AUGUST 7, 1924
VOL. LXXIII No. 2

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

25 Cents

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The Popular Magazine

AUG. 7
1924

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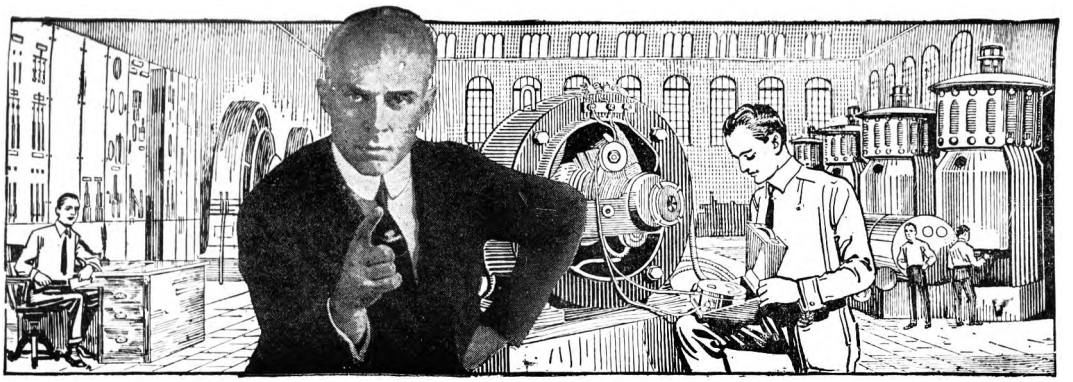

Electricity Needs You Now
I Will Train You at Home

STOP right here. This is **Your Big Opportunity.** Electricity is calling you. The Electrical Industry is the fastest growing thing in the world. It is expanding at the rate of a billion dollars a year. But it needs more trained men—big-pay men. With My Home Study Course in Practical Electricity I can quickly fit you to fill one of these big-pay jobs.

Earn $70 to $200 a Week

You've always had a liking for Electricity and a hankering to do Electrical jobs. It's the most interesting thing in the world. Now is the time to cash in on your talent—There's big money in it. Even if you don't know a thing about Electricity now, I can make a real Electrical Expert out of you in a few short months time. Age or lack of education or experience makes no difference. I have put thousands of men into big-pay jobs—$3,500 to $10,000 a year. I have started hundreds in successful businesses of their own. I will do the same for you.

Be a Highly Paid Electrical Expert

What are you doing to prepare yourself for a real success? At the rate you are going where will you be in ten years from now? Have you the specialized training that will put you on the road to success? Have you ambition enough to prepare for success, and get it?

You have the ambition and I will give you the training in the greatest business on earth. So Get Busy. I am offering you success and all that goes with it. Will you take it? I'll make you an **ELECTRICAL EXPERT.** I will train you as you should be trained. I will give you the benefit of my advice and twenty years of engineering experience and help you in every way to the biggest possible success.

Step out of your $20 to $30 a week job—you can earn from two to ten times that much in Electricity.

Look What These Men Are Earning!

J. R. Morgan of Columbus, Ohio, earns from $30.00 to $50.00 a day since completing my course. He used to earn $5.00 a day as a carpenter's helper. W. E. Pence, a $35.00 a week mechanic of Chehalis, Wash., made almost $10,000.00 last year doing electrical work in a town where he didn't think he could earn a dime. Harold Hastings of Somers, Mass., only 21 years old, cleans up $480.00 a month. He was still in high school when he started on my course. Joe Cullari, 523 N. Clinton Ave., Trenton, New Jersey, increased his income 300 per cent in one year and frequently makes the entire cost of his course back in one day's time. John Jirinec, 1133 Fourth Ave., Astoria, L. I., New York, makes $800 to $1,000 a month in business for himself.

Earn Extra Money While Learning

I will give you something you can use now. Early in My Home Study Course I show you how to begin making money in Electricity, and help you get started. No need to wait until the whole course is completed. Hundreds of students have made several times the cost of their course in spare time work while learning.

Satisfaction Guaranteed

So sure am I that you can learn Electricity—so sure am I that after studying with me, you too can get into the "big money" class in electrical work, that I will guarantee under bond to return every single penny paid me in tuition if, when you have finished my course, you are not satisfied it was the best investment you ever made.

FREE! A Big Electrical outfit and Radio course

I give a fine outfit of Electrical Tools, instruments, Materials, etc., absolutely FREE to every student. I will also give you FREE a Special, newly-written Radio Course worth $45.00. Full particulars when you mail coupon below.

