ejaculation interrupted by a bare fraction of a minute the old gentleman's philosophic trend of thought down a coal-hole.

The old gentleman's appreciation of Mr. Wegg's timely interruption found expression in many words and a bill which he thrust into the battered derby, and which, upon later careful inspection on the part of Piecrust, proved to be for one hundred dollars.

The dreams of many days, days of sleet and slush and snow, days of torrid heat when the asphalt was soft enough for the wheels of the vehicles to leave their impression long after they had passed, days of clear, keen, sweet, intoxicating spring, days of autumn and October's tans and mauves, days of bitterness and elation and joy and hopelessness, the dreams of all the days of all the fifteen years of Piecrust's life on the edge of the sidewalk, came true in that hundred-dollar bill.

The hundred dollars were used as Piecrust had always dreamed of using them, if they ever came his way. Fortune smiled. In hours less than the dollars that it stood for, the bill had grown to as many thousands. And now the legless beggar of the gutter was no longer Piecrust Wegg, but Mr. August Richardson Wegg of No. 65 Fenwick Place and the Cumberland Club. The hundred thousand, sprung from gigantic forbears, had taken unto itself Gargantuan properties and turned to millions.

Little did old Timothy Salwalladda reck that in bestowing a hundred-dollar bill upon a sidewalk petitioner who had saved him from a sooty eclipse, if not a grave, he was raising against his own right an opponent in the financial world who would cost him in the years to come many a sleepless dawn.

II.

HAVING determined what it was that he desired, Mr. Wegg proceeded to acquire it. Bennington was summoned, Bennington the magician to whom all things were possible. He received his in-

structions with the same expressionless lack of wonder that we are pleased to assume the jinni wore when Aladdin commanded.

The articles which this jinni presently brought to Mr. Wegg might well have excited the curiosity of an oyster. They consisted of an old and ragged suit of clothes, a rusty, ancient and ill-used derby hat, a pair of cheap crutches and a dozen pencils of brightest yellow, sharpened at one end, and with a rubber for purposes of erasure at the other.

Having inspected these articles, Mr. Wegg expressed his entire approval and Bennington thereupon undressed his master, carefully depositing his little-used lounging suit in the closet, folding the fine linen shirt and depositing the diamond stud in the strong box. Being then further directed by the financier, the capable Bennington proceeded to take from him the legs that were so cunningly constructed as to appear almost human, and when he had finished, upon the floor sat not the feared master of the Wegg millions, but Piecrust, derby extended, face smilingly expectant, stumps drawn beneath him, battered clothing crying the poverty of the suppliant.

A block away from his old stand, Mr. Wegg descended from his limousine. The morning was young, the crowds were not yet large. What people were about walked briskly, laughed, spoke cheerily to one another. Life was keen. It was spring. Two newsboys were spinning tops under the very nose of a traffic cop.

Piecrust found his old place and settled himself for the day. The smell of the street, freshly wet down by the morning water cart, came to him as the most delicate of aromas. The thickening crowd, rosy-cheeked stenographers with white waists and much-frizzled hair, keen-eyed business men, thin clerks, with a misplaced, abortive sensitiveness to the appeal of the season, newsboys shrill with events, pretty shopgirls hesitating before florists' windows—it was the same, the very same that it had always been. Piecrust felt queerly happy. It was the thing he had missed, the vague craving had been for this. He hunched forward contentedly, looking up with his old smiling appeal into the faces of the passers-by. And then——

Plunk! A man had dropped a nickel into his derby. It gave him a thrill, the old thrill. He hastened to look—to see what the coin was, whether a nickel, or a copper—or perhaps a quarter. Some of them were quite profligate in their charity.

It was a nickel. And the man had not taken his pencil. He was a good sport. Piecrust pocketed the nickel with fervor. The day had started propitiously. It ought to be a good one.

III.

IN the offices of the combined Securities Company in Wall Street, the organization which had sprung into life beneath the magic touch of the Midas-fingered Augustus Richardson Wegg, grave concern verged upon the brink of panicky hysteria. Mr. Jefferson Clarendon, who a dozen years before had been a talented but underpaid and quite obscure broker's clerk and who was now Wegg's head man, paced the thick-carpeted floor of his chief's private office in a state of mind minutely approximating frenzy.

The office clock had passed ten and Wegg had not yet arrived. Clarendon, unable longer to sustain the suspense, seized the desk telephone and sharply demanded that he be connected with the Wegg apartment.

The voice of Bennington came over the wire.

"That you, Bennington?" called Clarendon.

The valet's deep bass answered affirmatively.

"Where is he?" This from the confidential secretary.

Bennington's big voice thrilled the delicate membrane of the receiver: "'E's tykin' 'im a 'oliday, sir, and 'e's not to be hinterrupted whatever, sir, by no means. Hi'm to see to that myself, sir, I am."

"Holiday!" The voice of Clarendon was petulant.

"The same, sir," from Bennington over the wire.

"But he's forgotten the day, Benning-

ton. He must be notified. The fight brought by the Salwalladda interests has come to a head suddenly, as a surprise. They're hammering all of our stocks on the Exchange, and recent reports from our men show that they've been working secretly for the past week. It's the biggest fight the Street has seen in five years and it may mean Wegg's financial destruction."

Clarendon paused for breath. Thick silence from the Bennington end. The secretary's brow was suffused with little beads of perspiration. "You know where he is, Bennington?"

"I do, sir."

"Does any one else know?"

"No, sir, hexcepting the chauffeur."

"Then you must notify him at once."

Silence.

"Bennington."

"Yes, sir."

"Do you understand me?"

"I believe so, sir."

"Well, then, why don't you say something? Why don't you go? Why don't you say you're notifying him? I tell you, it's life or death, you fool."

"I 'ave my hinstructions, sir. 'E was quite hexplicit, sir."

"But this is exceptional."

"Very likely, sir."

"Then will you notify him at once?"

"I will not, sir."

Muttered profanity in the private office of Augustus Richardson Wegg. "You blithering, brainless, cement-domed sepulcher of imagination, this is an unusual situation. Do you know that your master's fortune depends on his being in this fight to-day, his financial life? Do you know your job depends on it? Do you know my job depends on it, my job and all the little I've been able to grab out of this damned fight that we live in? Do you know that this day is going to be memorable in the financial history of this city and this country?"

"Quite so, sir."

"Then don't waste any more time, but beat it for wherever the boss is taking his damned holiday and tell him to burn up the road to his office. Old Salwalladda is on his trail and the old serpent is fixed this time. He knows it means his own life or Wegg's, his rehabilitation in his old place or his annihilation and retirement. It's the crux of the old fight, Bennington, you poor nut, the big battle! Salwalladda is trying to get back and he will get back good and plenty if you continue to act the superlative ass you've been all this morning."

Silence from Bennington.

"Are you there?"

"I am, sir."

"Are you going for the boss?"

"I am not, sir."

"You poor—— Why—— The h——l you—— Why not, Bennington? Don't you understand yet?"

Silence.

"Bennington."

"Yes, sir."

"Answer me."

"Horders is horders."

Clarendon hung up.

The door behind him burst open. Two men rushed in. They bore the signs of agitation. Clarendon explained briefly, pointedly, succinctly, tragically.

The three rushed out.

IV.

THE day fulfilled its promise for Piecrust. It was the happiest day he had known for many months. It was filled with spring's own sunshine, a sunshine that was just right, not too hot, just enough to neutralize the faint touch of chill that yet lingered in the shaded alleys and corridors.

The crowds thickened as the day aged, grew more hurried, more cosmopolitan, more human, more polyglot. The noises of the city rose and swelled and mingled into the deep, busy, cheery, strident, unmusical cry that is the voice of the day.

At noon Piecrust had his lunch from the free-lunch counter of French Sid's in a side street two blocks away, with a glass of the same kind of beer that Frenchy had always on tap. Piecrust found the menu at Frenchy's almost as he had left it. He was disposed to criticize the pigs' feet, but no doubt this was an off day for pigs' feet. Some days were. And the pretzels were fine. He had a second glass of beer and slipped a half

dozen spirals of the curly breadstuff into his ragged pocket for afternoon munching.

One thing rather saddened him. No one at French's remembered him. There was a new bartender. But the customers at French Sid's had all heard and forgotten, for the time being, the wonder story of the beggar's rise to affluence, and not one of them would have imagined that an affluent beggar might ever return to the scenes of his indigence. Piecrust was not recognized.

The afternoon was as many hundreds of other afternoons he had known. First the hurrying throngs of lunchers returning to their caves in the vast cañons of their labors. Then the matinée crowds, the shoppers, the sight-seers.

A fire alarm sent the throngs scurrying to each side of the street and the fire apparatus dashed screeching by almost over Piecrust's nose.

With all its hurry and bustle, its intent haste, its burning interests, its headlong race for the things of life, the crowd had been generous. The side pocket of Piecrust's ragged old coat gave forth an encouraging jingle. There were some pennies, a number of nickels, a large assortment of dimes and a goodly showing of quarters. Also there were three half dollars and one dollar. And in the battered derby still gleamed and invited a good half dozen of the yellow, nicely sharpened, convenient rubbered pencils.

When the homegoers had thinned out to some extent and the great buildings were glowing Argus-eyed in the dusk and the surface cars had turned on their lights and the streets themselves began to glow under the artificial illumination of their night which is brighter than day, Piecrust sighed contentedly and got upon his weather-beaten crutches.

He propelled himself around the corner, went another block, turned into a dark side street where waited a limousine.

"All right, Billie," he said cheerily.

The chauffeur relieved him of his crutches and lifted him into the luxuriously upholstered car. The great engine purred softly and the limousine moved swiftly out into the hurrying procession of the busier thoroughfares. As the car rolled along Piecrust counted the money that had been dropped into his hat. Then, taking out a check book and fountain pen, he drew a check for many times the amount, to the Local Charities Board.

When Bennington had brought forth the lounging suit and the fine linen shirt and the diamond stud and the artificial legs and had in his deft way reconstructed the millionaire Augustus Richardson Wegg from the nondescript Piecrust, the financier sighed again and spoke to his faithful retainer. "I've had a bully day, Bennington."

"Yes, sir. Quite so, sir."

"Any news?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Clarendon is waiting in the library, sir."

"Bring him in."

The confidential secretary was brought in. The ravages of the day showed upon his haggard face. He was ten years older than he had been that morning.

Mr. Wegg regarded him with wonder.

"They beat me, sir. They were too strong for us. Old Salwalladda led the fight himself, they say. But we succeeded in saving the pieces. It was almost a draw, in fact, but Salwalladda is back in power again with the Industrial Bank on its feet. We needed you, sir. If you had been there——"

Mr. Wegg smiled reflectively, reminiscently. "Forget it, Jeff," he said, "I've had the finest day I ever had in my life. Come on in and have dinner with me."

With Bennington's assistance he got to his artificial feet. "I reckon," he added whimsically, "that I owed old Salwalladda something, anyway. We're about even now."

The Opportunist

By Maxwell Smith

CHAPTER I.

OPPORTUNITY ABROAD.

SOME might have called Julia Sinclair an adventuress, considering the delightful uncertainty and suggestion of intrigue that the term implies. They would have been wrong. Julia Sinclair was an Opportunist. She admitted that and, to some extent, was pleased with her ability to turn things to her own account.

Others might have said that Julia lived by her wits. She did—but not in any penny-farthing sort of way. When Julia applied her wits to opportunity they made a combination for a stake worth while.

Here and there might have been one who frowned and wondered whether Julia always was within the law. For instance—well, sometimes it is difficult to draw the line just where blackmail begins and ends—to determine the exact shade, you know. Julia would have laughed at that and, if she felt in the mood, pointed out that, while the authorities were not unaware of her existence and endeavors, they never even had so much as invited her "to drop in and see the captain."

But now, Julia grimaced. Opportunity was dreadfully scarce. There wasn't even the hint of a rapping at her door. Not since the affair of the millionaire's daughter from Buenos Aires had she turned a coup; and that was nearly two years ago. If something didn't crop up soon——

Deliberately Julia picked the hand-painted cover off a powder bowl on her dressing table. Languidly she turned and heaved it at a trifle in Italian rough clay that didn't belong in the room, anyhow. That was precisely how she felt, but her aim was poor. She threw the bowl itself, and missed again. Whereupon Julia laughed and rang for her maid to gather up the pieces.

There you have Julia in a nutshell. Also, you find her within the apartment which added constant fuel to her ever-growing annoyance over the coyness of Opportunity. Think of having to live in an apartment that didn't all face to the front! Where two of the rooms faced on the rear court and another was on the end of the building! On the seventh floor, too, which was neither up nor down, when it is remembered there were five more stories heavenward.

When she had been called upon to make this sacrifice, Julia had shut her eyes and forced herself to concentrate on her bank balance. Six thousand dollars —and Opportunity in hiding! Ugh! she had shuddered excusably.

With nothing in sight, one cannot afford to sign another year's lease on a five-thousand-dollar place. Not if a person is prudent. An obligation that *has* to be met brings the temptation to take chances that otherwise would not appeal; to go after smaller game. Julia preferred to wait. Hence the abhorred place at two thousand dollars a year, with its two rear rooms and another facing the side of the next building thirty feet away.

The economy had left her little enough to go on while she scanned the horizon for the resurrection of Opportunity.

Julia sighed, dawdling with the geegaws on the dressing table. It was exasperating. Twice since the affair of the girl from Buenos Aires she had had promising prospects. The police had beaten her out by an hour in the Gridley incident. A private detective had stumbled in and snatched greedily at the five thousand offered in the Oil City case. Good lord, if he hadn't been in such a famished rush, she herself would have given him five thousand to keep his hands off; Julia had figured on getting twenty thousand. She had that way about her—of making folk raise the ante though afterward they might wonder why under heaven they had done so. That was Julia. When she performed service she did not skimp in putting a value on it.

Swinging the mirrors so she could see herself three times without moving her head, Julia smiled. She wished she had not promised to dine with the Kindertons.

Phewpf! What a perfectly rotten five months these had been in this stuffy apartment. And a miserly fifteen hundred dollars between her and the poorhouse! If something didn't break soon——

From the low bench Julia crossed the room to survey herself in the pier glass. She draped the cloaklike negligee she affected about herself and strolled into the hated rear rooms. She might as well enjoy her misery. What a beastly view!

Julia started back from the window. Her brows lifted in captivating arches, poised as though about to soar from the dead white of her forehead, then sank abruptly below their normal line, ruffling as velvet silk would ruffle, while she pondered.

Impatiently, pettishly, she exclaimed. If only she hadn't dallied so over getting dressed! Wasn't *that* Opportunity returning to life—before her eyes! And here was she—she stamped her foot—here was she with next to nothing on her in the way of clothing!

CHAPTER II.

ON THE BACK TRAIL.

HIS face lighting with pleasant recollection, Barry Kirby stirred from his sleep. To retain the delight of his dream he kept his eyes shut and tried to retard the coming of full wakefulness.

It had been remarkably vivid. Right beside his chair she had stopped, her presence deliciously pervading. So real had she been that his hand had gone out to touch her. He regretted that move. Had he remained still perhaps she would have lingered.

Grinning at his foolishness, he opened his eyes. The last of daylight was going. He snuggled his head back into the deep plush and recrossed his feet on the stool drawn up before his chair. He had not intended to doze, but the trip from Chicago had wearied him.

"'Tisn't fair," he grumbled, "that a chap should wake up when a vision like that comes to brighten his slumbers. Why didn't I wire Marjorie?"

The latter thought had nothing to do with the vision. Marjorie was his sister with whom he lived. She had been out when he arrived an hour ago and so had both the servants.

Kirby reverted to his dream. Although he really had not seen her face, he was sure his visitor had been beautiful. There had been a flutteriness about her when she had tarried beside him that bespoke beauty. So had the lightness with which she had receded when he had reached out.

Now, why couldn't he have slept long enough to have heard her talk? It was stupid that dreams always ended when they promised to become interesting.

The closing of a door in the apartment, the distinct click of a lock, interrupted his mooning.

"That you, Marj?"

He listened and called again. There was no answer, no further sound. He called the names of the two maids. Silence.

Kirby's feet slid from the stool. Undoubtedly a door had shut—the hall door, he believed. There had been no one besides himself to go out. Some one, therefore, had come in. He became very wide awake.

From the room in which he was, a hallway ran twenty feet into the reception hall. Three rooms opened off it. An intruder could not have penetrated that far without having made some slight noise.

He went straight to the main hall and switched on a light. It was empty. Quickly he ran through the other rooms—the small library, the living and dining rooms, even into the kitchen and the big pantry. There was no sign of any one.

Back in the reception hall he looked around, puzzled. He was convinced the door had closed in his apartment. The walls were too thick for the sound to have come from anywhere else. The slamming of a door outside might have reached him, but that had not been a slam—it had been stealthy, in keeping with the non-appearance of any agency for it.

Kirby opened the outer door. The corridor, dimly lit, was vacant. No; there was a woman by the elevators. He stepped out and spoke before he realized what he was doing.

"Did you see any one come out of here, madam?"

She turned and looked at him inquiringly. He repeated the query, and she smiled, nodding.

"I don't know what apartment he came from, but there was a man——" With the slightest gesture she indicated an angle in the corridor while she added: "A moment ago, you mean?"

"Yes, thanks." Kirby hesitated. She must think him crazy, asking whether *any one* had come from his apartment. "I was snoozing," he explained, "and thought I heard the door close."

The woman of his dream would have looked like this had she materialized. He was in no hurry about leaving her to follow the lead she had given him, although it was patent that the fugitive, probably, had been making for the other elevators.

He noted the slender hand that pressed the bell again. She was politely interested in what he had remarked; her attitude was impersonally friendly as was to be expected from a stranger. He hoped the elevator would be long in coming.

"You said he went that way?" Kirby sought to prolong the conversation. "What did he look like, please?"

"I—didn't notice."

He approved the frank eyes and features. The lift stopped as he framed another question. She bowed to him and was whisked out of sight.

A flight and a half downstairs, a man squeezed close to the caging around the elevator shaft. Kirby's first words had arrested his descent. His face puckered and eyes wide, he had strained to hear every syllable. As the elevator slipped down past him, he expelled his held breath and continued with noiseless tread. Dave Erland wanted to get down two more floors, to the third, before he was seen.

Barry Kirby blinked at the grilled gates. He was disappointed. Here was another vision, equally charming as that of his dream, that had bobbed in on his appreciative soul and bobbed out again. Maybe—it was a tiny possibility—maybe Marjorie knew her.

He recalled his object in leaving his apartment. There wasn't much use following now, but he started along the corridor again to seek further trace of the man she had said passed that way. Around the corner he came upon an electrician atop a ladder, working on a light shower in the ceiling.

Kirby asked if he had seen the man. He had not.

"Eh?" Kirby stared up at him. "How long have you been here?"

"Half an hour or so. Why?"

"And you didn't see a man come this way within the last few minutes?"

The electrician shook his head. "He

didn't. Nobody passed at all while I've been here. Anything wrong?"

His brain circling about his dream woman and the girl who had gone down in the elevator, Kirby persisted:

"Did you hear a door close not long ago?"

"Yep. Somebody came out down there," he jerked a hand in the direction of Kirby's apartment. "Stopped at the elevator, I guess."

"Thanks." Kirby turned away. Funny thing that she had brought back so sharply the picture of the subject of his dream. He reëntered the apartment and searched it from end to end without result.

In the small sitting room in which he had dozed, he settled down to review the last ten minutes. Starting with the dream——

His lethargic retrospection gave way to keenness. Hadn't the woman who had appeared in his sleep entered through the window? There was a fire-escape balcony extending past both windows to this room. The windows themselves went down to the floor and were pivoted in the middle at top and bottom. One of them had been open when he took his nap. He looked around to verify that. One window was closed tightly, the other nearly so.

"I'll be——" He checked the condemnatory exclamation as another thought bore in on him. Had it been a dream at all? Or had a woman actually gone through this room, and he, in only the first stages of consciousness, imagined her as in a dream?

If that were so, he had let her slide through his fingers for, of course, she must have been the girl who, according to the electrician, had lied to him when she declared a man had passed along the corridor. He should have asked that handsome creature where *she* had come from!

Granted there had been an intruder, it was easy to see why she had fled. She had not expected to find any one at home.

That shrinking of the dream woman, then, had been genuine when she discovered him in the chair. There had been good reason for her rapid and silent fading out.

Accepting all that as fact, Kirby followed the line of least resistance and opened a window. The problem before him, now, was whether she had come up the fire escape or down. It did not strike him to speculate on why she had not retreated instead of going on through the apartment.

The fire escape was built in with brick, iron doors giving access to the balconies. On the stair landing Kirby paused, then elected to go upward. He also neglected to consider that the woman might have come from the apartment through the wall on the same floor.

On the floor above, the seventh, he stalled again, undecided whether to go to right or left. Finally he chose the apartment directly over his own at which to make the first inquiry. It was occupied, he knew, by a financial broker named Lawrence who lived alone except for a manservant.

A window was open, but all was dark inside. Kirby knocked on the glass and called, but gained no response. The telephone rang inside, but went unanswered.

Without thinking that he was laying himself open, he went in. His curiosity was thoroughly aroused. It was logical enough that the woman likely had come from these deserted rooms, and, if he could establish that robbery had been committed, time would be saved in beginning the hunt for her.

Groping, his hand located a switch on the wall beside the window. A reading lamp on a table in the corner burst into light. The solid brass shade, however, was pulled over it so that little of the rays escaped. He loosened the setscrew, raised the shade, and wheeled to survey the room.

The place seemed to be in order. He had taken a step toward the door when, sweeping downward, his eyes popped, and he froze to a standstill.

The feet of a man protruded from behind a couch that stood out from the wall.

"Come out!" commanded Kirby crisply. As he spoke he knew that the man could not hear.

Aside from the dictate of common sense that a person in hiding would not leave his feet sticking out, there was an ominousness in the very way the legs were lying—one drawn under the other. And as his glance ran over the couch, Kirby observed the tip of the prostrate man's shoulder. He was on his side, his face to the wall.

With a clammy feeling of horror, Kirby pulled the couch away. The man rolled slowly onto his back as the support was withdrawn.

"God!" Kirby's heart stopped and spurted till he heard it batter on his ribs.

Stooping, the couch still between him and the body, he strove to collect himself. Out of the mad tumult in his brain one impression sorted itself above all others; a woman could not have done this!

Not even a strong woman, he told himself—such as the one he had seen downstairs—or she of his dream. He was on the wrong trail to discover where *his* woman had originated. Surely she had not come from here.

His eyes fixed on blood at the left ear. Going around the couch he knelt beside the body. The blood came from a contused laceration on top of the head and a gash behind the ear.

The dinning reiteration in his head that this could not be the act of a woman was stilled. A frail hand could wield a weapon with force enough to stun—to kill!

Kirby shivered. The girl he had talked to had not been frail. Nor the one in his supposed dream. And he had come to look upon them as the same person!

He got heavily to his feet. His duty was to raise an immediate alarm. To start the hue and cry for her. She had no more than fifteen minutes' handicap.

Switching on the lights as he proceeded, he went to the telephone niche in the hall. He was about to lift the receiver to his ear, he was already framing the words, "I want the police!" when he stopped. How was he to explain his own presence in another man's flat with the body of that man? How could he make that plausible, in view of the fact he scarcely had been acquainted with the victim; when, furthermore and particularly, he had entered by way of the fire escape!

The story about having been on the back trail of a woman he had dreamed about would be woefully thin. What if they did not catch her?

And what if they did? Suppose the elevator operator did remember the girl going down, Kirby could not state with conviction that it was she who had been in his rooms. All she had to do was prove that she had been on legitimate business in the building. Against such a declaration, in support of which she certainly would have witnesses, he would be able to do no more than mumble, "I was mistaken in thinking I dreamed it; you were there and you came down the fire escape!" That would be idiocy. A twisted grin spread on his white face. What a snarl he would be in if he were found now!

It was inhuman, of course, to leave that poor devil, Lawrence. He might lie there for days.

Kirby consoled himself that there was no help he could give except by telling about the woman. That could be done as well anonymously. He was glad that she had compelled his attention; he could paint her in fair detail, especially her features. He also was sorry on that respect for she had seemed—— No matter! He would send the police a description of her without becoming involved himself.

He extinguished the hall lights. His fingers were on the switch in the room with the body when the doorbell shrilled. He snapped out the reading lamp and got onto the balcony.

The doorbell rang again. The telephone brr-r-rd as the operator called in vain for an answer.

Kirby tiptoed the few feet to the fire escape proper. He was thankful the stairs were inclosed. If only he had left his own place in darkness! He'd have to chance being seen crossing the balcony in the full glare.

Another shock was coming to him on that score. At the iron door he halted in doubt. The lights he had left were no longer burning! He prayed that it was

his sister who had returned. He could tell her. If it were one of the maids——

When he found that the windows had not been locked he breathed better. His nerves on edge, he made straight for the dining room. He had an immediate call on the sideboard—he needed a drink.

A maid appeared as he was swallowing it. She gaped, for she had just toured the apartment without seeing anybody. For the last several minutes she had been in the sitting room nearest the outer door and was positive he had not come in by that.

He finished the drink and laid down the glass, but he had not missed the question with which she regarded him.

"I put out the lights through there, sir," stammered the girl.

"All right, Helen, it doesn't matter. Did—ah, did Miss Kirby say when she would be in?"

"Yes, sir. Between seven and eight, she said. She told me to have something cold on the table. I was going to fix it now."

He turned away with a careless nod, but he could feel her puzzled eyes on his back. And——

"I—I didn't know you were in, sir," she blurted. "Were you?"

His brows gathering in surprise, he looked at her. The direct interrogation was disconcerting. He got out his cigarette case and tapped a cigarette to cover the shaking of his hands.

"Of course, I was in, Helen. I was—asleep."

"But——" The girl caught herself.

Kirby managed a smile. He stood half facing her. "But what?"

"Oh, nothing, sir." Helen set about putting the linen on the table. It was none of her business, but she would have sworn he had not been anywhere in the apartment—not even in his bedroom, for the door had been open when she went by.

Before he could sound the maid further, a key rattled in the hall door. His sister entered, laughing and talking with a companion.

Kirby went to meet her.

"Hello, Marj!"

His jaw fell loose.

"Hello, Barry!" Marjorie didn't notice his manner. "Stealing home without sending word! Here's somebody I've wanted you to meet. Farylea, this is my brother Barry—Barry, this is Farylea Medford." She gave a little cry and ran to his side. "Why, Barry, what's the matter?"

Kirby ran his hand over his eyes. There wasn't any mistake. This was the girl he had questioned—who had told him a man had gone down the hall when a man had not! This was the girl who had invaded his apartment about the time a man was slugged on the floor above!

His jaw set hard. "Nothing, I'm all right, Marj. I—was just wondering whether Miss Medford and I," he bowed mockingly, his eye coldly on her, "had not met—somewhere—before?"

"Of course." Farylea Medford smiled evenly. "As we came in I was telling Marjorie how surly you were to me not more than twenty minutes past—when I came to the door and inquired for her. Naturally, I concluded it must have been the brother she's spoken about and"—she raised her chin an inch and laughed softly, gloriously, at him—"it certainly was!"

CHAPTER III.

ACCUSED OF MURDER.

ERLAND landed on the third floor cautiously, as he had wished, without being seen. That was as Barry Kirby returned to his apartment and Farylea Medford descended to the street.

Erland's face was even more skeletonic than usual; the cheek bones and nose seemed about to split the skin. From the hinge of the jaws, the cheeks hollowed down to the line of the thin, compressed, colorless lips. The deep-set eyes were jumpy, boring into the gloom as he walked hastily along the corridor.

At his tap, a door opened promptly. Van Wert had been waiting behind it, nervously a-tiptoe for the reappearance of Erland. As the latter sidled in, the door was shut as swiftly and quietly.

Erland mopped his brow with a handkerchief, as would a man perspiring. That was the only evidence he ever gave of emotion or stress, and it was a wasted effort. There wasn't enough blood in his veins to bring a bead to that broad ex-

panse above his eyes through which showed every detail of the frontal bone.

His lower lips clung to the teeth, his upper curled, as he asked, "Where's Dutton?"

"In there." Van Wert motioned with unsteady hand toward the interior of the apartment. His mustache covered the jerking of his lips; his countenance was pasty. From long association he could tell when Erland's manner portrayed a crisis. Knowing Erland as well as he did, Van Wert was afraid, now.

"Still sopping it up?" It was a statement as much as a question that rasped from Erland.

"Yes. You'd better stop him if—— How'd you make out, Dave?"

The long bony fingers mopped the forehead again. Erland took Van Wert by the arm and propelled him to the telephone.

"Call up Lawrence," he ordered. "Tell him we're coming to see him. And," his eyes flickered, "if he doesn't answer the phone, ask the office if he's in the building."

Bewilderment shown in Van Wert's face. He evinced relief and spoke eagerly.

"Didn't you see——"

"Never mind what I saw. Get busy—phone Lawrence. And, for the love of Heaven, Van, put a smile into your voice. Let that phone girl know you're happy—that you haven't a worry in all the world."

Dutton strolled in on them. He smiled expansively.

"Cheer-o, Dave!" he saluted. "What's the great good word? Did friend Lawrence listen to reason or——"

He whistled, as he caught sight of Erland's face. His rather loose mouth worked into a thoughtful grin.

"We're going to see Lawrence—all of us," replied Erland concisely. He swung to Van Wert, pulling out his watch. "Get started, Van! Minutes mean plenty. Phone him!"

Van Wert's hand shook as he took up the phone. He had to clear his throat to get rid of a dry huskiness. He could not understand why they should be going to call on Lawrence. Nor why they should telephone him.

In the silence that fell, the others could hear through the instrument in Van Wert's hand, the operator ringing Lawrence's phone. Some of her words reached them too, as she stated petulantly that she "couldn't raise him."

Van Wert closed a hand over the transmitter. "Not in," he whispered.

"Have them ask the doorman if he's gone out," breathed Erland. "Jolly that fool girl while you're at it."

Another delay was followed by the information that Lawrence had not left the building. Van Wert hung up.

Erland jabbed a finger at Dutton. "Get into your coat and hat, Art—show us some speed. Never mind another drink. You can have that after we've seen Lawrence."

Dutton loafed away with a shrug. There were times when he considered Dave Erland too prone to demand that a man do this or that or so and so. However, since Erland was running things, Dutton got his hat and coat.