Valuable Book Free

My big illustrated book "How To Be An Electrical Expert" — The "Vital Facts" of the Electrical Industry is **FREE.** It has started thousands of men on the way to fortune. I will send a copy of it postpaid to every man answering this advertisement. With it, I will send a proof lesson, a guaranteed bond, and a credit check for $45.50.

ACT NOW! Good intentions never get you anywhere unless backed up with action. Action is the only thing that counts. Now is the time. Mail the coupon while the Big Book, and full particulars of your Free Outfit and Home Study Course—all desire for success is fully prepaid, without obligation on my part, upon you.

USE THIS "FREE OUTFIT" COUPON

L. L. COOKE, Chief Engineer
CHICAGO ENGINEERING WORKS
Dept. 7-C, 2150 Lawrence Ave.
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir:—Send at once the "Vital Facts" containing Sample Lessons, your

Name.....

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The "Cooke" Trained Man is the "Big Pay" Man

$9000 First Year!
"When I first saw your inspiring message I was a civil service employee. Now I have better than a $9,000 position with lots of room to grow."

Ellis Sumner Cook,
Oak Park, Ill.

"What This Amazing Book Did for These 8 Men

It would be just as easy to tell the same story about 20,000 men—even more—but what this book brought these eight men is typical. If you do not get a big salary increase after reading this message you have no one but yourself to blame. This amazing book is

NOW FREE

$1,000 in 30 Days
"After ten years in the railway mail service I decided to make a change. My earnings during the past thirty days were more than $1,000."—W. Hartle, Chicago, Ill.

First Month $1000
"The very first month I earned $1,000. I was formerly a farmhand."—Charles Berry, Winterset, Iowa.

$524 in Two Weeks
"I had never earned more than $60 a month. Last week I cleared $306 and this week $218."—Geo. W. Kearns, Oklahoma City.

City Salesman
"I want to tell you that the N. S. T. A. helped me to a good selling position with the Shaw-Walker Company."—Wm. W. Johnstone, Jr., S. Minneapolis, Minn.

$554.37 In One Week
"Last week my earnings amounted to $554.37; this week will go over $400."—F. Wynn, Portland, Ore.

$100 a Week in Only 3 Months
H. D. Miller, of Chicago, made $100 a month as stenographer in July. In September, three months later, he was making $100 a week as a salesman.

$10,000 a Year
O. H. Malfroot, of Boston, Mass., stepped into a $10,000 position as a SALES MANAGER—so thorough is this training.

IT seems such a simple thing—but the eight men on this page who did this simple thing were shown the way to quickly jump from deadly, monotonous routine work and miserable earnings to incomes running anywhere from $5,000 to $10,000 a year. They sent for the book, "Modern Salesmanship," that you can now get—free.

Possibly it is just as hard for you at this moment to see quick success ahead as it was for Ellis Sumner Cook, 58 Superior St., Oak Park, Ill. When he was earning only $25.00 a week the large sum of $9,000 a year seemed a million miles away. But read what happened after he had read the book we want you to send for. Almost overnight, as far as time is concerned, he was making real money. The first year he made $9,000.

There is nothing unusual about Mr. Cook, or about his success. Thousands after reading this book have duplicated what he did—Mr. Cook simply was willing to investigate.

The only question is—do you want to increase your earning power? If so—this book will quickly show you how to do it in an amazingly easy way.

SUCCESS INSIDE TWENTY WEEKS

Within twenty weeks you can be ready to forge ahead. This may sound remarkable—but after sixteen years of intensive investigation the National Demonstration Method has been perfected—and this means you can now step into a selling position in one-fourth the time it formerly took to prepare for this greatest of all money-making professions.

SIMPLE AS A B C

There is nothing remarkable about the success that men enjoy shortly after they take up this result-securing system of Salesmanship training. For there are certain ways to approach different types of prospects, certain ways to stimulate keen interest—certain ways to overcome objections, batter down prejudice, outwit competition and make the prospect act. Learn these secrets and brilliant success awaits you in the selling field.

MAKE THIS FREE TEST NOW

Simply send the coupon for this Free Book. Ask yourself the questions it contains. The answers you make will show you definitely whether a big success awaits you in this fascinating field. Then the road is clear before you. This amazing book will be a revelation to you.

National Salesmen's Training Association
53 W. Jackson Blvd., Dept. 4-K
Chicago, Illinois

WORLD'S OLDEST AND LARGEST SALESMANSHIP TRAINING INSTITUTION
NATIONAL SALESMEN'S TRAINING ASSOCIATION

National Salesmen's Training Association. 53 W. Jackson Boul. Dept. 4-K, Chicago, Ill.