They were going out when Erland paused. His cavernous eyes leaped from one to the other.

"Get this straight before we start. This is *not* an undertaker's parade. Shake the atmosphere that you're on your way to the scaffold—it's a long way off. We're a bunch of good fellows going to visit a business friend who happens to live in the same house as you, Dutton. Nothing strange about that; we've done it before, haven't we?" His low voice became more metallic. "If it'll help any, take it from me that we're coming out O. K. The deck's all clear. Come on."

He was telling an anecdote as the elevator gates rolled wide to admit them. Aboard the car he continued it, Dutton giving frivolous support. Van Wert alone failed to play adequately to the occasion, though he did come more to life when his shin was raked by Erland's foot.

At the seventh floor they got off. Dutton's laugh echoing, they passed on to the door of the apartment in which Merritt T. Lawrence lay dead.

Erland prodded the bell. His thumb

stayed on it, and they heard its continuous summons.

Van Wert plucked at Erland's arm. "Can't you see he isn't in? Let's get out of here." His tone rose on the final word, and he glanced over his shoulder apprehensively at a man and woman down the corridor.

"Stay to it, Van," drawled Dutton with a chuckle; he had had enough drinks to increase his jovial humor. "Dave's pullin' something good, I bet."

Erland kept the bell ringing. It was plan that for some reason he refused to accept the prolonged silence as conclusive that there was no one inside. That was what made Van Wert anxious to retreat.

Minutes dragged by before a shuffling movement sounded from within. There was a fumbling at the lock. The door opened to reveal Merritt T. Lawrence's valet and man-of-all-work, King, a quaking figure.

"Hello, King. Mr. Lawrence in?" Erland pushed forward, to halt close to the valet with an ejaculation: "Good Lord, man, what ails you?"

Wizened and prematurely old at forty, King grinned. His head bobbed between his stooping narrow shoulders; his hands washed about one another. His eyes were dull under drooping lids.

"I—I'm all right—all right." He had difficulty controlling his chin. His hand crept under the sleeve and pinched at a spot on his left forearm. "Yes, sir—I think Mr. Lawrence is home—I think he is." He stepped aside to allow them to enter.

"Fine hophead," murmured Dutton. "He needs another shot."

"Just had one, I guess," opined Erland. "He's perking up."

"In here, gentlemen—in here, please." King ushered them into a room hung with Oriental brocades, rich with their interlacings of spun gold. "I'll tell Mr. Lawrence."

Dutton poked a sacrilegious finger into the basilisk eye of a Buddha. He was content to let affairs develop as Erland willed. He had complete confidence in the ability of the principal of their triumvirate to keep matters running smoothly.

Van Wert's lips twitched under his mustache. Restlessly he traced again and again over the delicate embroidery on a low silken screen in front of the hearth. Dominated as he was by Erland, Van Wert, nevertheless, could not discard the feeling that a tremendous climax was imminent.

Erland himself stood motionless, his face more rigid, his sunken eyes bent on the door. From him Van Wert took frightened cue and strained in listening expectancy.

Less than sixty seconds had ticked when through the apartment pealed a chattering scream. A pattering footfall, uncertain but hurried, and King was in the doorway, his hads stretching feebly to the draperies for support. Tongue-tied with fear, he gagged when he tried to enunciate.

"He—he's dead," he gasped at last. "Dead! He's been—murdered!"

Van Wert tore through the silken screen. His gaze went despairingly to Erland. Dutton paused in the act of scratching Buddha's head, and his plump face wound up in a stupefied expression.

The muscles stuck out on Erland's jaws. He was perfectly steady. He went over and took King by the shoulder, leading him into the room. "When last did you see him alive?"

King cringed, and his right hand pinched at the left forearm.

"Not since morning," he sniffled. "I've been asleep. You woke me with the bell. I don't know when he came in." Hysteria gripped him. "I don't know nothing about it, I tell you."

"Sure you don't," said Erland pointedly. "They never do! You're full of dope, King."

"I'm not. I'm—I'm sick. I——"

"You'll be sicker." Erland shook him. "Show us where he is." He looked over his companions and chose Dutton, who had recovered his poise. "Phone for the police, Art, and tell the manager to come up."

While Dutton obeyed, Erland forced King through the hall to the room in which Merritt T. Lawrence lay dead. His

eyes dilated momentarily, as he viewed the body, on its back beside the couch.

"Did you touch it?" he asked King abruptly.

"No!" The valet squirmed farther away, his hands covering his face.

"Then how——" He hailed Van Wert who, hanging back in the hall, was having trouble lighting a cigar. "Come in, Van. He's——"

"Not on your life!" Van Wert was excitably explosive. "What you thinking about? Say! what d'you think you're lettin' us in for now? You can——"

Dutton came up behind him and put a hand over his mouth.

"Thanks," said Erland dryly. "Take him away and talk some sense into his head. I'll handle this," he nodded down at King, who had sunk moaning into a chair.

When the manager bustled in, shocked and fearful for the reputation of his house, he stated that Lawrence had got home about five o'clock in the afternoon, two hours previously.

"Where were you then, King?" inquired Erland.

"Sleeping." The wizened face was of an unhealthy hue; a slinking horror widened the eyes. "I was sick——"

"If anybody had come to see him," interrupted Erland, "wouldn't the bell have awakened you?"

A hint of his predicament seeped into King's befuddled brain. He protested volubly that he had heard nothing—knew nothing.

"You heard when I rang, didn't you?" Erland glanced meaningly at the manager.

"I just woke up—happened to wake then," whined the valet. "I'd been sleeping since noon—I was due to wake——"

He quailed under Erland's cold stare, and his tongue seemed to swell again and crowd back into his parched throat. His teeth chattered at his inquisitor's next speech although it was accompanied by a friendly pat on the shoulder.

"If I were you, King, I wouldn't do too much talking at present. You'll have to come stronger than that. Lawrence was killed while, so far as is known, there was no one in the apartment except you. You've been taking dope—you say you were asleep and didn't know he was home. You took another shot as we arrived. Oh, yes, you did——" He shoved up King's left sleeve and showed the manager the needle prick on the forearm surrounded by the red splotch where the addict had pinched to hasten diffusion of the drug.

The bell clattered.

"That's probably the police," went on Erland dispassionately. "They'll want a better story than that, King, particularly when they learn that you're doped. I'd advise you to keep still until you've seen a lawyer."

With a frown he turned to the manager. "What I can't understand," he declared frankly, "is why he let us in. D' you suppose there's a chance he's telling the truth? Or d' you think it's just a crazy dope-inspired idea of trying to get away with it?"

"I've often wondered why Lawrence kept him." The agitated manager loosened his collar and glared at King. He indulged his prejudice. "I think King is lying," he said.

Two detectives and a uniformed policeman, let in by Dutton, listened to Erland's recital and at once pounced on the valet.

"Whatcha kill y'r boss for? What's y'r name? King? Y're a dope, ain't yuh?" snapped one.

"Lost y'r nerve at the scratch, didn't yuh?" buzzed the other detective. "Put off y'r get-away till y' got another jolt working, didn't yuh? Whatcha do it for?"

But King, his nerves keying up as the latest injection of the drug began to take hold, followed Erland's advice and refused to say further than that he had been asleep.

Beside the body at the back of the couch they found a heavy brass ash receiver with which Lawrence had been felled. They were waving it under King's nose, accusing him, when the precinct captain arrived with three more detectives. Quickly he was acquainted with the details. He also took a whirl at King.

"I was sleeping," reiterated that much-harassed little man. "An' that's all I'm going to say till I've seen my lawyer."

"Lawyer!" The captain jumped at the declaration. "So you expected *to have* to see a lawyer! What for? Y'might's well spill now and get it over—— Not yet? Take hold of this bird, Bill. And now," he wheeled with a smile on Erland and the manager, "who are the gents in the other room?"

"My partners," bowed Erland suavely. He already had given the captain his card. "Mr. Dutton lives in the building—on the third floor. Van Wert and myself were visiting him when we ran up to see Lawrence and found him dead. We've been with him in business on several occasions and wanted to interest him in a deal."

The captain nodded vigorously. He was calculating how simple was the job before him—all they had to do was to keep King's dope away for twenty-four hours and he'd talk his head off!

"Stick around, Mr. Erland, will you? We'll want statements from you and your friends after awhile. We'll clean up here and see what else we can turn up. The medical examiner'll be here soon."

Stooping over the murdered man he instructed one of his subordinates:

"Phone somebody from the district attorney's office to come here with a stenog. That'll save Mr. Erland and his friends from going over to the station house."

"Thanks, old man——" Erland was grateful for the consideration. He strayed casually away to observe what state Van Wert's nerves were in.

CHAPTER IV.

CONSUMMATE ACTING.

AS he followed his sister and Farylea Medford into the living room, Barry Kirby got a grip on himself. The—the insolence of Miss Medford in referring to their previous encounter had staggered him. It had taken his breath away when she had declared she had been at the door inquiring for Marjorie.

In the space that was given him as the maid took the girls' wraps, he thought he saw the reason. To say that she had been calling on Marjorie was the only legitimate excuse Farylea could give for having been in the building at all. She had been quick to see the recognition in his face and had determined to carry the matter off with a high hand.

That was it. Of course she could not know that he already was cognizant of what had taken place in the flat above. When she discovered that he was——

Barry stopped in the middle of that thought. Hadn't he decided to keep out of the mess? To steer the police after this girl and, if it were possible, to take no part even when she was apprehended? And here she was, walking right in on him, forcing him to act!

A new idea came to him. Why not, now that he knew exactly who she was—why not let things drift for a few hours and see if she could not be trapped into an admission of some sort?

Yet, Barry Kirby could not reconcile her carefree demeanor—which chimed in so with her whole enchanting presence—with the well-grounded conclusion that she was implicated in, if not actually guilty of, the murder of Merritt T. Lawrence. It was incomprehensible that one whom his sister so evidently liked could be so brazen; the consummate acting, with which she shut out any memory of the dead man behind the couch, astounded him.

And—Barry's jaw set grimly again—when he met her denial with the announcement that he had seen her go through his apartment from the fire escape, that would clinch it. Doubtless she would indignantly proclaim him insane when at length he summoned the police to take her. Then he would take her off her guard and——

Somehow it chilled him when he conjured the cry that would escape her; the stark fear and horror in her face; the shrinking of her body. That would not be pleasant because she——

"I'm in a hurry, Barry," his sister broke in on his tumultuous thoughts, pushing him toward the Dutch-windowed doors into the dining room, "and if you'll run in there and serve whatever Helen has produced, while I'm fixing this wandering hair of mine, you'll save me a good minute. I wish, I wish, Farylea"—she gathered up her straying tresses—"that I had your secret of not falling apart!"

His sister's words caused Kirby to scan the visitor more intently, and he found food for further puzzlement. She was absolutely spic and span—utterly unlike one who but recently had engaged in a struggle, and, though Lawrence had been struck down violently, it was probable that there had been an instant in which he had put up a fight.

"It isn't a secret," laughed Farylea, "it's a net." The laugh died as Marjorie left the room. She stepped close to Kirby, her gray eyes searching him.

His nerves tingled when, featherlike, her fingers rested on his coat—tingled and braced himself to withstand her.

"You'll pardon the little fib, Mr. Kirby—about my having been to the door." Her voice was very low. "I saw that you recognized me and had to—to beat you to it." She smiled faintly, and Kirby sickened. Wasn't that the way he had figured it out? That she had played boldly to gain a respite?

"It will be necessary to maintain that fiction only briefly," she added, "if—if you have to upset it at all for any reason."

"I take it, Miss Medford," his tone matched hers, and his face was hard, "that you expect me to support that—did you call it 'fiction'?"

"Yes." She was very serious, but her gaze remained clear and unwinking. "You see, it is difficult to explain—just now."

"Explain to whom?" The sharp demand made her stare, a tiny crease coming between her brows. A doubtful smile replaced the frown and grew in confidence.

"To Marjorie," she said.

"Marjorie! What has she to do with——" Kirby balked in his speech because he was saying too much. He balked in his action because his hands were closing on Farylea Medford's shoulders!

Dimly he recorded the fact she did not recede from his threatened motion and he counted that as corroboration that she was striving to win him as an ally, conscious or otherwise. Nevertheless, he flushed and his arms were still upraised when his sister spoke from the dining room:

"You're a helpful brother," she bantered. "You——"

She had reached the windowed doors before Kirby could get his scattered senses together. He was a fraction too late in dropping his arms.

When a man is standing within a foot of a girl and his arms are falling away, one on each side of her, the situation ordinarily enough is delicate. When the principals met for the first time no more than ten minutes ago, the tableau is rather surprising and more interesting. That's what Marjorie thought; what both Kirby and Farylea realized.

Kirby showed it. He was red to the ears and stammery.

Not Farylea. Serene and smiling, she looked at Marjorie. She appeared unconscious of the scene and its inference.

"We'll have to speed up, Marjorie, if we're to get to the club on time. It's ten after seven."

Marjorie snapped the switch of the percolator on the table. She was considerably dazed by the abrupt development.

"Sit there, Farylea—and you there, Barry."

The maid, Helen, placing a hastily concocted salad before her mistress, spoke in an agitated undertone. The fork clattered from Marjorie's hand.

"Murdered!" She started half to her feet.

"Yes, ma'am," the maid abandoned all effort to subdue her voice. She had thrilling information to impart. "The place is full of detectives. Mr. Lawrence has been——" She babbled on with the news that had reached her so rapidly through the underground channels of the apartment house.

Marjorie's eyes and Farylea's were fixed on her during the recital, mute with tragedy. But it was to Farylea alone that Kirby gave his attention.

He could not down his admiration. As an actress she was surpassing! Why, she behaved as though it were the ost dreadful news that ever she had heard; as though she knew nothing of it!

It was Farylea who finally interrupted the garrulous maid. Kirby groaned at the mummery, at the magnificent way in which she carried it off.

"Let's go up!" she proposed, eagerness in every gesture and intonation. "I've always wanted to be one of the—the 'morbid onlookers' is what the papers call them, isn't it?" She laughed a bit shakily. "I'm morbid, I guess. Let's go up, Marjorie. Maybe there's a lot of mystery!"

Kirby arose. A wavering grin, born of the travesty he saw before him, wrinkled the corners of his mouth.

"Let's do that," he seconded. "It should prove at least—interesting!"

CHAPTER V.

JULIA MEETS OPPORTUNITY.

JULIA SINCLAIR swirled fetchingly in front of the glass, smoothing her gown with lingering touch. Her fretfulness over the bashfulness of Opportunity was dispelled for the meantime by the glory of this informal creation in oversea blue moon-glow meteor, yet she could not altogether down a lament that she had not been attired in it, or something else, half an hour ago. Then she would have been equipped to take up at once the cue observed from those detestable rear windows. There was still a chance, it was true, that she might find a way of converting matters to her own benefit, but—well, Julia's practiced mind understood that one must act promptly when Opportunity presents himself or herself or itself.

The elongated hexagonal watch, no larger than a lavalliere, that hung at her bosom, pointed to seven-twenty-two on its tiny face as she threw a scarf negligently over her head and permitted the maid to lay the military cloak on her shoulders. Her dinner engagement was for eight-fifteen. The cab was waiting. She had lots of time.

With the closing of the apartment door behind her Julia, therefore, left all her worries. She gave herself entirely to the prospect of a few hours' enjoyment with the friends who had invited her to dine. She prided herself on her ability to concentrate on the present, no matter what it might hold. It helped when the need arose to adapt conditions or apply circumstances to her own ends; it intensified her power to grasp at a point suddenly put before her and bring it into immediate focus.

She was humming as she walked with buoyant step toward the elevators. Two policemen, leaving a car, caught her attention. She heard the operator give them instructions to go to the right. The other car, descending, stopped for her, but Julia shook her head and went after the policemen.

Turning into the other wing of the house, she saw a group of people outside the apartment in which Merritt T. Lawrence lay murdered. A policeman blocked the door. As she drew nigh, two detectives emerged with King, the valet, sniveling between them.

Mentally Julia studied the location of the apartment. The rear of it was directly across the court from her own. Her eyes lighted at that, and she remained thoughtfully in the background. If only she had been a little more than less than half dressed when Opportunity had seemed to beckon!

Casually she noticed Barry Kirby, his sister Marjorie, and Farylea Medford pass her. She knew Marjorie lived on the floor below. In her preoccupation, Julia's glance clung to them curiously as they joined the knot of whisperers near the apartment door.

Her attention shifted to the uniformed policeman lounging in the doorway, then rested on the tall, hatchet-faced man speaking to him. She marked Dave Erland's deep-socketed eyes rove over the folks in the corridor—and held them when they fell upon her.

Erland stepped out and brushed his way down the corridor to where Julia stood apart. He was going by when she asked a natural enough question to put to any one coming from the immediate center of excitement:

"What has happened?"

The man half turned on his heel. "Murder," he replied briefly, and would have gone on had she not motioned. His cadaverous features became shadowed as he waited for her to speak.

Julia Sinclair took her chin between gloved forefinger and thumb, nodding

thoughtfully as she recalled the picture of King being led away.

"They have arrested the—murderer?"

"Yes!" Erland's thin upper lip wrinkled, while the lower stayed tight over his shut teeth. He mopped his forehead. "The valet did it."

Something impelled him to move so as to bring Julia's face into the light. The muscles protruded from his jaws when he noted the swift change in her expression.

"The valet," she echoed. "You mean they found him in the apartment?"

Others were edging nearer, seeking to overhear this first-hand information from one in close contact with the crime. Erland scowled at them. Why had he dallied, anyhow, to answer these questions from a woman he never had seen before?

"He was in there—yes," he answered shortly. "Pardon me, I have——"

He bit off the words at the flicker in Julia's eyes. His breath inhaled rapidly as she interrupted.

"But he is not the man I saw—not that little man——"

Like a flash Erland's head snaked around to take in the bystanders. His hand, closing like a vise on Julia's arm, made her break off with an exclamation of hurt and surprise. Before she could protest he was guiding her along the corridor away from the others.

It was for fast-moving, unexplained contingency like this that Julia Sinclair had trained herself. As the impulse to resist was born, she downed it with the realization that this man desired to carry her beyond earshot of others before she said any more. She went passively and was prepared when he fired the question:

"The man you saw—*where?*"

His suppressed fierceness caused her to stifle the last shred of objection against his cavalier treatment. It increased her self-control in the emergency—her faculty for snatching at Opportunity.

"Please!" her free hand tugged lightly at his wrist. "You have a terrible grip!" She laughed softly, and he released her arm. They had turned the corner and stopped in the empty stretch of corridor.

"Where did you see—the man you refer to?"

The insistence and anxiety in his voice brought another low laugh from her. She shrugged. An Opportunist must, above all, play the cards in proper order. She withheld her trump, but offered an ace.

"My windows"—her tone was tentative—"face on the rear of that apartment——" Her fingers met again on her chin while her big brown eyes surveyed him—not too meaningfully, not too impudently. She might have meant—*anything.*

Erland's face told her much, however, though he strove to mask it. The sunken eyes blazed, wide open. "And——"

"It is wretched, isn't it, to get mixed up in a thing like this," responded Julia. She looked at her watch. "Dear me, I have an engagement in half an hour and —I beg your pardon, did you speak?"

Dave Erland had spoken, but it had come out inadvertently. He muttered an apology and was continuing when Julia ran on:

"Thanks ever so much for telling me about the murder. I guess I'd better go talk to the police—let them know about——"

At her first step he seized her arm again. "In that case, my dear madam," he was ingratiating, "you may tell me. I am—a policeman. And," he took on a rare skull-like grin, "there's a bit of jealousy among us, you know. If you can help me make this case——" His bow suggested the extent of his gratitude.

Julia Sinclair found difficulty in avoiding laughing aloud. She was far from lacking in perspicuity; else she never could have welded Opportunity to yield her subsistence. Also, she believed she could distinguish a policeman from any other. Dave Erland bore nothing of the stamp.

Wherefore, her wits, ever at high pitch for a situation that by proper and adept manipulation would improve her lot—and long starved in that search—set Erland down unhesitatingly as an impostor.

When a man impersonates a police officer, where murder has been done, to learn how much a potential witness can tell, there must be some compelling influence. That was as patent as the fact that he

stood before her, eagerly expectant over her next move.

Julia became responsively sympathetic. She asked for no credentials; he displayed none.

"I understand," she said. "You get promotion and rewards and things when you make a good arrest, don't you? And, of course, it really makes no difference to me where the credit goes."

Erland's face almost touched hers. She saw his body quiver and she made ready for the contest. Her eyes half closed, became calculating at the greediness of his gaze.

"What about the man?" prompted Erland.

Julia spread her hands at her sides. She yawned delicately. Her smile brightened significantly.

"I—don't—remember," she stated deliberately, "just—now."

His jaw opened and snapped in a snarl. The police captain had come into the corridor. While his nerves screamed, Erland saluted the officer and got a cheerful return. The captain was entirely satisfied. They had it on King—like a tent! King would confess anything and everything when sufficiently broken up by the holding out of his dope. Nothing to it—that was the captain.

But Dave Erland was not so satisfied. It would require a confession, certainly, to make the case stand up. Granted that would be forthcoming, juries sometimes were chary about convicting on a confession.

And here was a woman who declared she had seen a man—not King—who entered into the scheme.

He let the police captain pass. Julia made no move to hail him.

"If I could talk with you awhile"—Erland's burning stare said more than his words—"do you think you might remember——"

"I might." Julia Sinclair's smile brightened. She forced the pace. "I might remember much—if it were worth while!"

"Or," the skin crinkled over his bony face in a sneer, "or you might—forget?"

"Of course." She was matter of fact. "I might forget."

CHAPTER VI.

THE INTERVIEW.

FROM the beginning, it was apparent to Dave Erland that his interview with Julia Sinclair, whose name he did not yet know, was likely to prove trying and dangerous. When she opened the door of her apartment and stood aside to let him enter, he went against his will. He had proposed that they talk in Dutton's apartment downstairs. She had insisted that they go to her place. On top of this new complication which she had engendered, he was worried about Dutton and Van Wert. He had not intended to be away from them so long—to leave them without his leadership and counsel when the assistant district attorney might arrive at any time to take their statements.

Van Wert, especially, was on his mind. Dutton's easy jovialty, fruit of his habitual mellowness, would carry him through; but Van Wert—Erland wished he could get back to him.

Therefore, although he tried to concentrate on Julia, and what she portended, his thoughts were irritatingly divided. As she led him across the dim-lit hall, he supposed she was merely heading for somewhere they could talk without interruption. Instead, she brought up at a window and silently drew the curtain aside in the darkness.

Erland's spare body became rigid. He required no explanation as to why she had brought him there first. Across the space between the wings of the building he looked into the room in which Merritt T. Lawrence had been slain.

The room was brilliantly lighted. While he watched, speculating on what this woman would spring on him next, a detective paused in front of the window, talking and evidently pointing toward the body.

To Erland, alert now to every detail that might come before him, the significance of her action was plain. She was demonstrating the possibilities of her knowledge before she entered into discussion of it.

Nevertheless, the coming of the detective into sight immediately impressed one

fact on Erland that made his eye glint. The corner of the room in which the body lay was not visible from the window out of which he was looking, and a glance showed him that from nowhere else in her apartment had Julia a more advantageous view.

He shook off his misgiving. Why the devil was he letting his nerves run away? There was no occasion for that. Rather it was necessary to maintain calm.

Julia dropped the curtains as he stepped back. He was starting to give voice to a demand that she declare herself and her purpose when an interruption came that snapped his jaw like a trap.

A maid, peering into the obscurity of the room, was inquiring if madame desired anything?

Erland swore beneath his breath and blessed himself that the words had not been out of his mouth. He wanted no witnesses when it came to a plain talk with Julia Sinclair.

"Yes, Felice," Julia spoke to the maid quietly. "Light the blue room, please. And send the cab away—I won't go out now."

She switched on a lamp and turned amiably to Erland. He felt that she considered herself master of the situation, and, since the injection of the maid, he was beset by a fresh fear that she might turn out to be so. The maid was a further quantity to be reckoned with that he had not anticipated. His strained attention was on her as she went to telephone, and Julia had to invite him the second time before he heard and followed her to the front of the apartment.

There he had a few moments to himself while Julia phoned her friends that she would not keep the dinner engagement. His hand ran across his forehead and came away damp. For the first time in his life, perhaps, Dave Erland was sweating.

Even he, however, responded to the influence of the delft-blue room into which she had shown him. The deep-paneled walls and the beamed ceiling in themselves bespoke restfulness. The fine willow furniture and the couple of squatty tables with tiled tops accentuated it. So, too, did the illumination, lights shaded in the prevailing hue and cunningly contrived in broad flat globes high on the walls, their radiance blending imperceptibly, diffusing warmth.

He was looking about him when the door clicked shut and Julia stood waving him to a seat. Her gaze was frank, untroubled. She maintained the attitude that the next move was up to him. Erland did not like that. It put him in the position of being the negotiator—which he was—while he wanted her to take the next step. It was essential that he should know more of what *she* knew if they were to be on even terms.

For once Erland was in doubt about how to proceed. What he had seen of Julia Sinclair already had convinced him that it would not be wise to press his original claim that he was a police officer. The promptitude with which she had come back with the remark that she might also know *how to forget* told him that she had not been deluded. Had she believed he was a detective she never would have put herself in danger of a charge of having conspired to defeat the ends of justice. Her indicated willingness to barter evidence amounted to such conspiracy.

His great hope rested on the fact that Julia had not proclaimed whatever knowledge she possessed for every one to hear.

In the prolonged pause while he studied her, Erland crossed and recrossed his long legs. She was so confoundedly, pleasantly inscrutable. She seemed content to sit there indefinitely, waiting for him to bring up the subject in hand, but not to break the ice herself.

With the double purpose of finding out something about her and of the course he would have to take, he questioned at last:

"You live here alone?"

She nodded. "Just myself and my maid. And, by the bye," she smiled charmingly, albeit with a touch of malice, "since we will—ah, see each other at the trial, my name is Julia Sinclair."

The cheek bones showed whiter on Erland's face, but his thin lips wrinkled in a grin. He appreciated the way she had phrased it about the trial. The inflection had conveyed her real meaning splen-

didly. By the answering gleam in her eyes he saw that she understood her shot had gone home.

For the present he passed by the implication. He was disturbed about the maid. He spoke softly for fear she was listening.

"Are we to be quite frank, Miss Sinclair? I inferred that we would—when you invited me here."

"It would be preferable, wouldn't it?" The careless manner dropped from her. Erland straightened involuntarily at the swift change in her expression—at the gleam of her strong teeth.

Erland braced himself for the showdown—and was disappointed. When he was prepared for her to declare herself and offer terms she did neither. She forced him to make the bid while keeping him in ignorance of what he was bidding for.

"What have you to propose, Mr.——" She halted for him to supply the name.

"Erland." It was useless to attempt to conceal his identity. She would not let him out of her sight if they failed to reach an agreement. If they did agree, his name would not matter. The part she was prescribing for herself would assure her silence.

He looked at his watch, giving her another opportunity to disclose her cards, which she again refused to do.

It was five minutes to eight. He had been away from Dutton and Van Wert twenty minutes. The assistant district attorney must arrive soon. Erland cursed to himself. He could waste no more time on Julia Sinclair. Jockeying and diplomacy had to go by the board if he was to get back to his partners to sustain them in the police inquisition.

He got up and moved a chair close to Julia. His lusterless eyes bored into her, seeking in vain to read her thought.

"What time did you see—the man you speak of?"

"About six." The answer was prompt. "My maid can tell the exact minute. I asked her."

Her persistent evasion of any positive statement baffled and angered him. He tried again:

"It was dark, wasn't it?"

"Not quite. It was light enough to see"—she shrugged and marked his irrepressible eagerness—"to see what was to be seen."

"And your maid——" Erland's lips compressed in a bloodless line, then snarled at her answer.

"Has been with me for years," added Julia to his words. Her finger skipped from one to another of the buttons on the bright girdle of her gown as though she were counting them. Her eyes were bland as she looked up from that inane occupation. "It isn't necessary to bring her into this, Mr. Erland—not yet. She does—what I tell her."

For another spell they measured each other silently. Erland was first to waver. He damned Van Wert and Dutton. Given time he would be able to handle Miss Sinclair, he believed. Lacking time he was under a handicap to which he had to submit.

In voice and countenance alike he was coldly menacing as he essayed giving her back in kind—an indirect threat.

"You know, Miss Sinclair, there is a heavy penalty for—*blackmail?*"

She laughed at him. "Blackmail! How in the world," she scoffed, "could any one think of blackmailing a police officer who is doing his duty—as *you* are! Perhaps, I'd better go straight to the captain——"

"Sit down!" She was on her feet when the command rattled from him. Somewhere in the apartment the silvery chime of a clock recorded eight. He gave up quibbling and fishing; abandoned at its inception his attempt to frighten her. What he wanted was her terms and quickly.

Julia sank lanquidly back into the chair. "I'll give you just three minutes, Mr. Erland," she stated succinctly.

"That's plenty," he accepted. He leaned over, looking clear into her eyes, his finger tips tapping in emphasis. "Would you like to make a trip?" he asked, "Japan—South America—anywhere?"

His meaning was so plain she did not have to consider his proposition. "For how long?" she asked briskly.

"A year—two years—forever, if you like!"

No sign of the excitement that gripped

her escaped Julia Sinclair. She could not afford to let Erland off the hook. An untoward word or act, a breath of anxiety, might give him the cue that would let him slip away.

"That would be very expensive," she smiled. "And, of course, I would not relish going away forever. You know that. For a time. Yes, that might be arranged."

The chill perspiration beaded on Erland's head. He knew how terribly he was committing himself, but saw no other way out. Julia Sinclair had to be gotten rid of; he was convinced of that. What she was going to do had to be decided rapidly so that he could rejoin Dutton and Van Wert and prevent either of them, particularly Van Wert, from undoing the entire fabric.

"You would start at once—to-morrow," he announced. "How much would it cost?"

"To-morrow!" Julia blinked at him and laughed again. "That surely is a speedy order. I couldn't go for more than a year."

"All right! How much?" Dollars always had spoken for Dave Erland, and he felt that they were not failing him now. His confidence increased. Let her open her mouth later on and she would stand convicted of blackmail by her own utterance. Pretty soon, once he had turned over a dollar to her, he would have Julia Sinclair gagged.