Gentlemen: I will accept a copy of "Modern Salesmanship" with the understanding that it is sent me entirely free.

Name.....

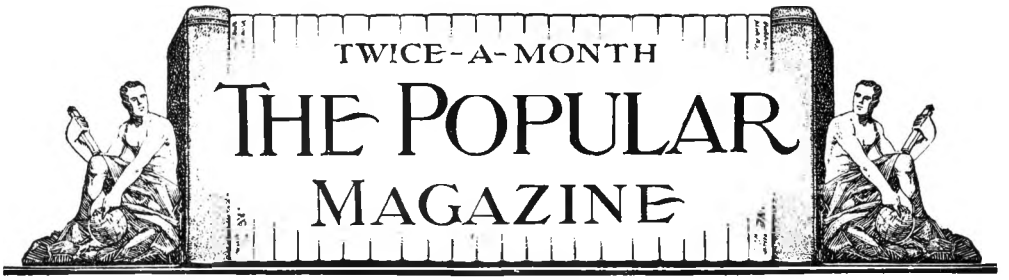
Address.....

City.....State.....

Age.....Occupation.....

"THE GATES OF MORNING," another fascinating romance of the South Seas by H. de Vere Stacpoole starts in the next issue. The complete novel will be "THE HOODOO KIWI," a story of the air and airmen, by Kenneth Latour. Ask your dealer to reserve your copy of the forthcoming POPULAR well in advance. It will be ready on the news stands August 20th.

Vol LXXIII AUGUST 7, 1924 No. 2



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Results like these are truly- "Priceless"

THE story of the extra-long, extra-keen Durham-Duplex Blades is told in *results.*

The man who uses them is well-groomed under all circumstances. A hurried shave and the shave under difficulties, as well as the shave for dress occasions all show the same unfailing result—a clean-shaven, immaculate appearance.

The proof? Any one of twelve million Durham-Duplex users—*at any time.*

DURHAM-DUPLEX RAZOR SETS
(both Models) ONE DOLLAR EACH
Interchangeable Blades*— *50c for package of 5
DURHAM-DUPLEX RAZOR CO.
Jersey City, N. J.
FACTORIES: Jersey City; Sheffield; Paris; Toronto
Sales Representatives in all Countries

DURHAM-DUPLEX

The Razor of "Priceless" Comfort

Here's $200 a Week

for any Man or Woman and a Special Offer for Quick Action-Grab it

I KNOW that there are thousands of men and women who are interested right now in making more money. They want immediate action—without red tape, and without delay. Now I am going to make a personal, special offer that will enable any man or woman to make from $100 to $200 a week, depending upon how much time is devoted to my proposition.

How Much Can You Make?

I want a man or woman in each community to act as my representative—to call on my customers and take their orders for raincoats. That's all there is to it. If you take four average orders a day I will pay you $96 a week. If you take only one average order a day you will make about $24 a week, and that is easy. Hundreds of my representatives are earning that much just in their spare time. For instance, George Garon made $40 clear profit his first day. And there is Harry Swartz of Pennsylvania, whose commissions on one day were $66. And W. S. Cooper, who has averaged over $5,000 a year for six years, working only four hours a day. Just read the records of a few of my representatives—on the right hand side of this page—and you will realize that it is amazingly easy for a man to make from $100 to $200 a week at this proposition.

No Experience Is Needed

It is not necessary for you to have been a salesman. You do not need any previous knowledge about raincoats. I will give you all the information you will ever need. There is no trick to taking orders for Comer All-Weather Coats and the reason is simply this—they are such big bargains that they sell themselves. People like to buy direct from the factory, for the money saved by this method of selling is passed on to the customer.

We manufacture our own coats and sell them direct to our customers by parcel post. Our representatives simply take orders. The values speak for themselves—and with such values, such styles, such materials as we offer, our representatives often take from 2 to 4 orders at a single call.

FREE

In addition to your big earnings I offer you a Buick Touring Car, without a cent of cost, that you can use to help you in developing this great business. Mail the coupon NOW.

And because Comer Coats are such big values and sell so easily, E. A. Sweet of Michigan made $1,200 in a single month—Spencer earned $625 in one month's spare time—McCrary increased his earnings from $2 a day to $9,000 a year.

This Is All You Have to Do

All that my representatives do is take orders—**and they get their money immediately.** If your profit for one day is $10, you will have that $10 in cash the same day. You don't carry a stock of coats. You don't put up any money. You don't deliver anything, and I do my own collecting through the mail.