"I fancy Japan," she murmured. "I've never been there and I have done South America."

Erland squirmed as she pondered. Her gaze focused on his pulsing temple, and she was tantalizingly hesitant.

"There are so many things to be considered, Mr. Erland, that it is hard to set a price. The—the inconvenience and all that. To begin with, there is the lease of this apartment—it is paid for the year—twenty-five hundred dollars. It would cost as much to equip oneself for a trip like that—it would have to be done so hurriedly as I went along if you want me to leave the city without delay. And a year's travel—that wouldn't come a cent under, say, fifteen thousand dollars. And my maid," she raised her eyebrows expressively, "she naturally has to be counted in. So that," she shook her head regretfully and pulled one cheek into a dimple," it couldn't possibly be done for less than—twenty-five thousand dollars."

"I don't want you to buy Japan," sneered Erland. "I only——"

"But even if that were necessary," she interjected cheerfully, "you might be persuaded to let me make the attempt. You will pay cash, of course—before I start!"

The assurance of her last remark brought a withered smile to the man. He liked the way she had carried herself throughout the interview. If Van Wert and Dutton only had half her nerve and poise.

"Cash," he conceded.

"To-night," she stipulated.

He objected. "I can't get that amount——"

"You must if you want this to go through," she affirmed. "You yourself proposed that I start to-morrow. I'm in favor of that—so much so that I'll get away before breakfast. There's always the chance that some one might come nosing around. I don't want to take that chance. If that sum is easily within your reach to-morrow, you can find some means of getting it to-night. I'll give you until midnight. After that——" She left it to his imagination to picture what she would do should midnight come without the money in her hand.

With difficulty Julia repressed the insurgent twitch at the corner of her mouth. Had Erland seen that telltale he might have gone after her in critical cross-examination—in his place she told herself she would have done so. For Julia Sinclair was not at all sure what her program would be in the event that Erland failed her. There were several strings to be pulled together before she would know. But there was one item outstanding and that was what really counted—her ragged fortune seemed well on the road to rehabilitation.

With a drink at his elbow, Dutton was amusing himself with the Buddha when Erland entered. Hunched on a Chinese stool, head on hands, Van Wert was sweating blood. His thoughts had settled down to a monotonous damning of

Erland—for Van Wert was fearful of the final outcome.

Nor was Van Wert visibly relieved when the assistant district attorney had finished taking their statements of the circumstances attending discovery of the murder. Watching with nerve-sharpened eyes, he perceived in Erland's manner that the end was not yet.

CHAPTER VII.

BYPLAY AND CONFLICT.

WHEN a man has blundered in upon stark crime in all its brutal crudity and stolen away lest he be ensnared by it, his sensibilities are apt to be fairly well jarred. He misses the thrill of awe that trickles through a person who merely hears of what has taken place and stands peering in from the side lines. Glaring memory of the reality destroys the ordinary sensations that would be his were he among those disinterested, except so far as their degree of morbidness and curiosity dictates.

When on top of that he does not know whether he certainly has escaped being implicated—but does know that a talkative maid right then is wondering whether he was or was not in his own apartment at a precise time, and if not, where he was—the man lacks inspiration to participate in or give heed to the hushed gabbling of those who only have heard of what he has *seen.*

Consider, also, that he was led to the place of death through a natural inquisitiveness anent a bewitching phantom woman who whisked through his apartment as he dozed. That even as he retreated from the body of a murdered man, while some one clamored at the door for entrance, the phantom returned with his own sister, and, as he sought to regain his balance, his dream woman calmly, complacently, gave him the alternative of abetting or accusing her. That now, while he mingles with the crowd that gabbles on the side lines, she is at his side, still unmoved, no more than subduedly interested in the smattering details of the crime that are being circulated—apparently confident that he will not accuse.

That was the state of the mind of Barry Kirby when, arriving outside the Lawrence apartment, he tried to evince at least some concern over the murder.

To tell the truth, he was wholly unable to devote himself to what was going on or was being said around him. There was room in his weaving brain for only one object and that was Farylea Medford. Brief as was the time since he had met her, she had taken unaccountably deep root in his life—for more reason than that she had been impressed upon his attention by the murder and the as yet unexplained occasion of her fleeting presence. For, he conceded regretfully, and it depressed him, the belief that he had seen her first in his dreams no longer seemed tenable.

Consequently, with eyes and ears for none but her, he tripped up in answering a simply horror-stricken comment by his sister.

"Yes, I know," he spoke absently. "Slugged with an ash receiver——"

"Why, where did you hear that, Barry?" Marjorie was surprised. The maid in telling them of the murder had stated no more than that Lawrence had been killed.

"What?" He said it testily; for Marjorie had broken the thoughts he was bending in an attempt to prove that the facts were wrong—that they could not be reconciled to involve Farylea Medford.

His sharp query attracted Farylea. "What's what?" she asked.

"Barry's a spook, I do believe," exclaimed Marjorie. "Here he is giving us inside details and we haven't been here a minute. He says Mr. Lawrence was hit——"

Kirby realized his slip and bit his lip in annoyance. He laughed jerkily. "Didn't you hear somebody say that, Miss Medford? I'm sure I did, or," he grinned at her sarcastically, "perhaps I dreamed it."

The gibe was lost. Farylea Medford still met him with a smile.

"No, I didn't notice. But then," she pouted, "we womenfolk get so much more excited over a case like this that we miss half of what is going on."

Which was not quite so, for she *had* noticed his elaboration. And she was positive that in the few seconds they had

been there they had not been close enough to any one to overhear conversation. While his sister let the incident pass, Farylea Medford found a new interest in Kirby.

The news that the valet had been in the apartment caused Kirby to start. Farylea observed that and his sucking breath.

"He was in there!" Kirby's eyes widened on the gossiper. "Are you sure of that?" Good Lord, suppose the man had come upon him beside the body and had shouted an alarm!

"And they expect him to confess, you say?" He echoed that without waiting for an answer to the other question as he saw the possibilities that were opened up. A confession by the valet would dispose absolutely of the theory that had begun to be overburdening. It would eliminate Farylea Medford, his phantom woman, who had materialized from the whole wretched skein. He was warmly receptive to such an outcome. He had wished for no more than that. Here it was done on no less authority than the police who announced that the valet undoubtedly was guilty.

In the reaction Kirby jeered at himself as a consummate fool. Had he had any brains he would have seen how absurd it was even to suggest that such a girl could have a part in any crime. It made him faint to think of the complications had he accused her—with nothing to back his accusation but a crazy sleepy imagining that she had entered his apartment from the fire-escape and hurried through. Suppose he had done so, and she had been unable to establish her innocence! How would she ever have gotten out of the charge? Even though she had been acquitted, wouldn't she have been everlastingly ruined by the notoriety; a woman dragged into the case of a man found murdered!

In the wave of relief that swept over him, Barry Kirby turned, beaming upon her. What an injustice——

His train of blissful thought was broken by Farylea's echo of his own interrogation:

"They say he will confess?"

"That's it." Their informant was wise. "They'll gouge a confession out of him—third-degree stuff. He's a dope fiend, so I guess it won't be hard."

As it had risen so was Kirby's happy enthusiasm snuffed out. He had been too fast. He had been too ready to snatch at the arrest of King and talk of a confession as a means of removing Farylea Medford from the ensemble. He had allowed his heart—yes, his heart—to run away with his head.

The valet might be telling the truth. Kirby could understand that if King were addicted to drugs he all the more easily could be brought to confess under "scientific" police methods. But, also because of King's addiction to drugs, Kirby resolved that such a termination to the case would not suffice. It only put him back where he had been at the start—unless Farylea Medford could give him a thorough and unshakable explanation of her passage through his apartment. Yes, the prospect made him ill, but he would go on with it—he had to revert to the conclusion that he actually had seen her in the flesh as he stirred from sleep in the chair an hour and a half before.

He squared his shoulders. The sooner he got it over, the better. He gave up his plan of waiting to see if she would commit herself in any way. He would give her a chance to clear herself before he turned her over to the police.

"Come, Marjorie—Miss Medford." He gripped his sister's arm tightly and the contact gave him strength. Also, he seized upon the excuse to take Farylea's arm; for, pathetically, he did so want to touch her before he betrayed her. His biting clutch made her turn in wonderment, but his furrowed head and sagging mouth silenced her. Her own brows wrinkled, and she eyed him surreptitiously as she recalled his knowledge of what had happened to Lawrence.

"Let's get out of here," he urged briskly, and without waiting for acquiescence he shoved them along.

Descending the one flight to his apartment floor, he was overcome by weariness and anger—weariness because of the breakdown in his endeavor to persuade himself that he had been wrong in his suspicions of Farylea Medford; anger be-

cause of the total unconcern with which she comported herself.

Who was she, anyhow, he asked himself. How had she become so chummy with Marjorie? And why? On the few occasions on which his sister had mentioned her new friend to him, she had gone no further than to stray into heights of enthusiasm. She had been correct in that, Kirby conceded dispiritedly. Farylea Medford was delightful, but——

In the act of unlocking the door of his apartment he paused to look at her. The brown eyes were big, beholding him with a shadow of doubt. His teeth gritted. Why did she look at him like that—as though she feared him?

As she passed in with Marjorie, Farylea's head turned to watch him. He did not miss that. It heightened his suspicions while he assailed himself for having put her on guard.

With great deliberation he swung the door shut and followed the two girls along the hall.

A respite was given him from his unpleasant task when Marjorie began chattering half hysterically about the murder. With this further opportunity to study Farylea, he did not put it to her credit that she maintained such composure, showing nothing of the excitement under which his sister was laboring; which, he told himself bitterly, was normal in a woman.

Farylea, in fact, suggested that they resume the luncheon which news of the murder had caused them to abandon.

"Eat now!" shivered Marjorie. "I couldn't swallow a morsel."

"I could, and I'm going to," declared Farylea. "I'm hungry."

"But you were coming to the meeting with me," objected Marjorie. "It's after eight o'clock now."

"Not I." Farylea shook her head. "I'm not going to any meeting to-night. I'd be thinking of that dead man all through it."

Kirby squinted at her. "I didn't think you were much impressed with the—the killing, Miss Medford," he said dryly. His use of the harsher word "killing" was aimed to shake her. Her calm annoyed him.

The significant emphasis made her turn slowly to look him full in the face. Surprise in her expression gave way to a blankness. Her lips parted, and one cheek wrinkled quizzically. She seemed to be pondering over just what he was driving at.

Kirby's head cocked slightly to the side. His mouth took on a tracery of scorn. His whole attitude was a challenge.

From one to the other Marjorie stared in bewilderment. The byplay was beyond her comprehension, but the electricity of conflict darting between her brother and her friend was unmistakable. Her mind went back to her intrusion on them an hour ago when Kirby's arms had appeared to be falling away from Farylea. She regarded him doubtfully. That must be what had brought about the antagonism, though she could not conceive of Barry insulting Farylea in that way.

She made an effort to relieve the silent tension. "What on earth are you two glaring at each other for? You look as though you were ready to fight!"

Farylea answered promptly, easily, but unconvincingly: "Don't be ridiculous, Marjorie." Her ready smile returned, but it was mechanical; her eyes did not reflect it. "I was wondering just how excited your brother expected me to become? Of course, I am shocked—one cannot help being so—but I can't see how it will help any for me to gloom or get all worked up. What strikes me out of the whole affair is that it was not premeditated. Don't you think so, Mr. Kirby?" She paused, and he caught her keen glance as she went on. "I'd judge that, anyway, from the fact that he was killed with such an everyday, innocent piece of furniture as—didn't you say an ash receiver?"

The shot made Kirby bridle. It was not a chance remark. The manner that accompanied it, told him that. Not only had she taken up his challenge, but she was sniping at him. He wanted to laugh. If she desired action—well and good!

He addressed his sister: "Did you say you're going out, Marjorie?"

"I promised to turn in a report to-night—that's what I came home for." Marjorie hesitated. She wished now to stay home and see if she could dis-

cover what lay behind the clash between her brother and Farylea; for, despite Farylea's denial, she was not satisfied. If she went out, her friend certainly would go too, unless——

"Perhaps Farylea will wait, and lunch with you," she proposed. "I can hurry back—I won't be gone an hour."

"Yes, I'll wait." Miss Medford's chin set. Like Barry Kirby she felt that the situation had gone rudderless long enough. "That is," she sent him another malicious glance, "if Mr. Kirby doesn't mind?"

For Marjorie's benefit Kirby strove to look pleased, but he was altogether too grim. Events could not have shaped themselves better. He had been seeking an excuse to get his sister out of the way while he threshed matters out with Farylea Medford. Now was the time for Farylea Medford to explain herself.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN UNWELCOME CALLER.

NEITHER Farylea nor Kirby referred to what was uppermost in their thoughts while they lunched. Their conversation was fragmentary. She ate heartily, but his appetite was gone. His meal consisted principally of four cups of coffee, and every mouthful made him more depressed and found him shrinking farther from the accusation.

Through a cloud of smoke from his cigarette he frowned on her. From her bare throat his gaze traveled down her modeled arm to the small firm hand that plucked at a bunch of grapes. Nausea came over him as he visioned that hand striking down a man. Almost he dropped his intended inquisition as insanity—she *couldn't* have done it! Again she pressed him to proceed and her evasive phrasing revived his purpose:

"Are we to come to an understanding, Mr. Kirby?"

He ground the half-smoked cigarette into his saucer. She was so infernally matter of fact!

Kirby closed the doors before he replied. Both maids were now in the apartment, and he had not forgotten that one of them was wondering where he had been when she entered.

Back in his seat across the table from Farylea he looked at her from under lowered brows. His tone was harsh and formal.

"I hope so, Miss Medford, but I'm afraid the understanding will not be pleasing to you."

"We won't get anywhere if you keep on with cryptic speeches," she retorted. "Why not disregard whether it pleases or displeases me?"

Her nonchalance upset Kirby's temper. He slapped the table and bent toward her. "Very well! As a starter: Were you in this apartment to-night before you came in with Marjorie?"

A light laugh rippled from Farylea. She picked a red chrysanthemum from a vase on the table and held it against her cheek. "Don't you know?" she drawled.

"Yes!" He battled to seal his senses, to blot out the allurement of the picture she presented with that violent splash of color against the delicate texture of her skin. His hand gripped the edge of the table to steady himself. He called up all his strength to withstand her, for now he did not attempt to deny that this girl had gone mightily to his heart.

"Then, if you're so sure," she mocked him once more, "why ask me?"

"Because," unconsciously his voice fell low, "because I want you to have the chance to convince me that you are innocent. If you can do that, I—I shall not call the police!"

"The police!" She half started to her feet, her face dismayed. "You would not do that!"

The momentary break in her repose cut into Kirby. It was an agony to him that he should be compelled to bring pain and fear to this girl; to be threatening her when he wanted to caress her.

The color ebbed back to her cheeks. The fright passed, and she was smiling.

"You would not do that," she repeated. "When you know——"

"God knows, I don't want to," he burst out fervently, "but——"

A knock at the door stopped him. It was the maid, Helen, who had been in when he descended from the scene of the

murder. As she advanced across the room to hand him a card she watched him shiftily.

"Miss Julia Sinclair," he read, and asked the maid what Miss Sinclair wanted. The girl did not know except that the business was urgent.

"Tell her to come to-morrow—any time except to-night," he was adding when Julia Sinclair spoke from the doorway:

"To-morrow won't do, Mr. Kirby."

He arose scowling. Had his visitor been a man Kirby would have taken joy in throwing him out.

Unheeding of her reception, Julia swept into the room. She had changed into a tailored suit from her rich gown. "If you have a cup of coffee left, I'm sure I wouldn't refuse it. You see," she faced him, "this murder cheated me out of dinner."

Kirby gaped at her. Another woman in it! And she came to see him! Why?

The question was on his tongue when he noticed the maid still in the room and much interested in what was going on. He dismissed her, but she went reluctantly, leaving the door ajar. He shut it and returned to the table, preparing himself for whatever further shock was to come when this unconventional visitor, who switched abruptly from talk of murder to a request for coffee, unburdened herself. He pulled up a chair for her with exaggerated ceremony.

"Miss Medford, will you pour for Miss Sinclair?" He let that serve as an introduction for the two women.

"Thanks." Julia centered her attention on Farylea reminiscently. "Would you mind standing up?" The query amazed Farylea into obedience. Julia nodded. "You're not wearing furs to-day, are you? No? And your hat is a small one? Yes?"

Farylea was flushed as she sat down. Why should it matter to a stranger whether she was wearing furs or what shape her hat? Had it not been for Julia's smile and twinkling eyes, Miss Medford would have been moderately indignant.

"You said your call had to do with the —murder?" Kirby's tone was not encouraging.

"I live on the floor above—across the court," replied Julia obliquely. She glanced from Kirby to Farylea and back at him with an unspoken question.

"Don't hesitate because Miss Medford is here," he declared recklessly. Julia already had given him a clew to what she was going to say, or so he thought. If he, too, were to be mixed in, it might as well come swiftly. "Miss Medford is aware of all that's going on."

Julia Sinclair sipped her coffee meditatively. She grew confidential.

"Quite a busy evening on the fire escape, wasn't it?" she ventured conversationally.

An exclamation broke from Farylea. Kirby swore—and did not altogether succeed in keeping it in undertone.

He did not consider the awkwardness of his own position. It was the dashing of his last hope concerning Farylea that racked him. Her exclamation and her startled countenance when the fire escape was mentioned left no doubt in his mind. If she had not entered his window by that means—if she were not guilty—Julia's words would have meant nothing to her. He groaned aloud at this revelation that there was another witness besides himself to accuse Farylea Medford.

Appealingly he looked at her, his eyes begging that she defend herself. He even stalled to give her time to collect her thoughts. For now that she was being attacked from another direction he had a wild idea that he could save her by denying the claim Julia Sinclair undoubtedly would put forth that Farylea had come off the fire escape.

"Wait a minute!" Julia hushed his irrelevancy. "Don't misunderstand me. I stopped in to tell you, Mr. Kirby, not to worry. I fancy your friend was in too big a hurry to let you know—but it's all fixed. He went downstairs without stopping on his floor—I watched. On the way back he'll probably——"

The sheer wonder blazoning on Kirby's face halted her. She could not mistake its genuineness. She was chuckling as Kirby stuttered:

"Fixed? Friend? What are you talking about?"

"The murder and the fire escape,"

laughed Julia. Things were working out as she had anticipated. There was every probability of it being an agreeable evening for Julia Sinclair. Besides profit, it seemed that Opportunity, so long deferred, had brought her a favor with offshoots that held interesting possibilities.

Farylea regained her voice. "You saw —some one on the fire escape?"

"I saw two, my dear! And," Julia ceased bantering, "I don't want either of them to leave this apartment until I give permission."

A sickly grin came to Kirby. It was all over. This woman had it in her power to throw not only Farylea but himself into jail.

"What if either of them were to go out?" he queried.

"They wouldn't get far before their destination was changed to a place with green lights outside," said Julia emphatically.

"What difference does it make whether they," Farylea, too, smiled as she used the third person, "go now or later?"

Julia patted her arm in friendly fashion. "If they follow orders I don't think it will be necessary to go at all," she asserted, but refused to be more specific.

"I have to go now," she continued. "There's a couple of things to attend to, but I'll be back about midnight. Don't forget about staying——"

At a sudden movement by Kirby she withdrew like a flash from his path, a tiny but evil-looking automatic pistol in her hand. In the midst of a step he checked himself involuntarily, lost his balance, recovered, and plunged on to the door. As he jerked it open Helen, the maid, jumped away.

"Come in here," he commanded her.

Her hands thrown up before her in fear, the maid whimpered. Retiring as Kirby moved toward her, she lifted her voice in a minor shriek:

"He'll kill me, too! Don't let him. I know he was——"

"Shut up," said Kirby roughly. He seized her by the arm and hauled her into the room. "Here's another you'll have to keep inside if you don't want the beans spilled," he informed Julia cynically. "She's on your side. She knows, or thinks she knows, that I went strolling on the fire escape."

Julia Sinclair sighed in relief. "Lordy, is that all! I thought for a moment that you were going to start something, hence the gun," and she slipped it into the handy but concealed pocket in the fullness above her waist.

A strangled cry issued from Farylea. Her arm, sweeping across the table as she stared dumbly at Kirby, sent a plate smashing to the floor. "That is how you knew"—they barely heard her gasping words—"how he died!"

"Of course!" Kirby looked defiantly at Julia, but evaded Farylea. Of what use was concealment now? He laughed throatily. "Didn't I see him lying there with the bloodstained tray near him?"

Crouched in a chair, the maid whined in hysterical terror. Chalk-white to the lips, Farylea Medford sat straight and frozen. One foot on a chair, Barry Kirby leaned an elbow on his knee and chewed an unlighted cigarette.

He did not even attempt to understand when Julia Sinclair, standing off to one side, deliberately winked at him.

"You're all under arrest," she announced calmly. She jabbed a finger at the maid. "You are a witness. Keep still till I come back and you'll be all right. Nobody will hurt you." She caught sight of the other maid hovering timorously in the hall and called her in. "You stay, too. Whoever goes out will be taken to the station house. Everybody understand that?"

The outer door opened and closed. They remained in silence as Marjorie Kirby appeared.

"Thank Heaven," praised Julia. "I'll leave you in charge of the bunch. I have to rush—folks waiting for me. And don't forget they're all under arrest!"

While the astounded Marjorie floundered vainly to comprehend, she found herself acting jailer to four prisoners, one of whom was her brother and another her chum. And the nearest approach to anything intelligible that she could make out of it all was that both her brother and her chum had been on the fire escape that

evening and so had become entangled somehow in the Lawrence murder.

Her pleading with them for explanations was useless. They were mute as oysters on the subject—Barry because had he related his adventure in full it would have necessitated naming Farylea Medford. To do that would block the last loophole through which she might escape. Fighting within himself again, he was not sure whether he would close that last avenue to her.

"Take those sniveling fools away, Marjorie," he said irritably, referring to the maids. "Put 'em in the other end of the flat where we can't hear them. All we need now is some one to read the funeral service and the party will be complete."

Marjorie was taking the maids away when Farylea called. Kirby kicked a chair viciously and stumped to the window when he observed her unsteady, groping steps and pallid cheeks.

The only bright spot in the whole mix-up—his heart leaped at it—lay in the fact that the maid had not seen Farylea. What if there were two witnesses against her instead of one?

Without considering the morality of this surrender to his emotions, he rejoiced in that. It did not matter that there were two to testify that he had mounted to Lawrence's apartment. He believed he would come out all right. Then, if Julia Sinclair adhered to the truth, she would swear that Farylea had entered his rooms. If he took oath that she had not, they would have nothing on her—nothing, unless—that was what had him by the throat—unless they could prove that Farylea Medford had a motive for killing Merritt T. Lawrence. He would have to quiz her about that. Before Julia Sinclair returned Farylea would have to tell him everything. He would try to save her anyhow!

Farylea's voice came faintly to him. He looked round to see her take a small packet of letters out of the bosom of her dress. She handed them to his sister.

"Will you lock these up for me, Marjorie?" she asked. "Put them where no one can get them—they are very important."

Kirby placed his head wearily against the cold windowpane; his last hope died. Here he was, ordinarily a law-abiding citizen, framing to cheat the law of Farylea Medford and, as he decided to perjure himself if need be, she, right under his eyes, was turning over letters to his sister—letters which in all likelihood formed the basis for the killing of Lawrence.

For half an hour he remained motionless at the window, unseeing eyes on the street far below. When at length he turned, his face was gray and haggard from the inward struggle that had been waged between honesty and love.

She was at the table, her head fallen on her outstretched arms, her hair tumbled forward in disorderly beauty. The utter despair of her posture decided him. Honesty lost.

Advancing to the table he stood opposite her, gripping the board. "Miss Medford!" he called softly. She did not move. His hand went forward and touched hers. "Farylea."

As one in a trance, her head uplifted. Her face was vacant, eyes dulled and staring wide.

Slowly, mechanically, her hands withdrew inch by inch from his.

"Farylea—tell me——"

"Don't—don't!" she whispered, shrinking beyond his reach.

Helplessly, not knowing what to do, he watched while the tears gathered and fell. An intense compassion mastered him as her head dropped convulsively onto her arms again and she gave way to a storm of weeping.

In two strides he was at her side, but she stirred only to press him from her.

CHAPTER IX.

A CASH-RAISING PARTY.

ALTHOUGH the raising of twenty-five thousand dollars off hand and after the closing hour of the financial marts is not a simple operation, even if the seeker has adequate resources, it can be done, as Julia Sinclair had pointed out to Erland. Also, in New York City the prospects are proportionately greater than in, say, Passaic, New Jersey.

Consequently, while he well knew that

it would require some hustling and scurrying around to produce the amount by midnight, Erland did not doubt his ability to do so. There were, for instance, certain places, in which he was not a stranger, that carried large sums of money because that was the essential of their nocturnal business; and the later the hour the more they had, though, of course, on occasion some one came along with a streak of luck and carried off a bundle. It was preferable to get what he needed at such places rather than from business acquaintances, for the latter might be excusably curious regarding the hurry-up nature of the call.

As they arrived at Dutton's apartment on the third floor after having made their statements to the prosecutor, he quickly apprized his partners that the twenty-five thousand hush money had to be obtained. He did not go into detail. Dave Erland reckoned it well not to let Van Wert too deep into what was going on. Van was too much on edge to be trusted. On what he could surmise, and that was considerable, he was inclined to be ugly. Brought to the scratch, he was demonstrating more than ever that his backbone was not over strong.

No sooner had Erland stated his need than Van Wert broke out with insistence upon a specific recital of what had taken place so far.

"That'll keep," said Erland shortly. "What we have to do at present is get the cash." He whirled to confront Van Wert at close range and warned him. "We're in this together, Van, and——"

"I'm going to get to hell out," said Van Wert vehemently. He waved his arms excitedly, bubbling over. "Lord! I knew you'd run us into the ground some day! You go charging along as you please, then rope Dutton and me in to help bear the load. There's nothing doing this time, I tell you—nothing doing! I'm going to get to hell out before this goes any further."

For the second time that night Erland found himself at a disadvantage because time was short. As with Julia Sinclair, so was it with Van Wert—minutes were too precious to use up in argument. It was necessary, therefore, to squelch Van Wert, to make him understand they were on a par when it came to their necks getting inside the noose.

Van Wert shifted under Erland's snaky, fascinating glare, but he attempted to get away with it. "If you've started something," he blustered tremulously, "you can finish it yourself. I'm through. Weren't things bad enough without——"

The malignancy of Erland's skinny face stopped him. He shoved his hat close onto his head with a show of determination, but under his mustache his lips were quivering.

Dutton came into the room, jiggling the ice in a highball he had made himself. The general atmosphere and Van Wert's closing words advised him that something was seriously wrong. Sharp and weather-wise despite his generally easy-going complaisance, he sized matters up correctly and cut in with the admirable intent of averting an out-and-out quarrel in which Van Wert must lose. "Where d'you figure on getting the dough, Dave?" he asked amiably. "What's it for?"

"It's to keep you and me and *that* out of jail," said Erland incisively. "And—*I* am going to get only some of it. *You* will get the rest."

Dutton put down his glass and hitched his hands behind his head. "Let's wait till to-morrow," he nodded lazily, rocking on his heels. "It'll be tough sleddin' to get it to-night."

Van Wert took courage out of the fact that Erland had not included him as one of the cash raising party. He put on his overcoat with an unaccustomed swagger. He thought that maybe he had called the turn on Erland. Now, all he had to do was push through with it—show that he wasn't going to be bulldozed any longer.

But his rope was paid out. Erland barred the way as Van Wert started for the door. He was freezingly dispassionate, but his every word went home. "We'll not debate this, Van." His skullish grin made Van Wert's flesh creep. "Get it straight. Dutton and I are going out now to dig up twenty-five thousand dollars. If you know where we can get some of it fast, say so. If you weren't such a—a runt," he sneered, "I'd trust you to

lend a hand, but till you find some nerve you're better indoors."

The appellation got under Van Wert's hide. With heart pounding at his own trepidity, his breath wheezing as from violent exertion, he sought to thrust his way past Erland—and was thrown back six feet. He retained his equilibrium, but cowered without knowing he did so as Erland followed him up.

"You bet your life you're through"—Erland tapped him on the shoulder—"but not until we're through with you. You'll sit by that phone and take Dutton's messages and mine—keep us in touch with each other while we get that money. And while you're sitting there between calls, just ponder every so often that if you throw us down you throw yourself down. If anybody gets nipped in this jam you're in it, too—and if you were to wriggle out they'd get you on the paper that Lawrence held. That alone is good for upward of ten years."

He motioned to Dutton. "We've three hours and a half to be back here with the money. Every half hour you'll phone Van Wert and report progress. I'll do the same. Come on. I'll tell you where to go."

Without another glance at Van Wert he started out with Dutton to accumulate the twenty-five thousand dollars that Julia Sinclair had set as the price of her silence.

He buttoned his coat with pathetic arrogance. Halfway to the outer door he paused. He cursed Erland—and Dutton. Dutton was a flabby idiot—he let Erland run him as he pleased. If Dutton had stood by in revolt, Erland would have been left alone to face whatever he had brought upon himself—and upon them.

Van Wert's insurgency oozed. He went back to the lounging room. He wished he could take a drink, but alcohol always made him deathly sick. He took off his hat and coat, threw them down, and flung himself onto a davenport.

After awhile, however, when Erland phoned, Van Wert left the devil out of the conversation and merely reported that Dutton had phoned progress to the extent of four thousand dollars.

CHAPTER X.

UNDER ARREST.

JULIA SINCLAIR let Erland into her apartment at a quarter to midnight. Murmuring a bromide about his punctuality, she took him again into the blue room. His very presence was assurance enough that he was about to yield, and her pulses thumped at the prospect.

His glance roved here and there thoughtfully, then settled on her. Except for steeliness of eye that compared with his own and a throbbing vein on her throat, she was without symptom that the occasion was out of the ordinary.

"Where is your maid?" he asked crisply.

"Out," said Julia, and added that she had supposed he'd rather have the negotiations strictly between themselves.

Erland smiled sardonically. "You're nervy, aren't you? Is this meant to impress me?"

"Oh, no! I—ah——" To his manifest surprise the pistol appeared from nowhere into Julia's hand. She returned him a silky smile. The weapon slid back into its concealed pocket.

From her he looked about the room. Two of the queer, flat electric globes on opposite walls were dark, he noticed.

Remembrance of the stormy session through which he had just been with Van Wert—in which Dutton alone had saved Wert from violence—surged over him. In conjunction with this costly intrusion of Julia Sinclair, this holdup, it touched the spark that left him in a fury. She would have to show him before she got a cent!

"You allowed me three minutes tonight to come to a decision, Miss Sinclair," he stated evenly. "I'm going to let you have as much."

The ultimatum did not affect her visibly; she acknowledged it with complete equability. "It wouldn't do to take longer than that," she replied gravely "My maid will be in at twelve."

The implied threat angered him still more. They had remained standing, and now he moved to within a pace of her.

"Why should I give you even twenty-five cents?" he snarled.

"You don't have to!" Julia was annoyingly indifferent, but he did not fail to observe that her hand hovered close to her pistol. "If you've changed your mind—why, don't let us talk about it any more."

Through half-closed eyes she watched him dreamily. The silver-toned clock that he had heard before tinkled twelve.

"If you leave now, Mr. Erland," she suggested softly, "before my maid returns, you'll have a few minutes' start at any rate."

Without restraint an oath ground through Erland's teeth. He was helpless. He did not dare defy her further; and he was aware that she was wholly confident he would not attempt it. None the less, he made another lead to draw her out. "If you have anything to tell the police, how will you explain your delay in going to them? Your withholding of evidence? That is aiding and abetting."

"When one knows that a crime has been committed—yes," she agreed. "But, you see, I didn't know. I've been in here all night—certainly. My maid heard of the murder when she went out a little while ago. As soon as she returns and tells me, I shall remember what I saw and rush off to the police with the information!" She sighed and shook her head at his simplicity.

Erland dried his forehead. She was quite capable of making her recital plausible. He was ready to stop bluffing when——

"There would be no question, Mr. Erland, as to whom they should hunt," she declared. "Doubtless the police noted your general appearance when you talked with them to-night—they would do that automatically. My description would be unmistakable."

He heard some one come into the apartment and a light step pass the room door. The maid, he supposed—who did what her mistress ordered.

Julia Sinclair held out her hand to him suggestively, palm upward. Without a word he extracted a mass of bills from a bulging pocket and gave them to her. She sat down and counted off in her lap six thousand-dollar bills; fifty-four hundreds; a hundred and ninety fifties, and forty-one hundred dollars in twenties and tens.

Venomously he watched her go to a small cabinet and, her back to him, fumble at a drawer. When she faced him again the money was out of sight.

"You did very well in raising the money so promptly, Mr. Erland," she said graciously, distinctly. "I'll keep my part of the bargain and leave town before ten o'clock—to be gone indefinitely."

"I might return the compliment," Erland grunted; "you haven't done so badly on the night!" He bowed in satire and made for the door. He purposed getting rid of some superfluous steam by further disciplining Van Wert.

Julia's voice halted him. "Do you reckon they'll have any trouble, ah—putting it on the valet?"

"Why should they?" He turned with burning eyes. "He was alone with Lawrence, wasn't he?"

"Yes, but—wouldn't it be more satisfactory if a stronger case than that could be made?"

He went back to her side. "What do you mean," he asked.

"Well, suppose there were witnesses to swear that *another man* did enter the apartment? Myself and a maid for instance?"

Erland didn't begin to understand what she was hinting at and said so. Ignorant as he was of Barry Kirby's part on the fringes of the murder, he inferred that Julia referred to her own maid, as she had intended he should.

"As long as there is the slightest question in any quarter about the valet's guilt—and, granting that he confesses, there will be many who will believe he was third-degreed into it—there is always a risk," she reasoned. "If the surreptitious entrance of another man into the apartment were proved beyond doubt, however, and his flight from it, the situation would be ever so much more convincing."

The logic of her argument appealed to Erland, but—his face screwed up in perplexity. She was altogether too deep, this young woman. Although he had bought her off, he, in view of this additional proposition, could not avoid uneasiness regarding the resources of her bag of

tricks. He affected skepticism. "Out of where would you produce this man—the air?"

"Something like that," she admitted. "To be exact, he went in and departed over the fire escape."

"What!" Erland's mouth gaped with incredulity. His bony cheeks flushed with eagerness, and he gripped her shoulder. "When? How are you going to find him?"

Julia drew away from him, laughing. "We won't go so fast," she stated bluntly. "First, there is matter of paying for value received. How much more is it worth to you to see the Lawrence murder closed forever with what on the face of it would be a dead-open-and-shut case? In your position, I am frank to say, I would feel much more secure than if I were depending upon a forced confession from a drug fiend."

"Never mind my position—I'll worry about that," grated Erland. The fresh demand for money had not been unanticipated, but that it had come so soon infuriated him. "I don't know what you're trying to cook up now, but I do know this: You have all you're going to get out of me! We'll stand on that."

"Perhaps," she insinuated, "perhaps that other man might be willing to—contribute. If it were revealed to him that the murder might be placed elsewhere, he, at least, would be grateful and relieved. And—I believe he could afford to pay."

His face distorted, Erland raised threatening hands. She couldn't dangle both ends of the string like that—not while he was on one of them. She had to realize that at once. "Pull anything like that," he snapped viciously, "double-cross me, and by God, you, too, will find out what it's like behind the bars. You are guilty now of blackmail—you're an accessory after the fact of murder!"

He crushed on his hat. That was the last word so far as he was concerned. He was opening the door when she followed him.

"That is so—I hadn't thought of that, Mr. Erland," she remarked somberly. "I am an accessory after the fact in the murder of Merritt T. Lawrence."

"Up to the neck!" His teeth showed through the curling lips, "And don't you forget it! Good night!"

Silently she went a couple of steps behind him across the hall. As he unlocked the door and stepped out he was looking backward over his shoulder at her. Thus, he was in the arms of two men before he was aware that they were there. Ere he could even think of retreating or struggling, they held him fast.

A third man appeared before his startled eyes.

"Better fan him," he ordered, and Erland's captors ran methodical, prying hands over him for a weapon. He had none.

"All right." The speaker introduced himself: "I'm Inspector Gilbert of the Homicide Bureau." He seemed to consider that sufficient.

Erland got himself together. He controlled his gasping breath. "What of it?" he articulated. "What's that got to do with me?"

The inspector didn't answer immediately, but waved his men inside with their prisoner.

"Good stuff, Miss Sinclair," he chuckled. Then he addressed Dave Erland. "For the Lawrence murder, of course. And if you come to bat with the rest of it—you've talked enough already to send you over—you've a chance, just a chance, of getting a second-degree sentence, which is some improvement on going to the chair. I'm not promising anything, understand, but think it over. Miss Sinclair," he smiled on her, "will you phone them to bring up Dutton and Van Wert?"

"I'll go tell them," said Julia.

"O. K." Inspector Gilbert confronted Erland who, slumped in a chair, was laboring to reconstruct his disrupted world.

CHAPTER XI.

A PERFECT TRIANGLE.

IT was a dejected enough gathering in the Kirby apartment that Julia Sinclair projected herself into at half past midnight. Kirby himself was humped in a seat, pawing over the pages of a magazine aimlessly while he gazed on

Farylea Medford with all the despairing unutterableness of a soul condemned. For three hours Farylea had been staring into space, when she was not crying, and refusing absolutely to talk to him. From another room came the moaning of the maids who, to judge by their lamentations, might have had a date with a firing squad. Added to this, there was Marjorie Kirby to lend her affrighted gloom to the occasion; for with nothing to go on but the story of the maid, Helen, involving her brother, Marjorie was far from cheerful.

Julia marshaled them all in a semicircle in front of her. Kirby looked at her darkly; he resented her inordinate and, to his harassed mind, most inopportune merriment. She was too frivolous—he remembered how she had winked at him while "arresting" every one in sight—under the tragic circumstances. He was about to make some such comment when Julia dropped a bomb at his feet.

"There are two points I'm not clear on," she admitted. "What were you, Miss Medford, doing in the apartment through the wall? And why did you climb the fire escape, Mr. Kirby, so soon after Miss Medford came in here?"

What followed "apartment through the wall" was lost on Kirby. He didn't care what Farylea had been there for! All that mattered was the fact that Farylea Medford had *not* been upstairs where murder had been done!

He did not wait to query how Julia Sinclair knew where Farylea had been. It sufficed that she had made the statement.

With a whoop of joy he started up, the lines disappearing from his face. It dampened him somewhat that Farylea did not similarly respond now that the daylight was breaking, but even that could not repress him entirely.

"Then"—he stammered—"then when I thought I was going back over the route you had come, I was on the wrong trail!"

"When you—*what!*" Farylea roused herself to an interest in the proceedings. Her eyes rounded with indignant amazement. "Do you mean to say, Barry Kirby, that you thought that I——"

"I haven't anything on you, Farylea Medford," retorted he with a grin. "Haven't you been thinking just that same thing about me? Haven't you been——"

"Let me in on this," said Julia. "Didn't you two know what each other was up to?"

Kirby chortled and related how Farylea had first come within his ken as a ghostly vision flitting through his half-consciousness. "And that, Farylea, brings us back to Miss Sinclair's question," he ended, confident that there was nothing serious to tell. "Why were you in there and why did you have to flee out the back window?"

"I was burgling," said Farylea solemnly. "Marjorie has the loot—half a dozen letters that a very dear friend of mine regrets having written—very foolish letters." She looked at Kirby's sister shamefacedly. "It was to get within reach of these letters, Marjorie, that I became acquainted with you—and cultivated that acquaintance. That we took to one another so wonderfully, and I think I can honestly say genuinely, made me feel meaner about what I was doing, for all along I planned to use your apartment as a sort of—of base of operations. That's how you came to lose your door key the other day. You didn't lose it—I took it. I've been spending most of my time since then phoning you and the next apartment. To-day neither answered and, deciding that no one was at home, I took my chance and got what I wanted."

Marjorie shook her by the shoulders. "You're the stingiest person I know," she protested. "Why didn't you tell me and let me help play burglar? Look at all the risk you took alone——"

"That was nothing compared to when I ran into Barry on the return trip!" She wilted again at the recollection. "I nearly died. And when I was congratulating myself on having gotten away after he had caught up and questioned me, I had to meet you and be taken back to become suspected of murder!"

"Darned good thing Marjorie did bring you back," said Kirby exuberantly, "otherwise the police would have had your description as the probable—— Oh, say, Miss Sinclair, how do *I* get out of this murder tangle?"

"That reminds me—you're all unarrested," laughed Julia. She singled out the maids who had ceased their wailing and were drinking in the scene. "You two can go now—and don't gossip or I'll lock you up!"

"It happens," he resumed, "that the police already have what amounts to a confession. They have just taken three new prisoners and will let the valet go. A man named Erland is the murderer."

While they chorused for details, she smiled reminiscently. "It seems to be a perfect triangle of blackmail! First there was Lawrence and these three men—Erland, Van Wert and Dutton. According to Van Wert—who, by the way, is ready to slaughter Erland out of hand for some reason or another—they had Lawrence discount some forged notes a while ago. Lawrence was a money broker, you know. He discovered the forgery and demanded double the amount of the notes. Erland went up to-night to persuade him to come down on his price. Van Wert swears there had been no talk among them of killing Lawrence, so apparently Erland got mad and hit him with the handiest object when his appeal was turned down.

"Next Miss Medford became interlocked through blackmail. The holder of the letters I suppose talked of sending to the writer's husband? Yes?

"And I"—Julia sighed and prepared to leave—"I did my bit in the blackmail line myself. It was through that that the police got their solution and three prisoners. I went after Erland and landed him."

Kirby voiced the question over which Julia's listeners were stumbling.

"You mean that besides seeing Farylea and me on the fire escape you also saw Erland commit the murder? Why didn't you at once——"

"Lord bless you, no!" cried Julia. "I did see a man—not Lawrence or his valet—pass a window, but I wouldn't have known him again from Adam! Erland hanged himself by posing as a detective and hustling me out of hearing of others when I remarked that there had been another man besides the valet in the apartment. After that I looked wise and followed my nose and my judgment! I told him how much it would cost to keep me quiet, and when he brought the money there was a dictagraph in one of the electric globes—it was easy to install it without leaving anything to betray its presence. Inspector Gilbert, an old friend to whom I told the whole situation, including you, was on the other end, and—— That's all. Erland lost his temper at me and said enough to make a confession unnecessary. Van Wert supplied the motive."

"There's one thing you've done, Miss Sinclair," said Kirby severely, "to earn my undying hatred!"

"What's that?"

"You could have told us a whole lot of this hours ago and saved both Farylea and me the miserablest——"

"You've plenty of time to make up for that—and here's hoping you do," said Julia sincerely. "I have to run upstairs now and let the police have *five thousand dollars* that Erland gave me as a bribe. I left it in a drawer, and it'll have to be marked as Exhibit A or something!"

"Night-night!" she rattled on. "Say! You haven't an idea where I can get an apartment without rear rooms, have you? I hate 'em! No? All right. I'll invite you over when I find it," and she was gone while they gaped.

It was probably an hour later that Marjorie reached a conclusion that had been growing painfully evident. She had been compelled to repeat a remark four times before it gained attention. Finally Farylea came to.

"Did you speak, Marjorie?" she inquired with a trace of surprise.

"Did I speak!" Marjorie regarded them tolerantly but suspiciously. "What I want to know is how long you two have known each other and why you never told me? It's been nothing," she mimicked, "but 'Farylea' and 'Barry' and 'Farylea' and——"

Farylea came back to the present. She blushed. "What a silly question, Marjorie, when you know that only to-night you——"

"Farylea, Farylea!" Kirby's hand

closed on hers. "Be truthful, girl dear, be truthful! I'll tell you, sister—hundreds of years is the answer—hundreds of years! And," he grinned broadly, even fatuously, "if Julia Sinclair finds a handsome enough apartment, maybe we'll take one like it and let you live with us!"

Luxuriating under the soothing strokes of the brush running through her hair, in the maid's deft fingering of the tresses, Julia Sinclair watched a fly in its devious wandering on the wall.

"Felice," she spoke drowsily, "I'm going to give you a thousand dollars."

"Yes, madame." Felice continued brushing. This was not the first occasion that she had heard something like that. But she shivered a little. She never knew but what it might be the last, and it was not a mercenary spirit that caused her misgiving—it was her love for this strange young woman whom she served.

"Later on, perhaps, you'll have to earn it." Julia's tone was whimsical, reminiscent. "Probably you'll have to remember seeing Mr. Erland give me five thousand dollars—the five thousand I handed to the police. He thinks you saw him in the flat across the way where the man was murdered, but we don't have to keep that up. It's likely, though," she smiled down at the slender, bare ankles stretched before her on the lounge and twitched the mules coquettishly on her toes, "quite likely that he'll say he gave me more than five thousand. But also——"

The maid paused with a braid half done.

"Isn't madame afraid," she whispered—sometimes, as now, her admiration was mixed with awe.

"Afraid!" Julia laughed. "He'll have no use for money where he is going. And, Felice," she became sharp, defensive, "we never take from any one that cannot spare."

"I know, madame, I know." The nimble fingers knotted the last strand in place. "But some day——"

"When *some day* comes——" Julia slid to her feet. Her eyes snapped. "Never mind. Let's get some sleep. I promised Erland I'd take a trip and I will. We'll run down to Florida till the grand jury needs us!"

LET'S TALK IT OVER

THIS is the age of democracy and publicity, of freedom of the seas and freedom of the press. The day of talking it over behind closed doors has gone. The wheezy whisper has wizzed. No more shall the mysterious gink beckon covertly, lead you to a dark corner, glue his lips to your ear and murmur secretly. Henceforth diplomacy is going to be diplomed in the open; the public is going to give every blessed and unblessed thing the once over before going home and to bed. And it's a mighty good thing. Once everything is done openly and aboveboard, in the full glare of publicity, the Bolsheviks and other pests will just naturally fade—because they will no longer find anything to rant and rave about. Most of us mean well, but it's the way we go about the thing that sometimes gets us into trouble. We might be merely talking about the weather, but if we do it behind closed doors, all sorts of evil and murderous intentions will be imputed to us. That's why I don't believe in having any editorial secrets around this shop—we'll talk it over in the open.

I want to talk about women. And why not? There are quite a lot of them in this world—God bless 'em! You see, a writer came into the office the other day and said: "I know what kind of stories you want. You're running a man's magazine—big stuff! You don't want woman interest."

"Hold on!" I gasped, holding on tight myself. "Permit me to remark that you are making a slight mistake. This may be, as you say, a man's magazine—but it's not a monk's magazine."

"Hey?" said the writer. "I suppose you're trying to be smart?"

"Not at all," I answered. "I'm merely trying to get at something. Have you ever been in love? Have you a wife, sister, daughter—has your daughter a sweetheart?"

"All of those things apply to me," said my visitor. "And my daughter has sixteen chaps calling on her—and I bet she'll pick the right one!"

"Of course she will," I said. "I give her credit for much more sense than you have. Well, this may be a man's magazine, but did it ever occur to you that every one of the thousands of men who read it has a wife, or a sister, or a daughter, or a sweetheart—or would give his right arm to have one or all of those feminine things? Did it ever occur to you that every man in this world is interested in, or is thinking about, some woman? As Shakespeare says——"

"Go to the devil!" yelled our caller, incidentally pinching a copy of PEOPLE'S as he ran from the office.

Of course you see what I was driving at—like life, fiction would be a mighty poor, abnormal and silly thing without women. Nearly every good story has a woman in it. This *is* a man's magazine; I'm trying to give you man-size fiction, with no sentimental drivel, no schoolgirl nonsense—but you know as well as I do that any man who says he doesn't want to read about women is a liar. Big, interesting, human stories of adventure must reflect life as you and I know it, and therefore they must deal with both men and women. I wonder what that writer's idea of a man's magazine was? I bet some clever woman put something over on him and he was sore—that was what was the matter with him. Bless you, there's a woman at the bottom of everything, isn't there? That's what makes fiction. Even a man's magazine can't ignore the most important sex in the world. Remember the splendid woman Allan Hawkwood gave us in "Gates of the North!" Then, there is *Rosie Maroney*, the clever girl in Albert Edward Ullman's stories. And of a slightly different nature—there is *Julia*, in Maxwell Smith's splendid novelette, "The Opportunist," in this issue. I don't

defend *Julia's* way of doing things, but she is wonderfully interesting—and I have a suspicion that she will stop her dangerous proceedings in the end. So—let's have women in our magazine, provided they are nice, lovable, clever, interesting, beautiful, ugly, deceitful, scheming and all else; and provided they do things and make men do things. What say you, Harchibald?

Our next number, that for February 25th, will contain a wealth of especially interesting yarns and much variety. Perley Poore Sheehan's great serial, "Red Eden," reaches its dramatic climax, and I know you are waiting for that!

"Billy Jim" will be the novel, and it is by our old friend Jackson Gregory. It is a breezy, amusing story of a remarkable cowboy, told in Gregory's best vein. You'll want to shake hands with *Billy Jim.*

"The Disembodied" is a strange, absolutely different, but intensely interesting novelette by H. Bedford-Jones, our master of fiction. The scene is the African desert—where man is likely to experience strange things, things almost unbelievable. But who knows?

"Corrected to Date" is another of F. R. Buckley's very human and amusing army stories. The scene is a French village, where a certain company is billeted. The sergeant is teaching a nice little French girl English—and trying to drill the daylights out of a too-peaceable company. Old Swizzletail, the captain, won't be happy until he sees black eyes and much gore on inspection. The best army yarn you'll find anywhere.

There will be a fine story about a dog—"Wolf," by Frank Richardson Pierce. He was a dog among a million!

"The Sunken Galleon" is by J. Allan Dunn, who knows how to write a gripping adventure story. You'll find this one right up to Dunn's standard.

"Latitude South," by H. G. Eley, a newcomer to PEOPLE'S, is a sea story filled with mystery—and shivers. It is finely told.

There will be a lot of real laughs in this next number. Have you been reading Robert Lee's funny Indian stories? "Highpocket and the Muse" is still another one. "Too Much Mustard," by Carl Clausen is a scream and a knock-out. I can't describe it—it is just an uproar of laughter. "Cap'n Efficiency Blewitt," by Edward Meetinghouse—a brand-new author—tells about an old sea captain who suddenly became converted to efficiency, with extraordinary results.

There will be a little railroad yarn by Edgar Young. And there will be a peculiar, creepy, but gripping tale by Marion Delcomyn—"The Vengeance of Sebek," a slice of Egypt and its age-old secrets.

I wish you would write to me and let me know what you think of our recent efforts to please you.

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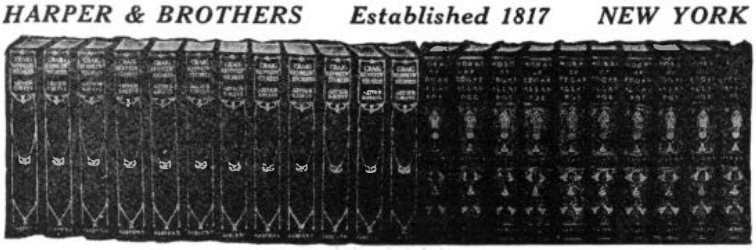

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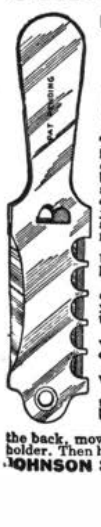

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To hone, place the blade in the holder, with the cutting edge to the back, moving the blade out until the cutting edge is clear of the back of the holder. Then hone in the usual manner; finish on a strop as with an ordinary razor.

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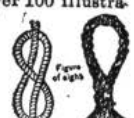

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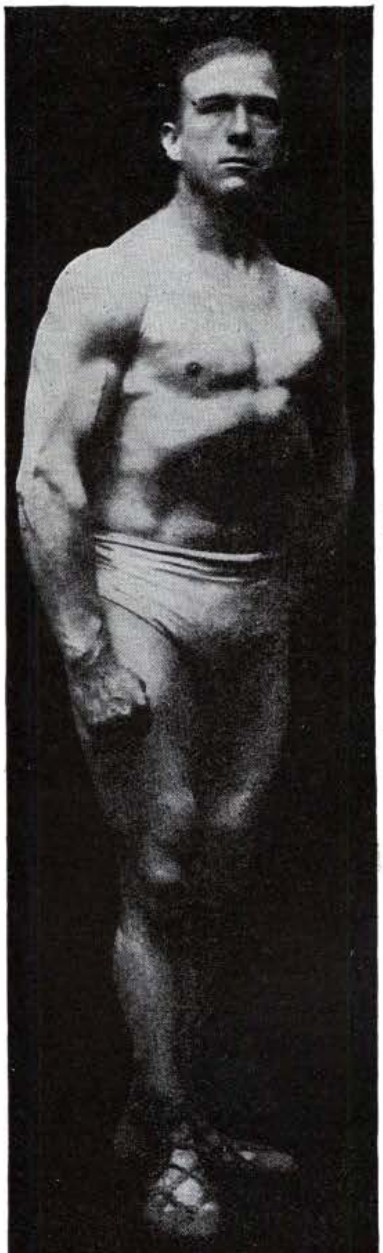

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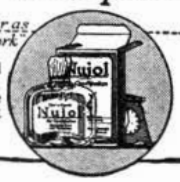

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More than twenty-five years ago I originated the correspondence method in this country. And although I encountered some prejudice at first, yet every year I enlarged the scope of my work until now many hundreds of persons all over the world are studying with me. Every state in the Union, every province in Canada, contains *scores* of accomplished players who obtained their *entire* training from me—*and at much less cost and effort* than was usually considered necessary.

I will gladly refer you to any number of my graduates who will soon convince you of the prompt and satisfying results they obtained with me. There seems no reason why you should not benefit in the same way, and I certainly urge you to investigate without obligation by writing for my 64-page free booklet "How To Learn Piano or Organ."

Occasionally I still encounter a man or woman who is hesitant about learning by mail and feels that the methods of fifty years ago are "safer." This feeling is, perhaps, natural enough, but it is due to a misunderstanding as to what are the *real* problems in learning piano. You will learn much more rapidly by my scientific *written* method than by the old-fashioned "spoken" or oral method, which *cannot* be made really *systematic.* My free booklet will fully satisfy your mind in this regard and explain exactly how and why my method produces such truly surprising results.

My Course in Piano or Organ represents the best thought of the *present day* and makes use of *every possible scientific help*—many of which are *entirely unknown* to the average teacher. If you wanted to study with a so-called "private teacher" by the old-fashioned oral system, and yet could afford only $1 to $5 per lesson, you could obtain only third-rate instruction. No true authority could give you his entire, *exclusive* attention for so small a fee. Yet, as you know, one lesson with an *authority* is worth a *dozen* other lessons. By enrolling with this Conservatory and joining my Personal Instruction Class, your lessons cost less than 43 cents each, as part of the Complete Course. Yet every step you take is under my *personal supervision,* and in all essential ways, I am in as close touch with you as if I were standing at your side. No matter where you live, I can teach you successfully. You study in spare time at home.

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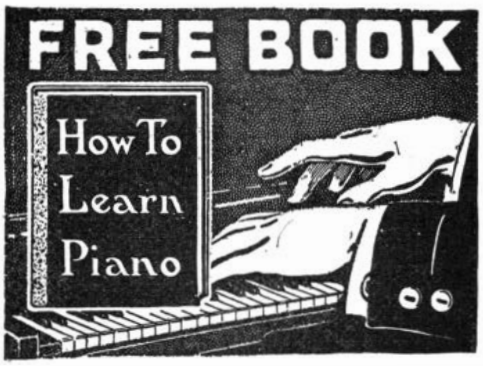

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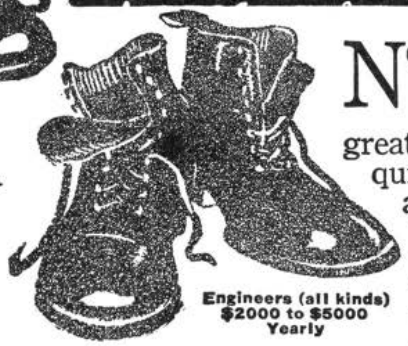

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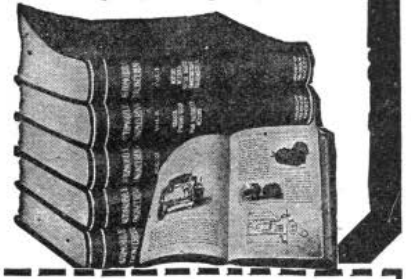

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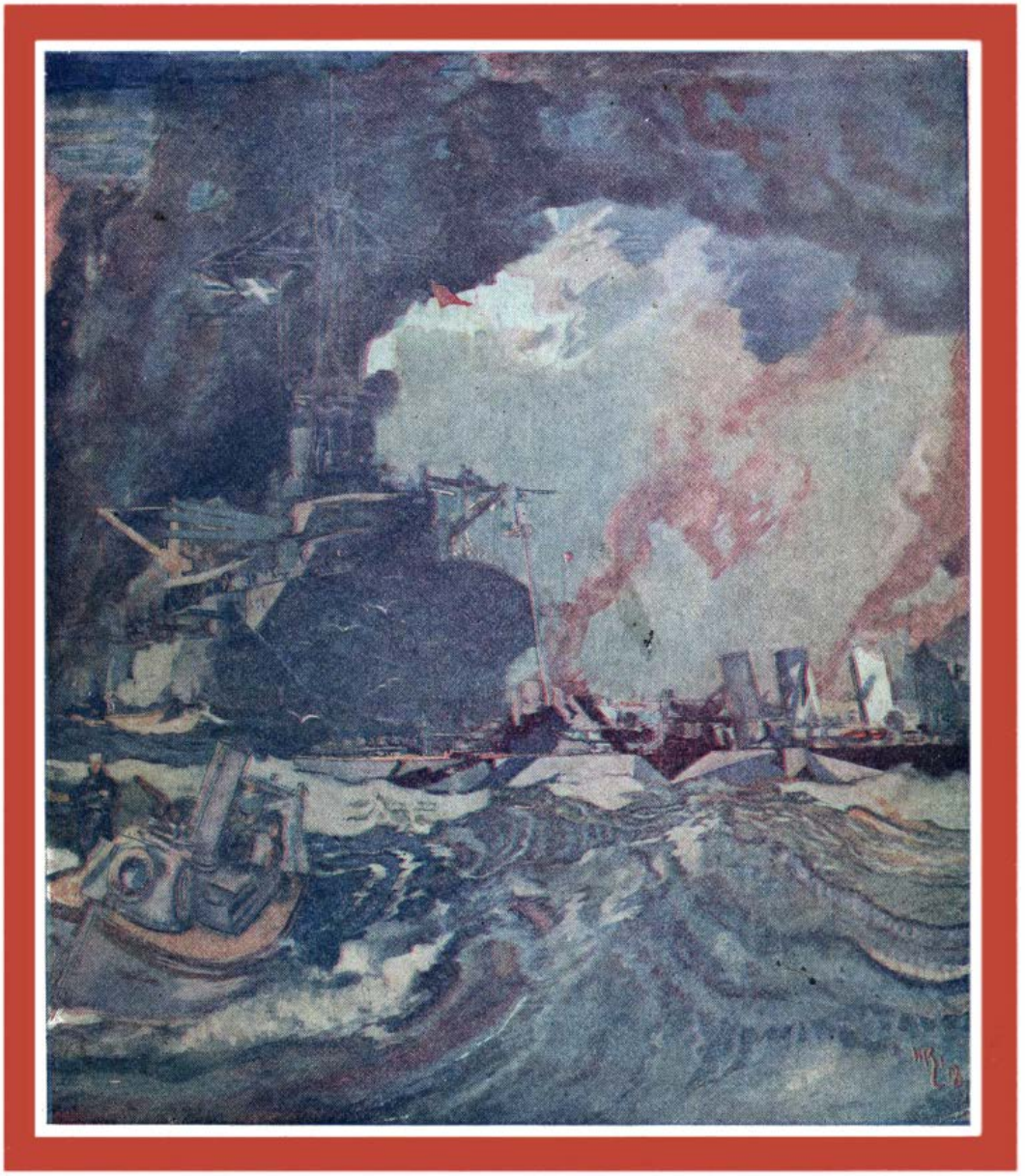

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