Accept My Special Offer

Now—**the important thing is to get started.** I know that you can make at least $100 within one week of today and have that $100 in **cash.** I know that within a short time you can be making $200 a week—every week. The important thing is to get started, and get started **quick.** If you will fill out the coupon with your name and address, I will send you, without any preliminary correspondence, and with absolutely no deposit whatever on your part, a complete selling outfit with full instructions, samples of raincoat material, style book, order blanks, and everything that you will need to make money. I will write you a letter that is so complete, clear and concise that after you read it you will know absolutely where to go, what to say, and how to make money.

Within the past few weeks I have paid my representatives hundreds of thousands of dollars. And I am willing to make this concession to you—send you the complete outfit, confidential information and instructions at once. So if you are one of those men or women who want a **real opportunity** to establish a big, permanent, substantial and profitable business—if you are sincere and earnest in your desire to make more money, sign and mail the coupon at once. In less than a week you will be making more money than you ever thought possible.

C. E. COMER, The Comer Mfg. Co.
Dept. SBK-73 Dayton, Ohio

J. R. HEAD

of Kansas, who lives in a small town of 631 people. He has made as high as $69.50 in one day selling Comer All-Weather Coats.

W. S. COOPER

of Ohio, finds it easy to earn over $500 a month selling Comer All-Weather Coats.

E. A. SWEET

an electrical engineer, is making $600 to $1,200 a month and works only about four hours a day.

Mail This Special Coupon Now

THE COMER MFG. CO.
Dept. SBK-73, Dayton, Ohio

Please send me, without expense or obligation, your special proposition, together with complete outfit and instructions, so I can begin at once to earn money.

Name.....

Address.....

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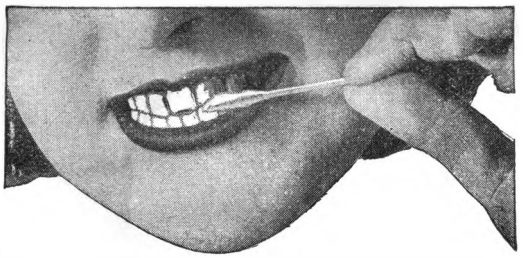
Print or write plainly



How Bleachodent Whitens Dark Teeth In Three Minutes

Bleachodent Combination contains a mild liquid to soften stains—and a special paste which gently removes them. Dull, yellow or tobacco-stained teeth are made flashing white, sparkling clear—almost while you wait! Perfected by two prominent dentists. Just use liquid once a week—paste every day. **Keeps** teeth wonderfully white and lustrous. Don't go around with bad looking teeth. They spoil appearance, and besides cause tooth decay, and bad breath. Get Bleachodent COMBINATION (containing both liquid and paste) for small cost. Distributed by Bleachodent Dental Laboratories and sold by drug and department stores everywhere.

I Want 700 Agents At $90.00 a week

Men and Women! Write me today and by this time next week I can place you in a position to make $2.00 to $5.00 an hour in your spare time, up to $15 a day full time. Thousands of our representatives are making that and more with our **New Plans.** Simply introduce and take orders for famous **World's Star Hosiery and Underwear** sold direct from mill to home—a complete line for whole family. Permanent customers and repeat orders make you steady, big income. No delivering or collecting. No capital required.

Write Quick It's a chance to make thousands of dollars. Your profits begin at once. Exclusive territory. No experience needed. Write today and I'll send all facts and tell how to start **Free.**

(Established 29 years.)

World's Star Knitting Co.
838 Lake Street **Bay City, Mich.**

After Your FIRST LESSON You Will Play a Complete Selection. We Guarantee That--

Our method is so simple, interesting and appealing that you begin in your first lesson to learn the famous Hawaiian Folk Song "ALOHA". Think how happy you will be when you surprise your friends by playing the fascinating Hawaiian Guitar.

Only Four Motions--
and You Master Them Quickly!

In a few minutes you acquire the four motions necessary to play *any* piece—after that a short period of practice and you will have mastered this weirdly sweet music. Complete course of 52 lessons includes FREE beautiful Hawaiian Guitar, necessary picks, steel bar, etc. No extras.

No Previous Musical Knowledge Necessary

If you *never read a musical note in your life*—if you haven't even the slightest knowledge of music, we can quickly and positively teach you to play this wonderfully popular instrument. Don't be just a "listener" when you can *easily be the center of interest* among your friends. **Over 40,000 successful students.**

Just Mail a Post Card for Details
of our remarkable FREE Hawaiian Guitar Offer—simply write: "I am interested"—*but do it today.*

First Hawaiian Conservatory of Music, Inc.
Desk 39 233B'dway (Woolworth Bldg.) **New York City**

Special courses on Violin, Tenor Banjo, Banjo—Ukulele and Ukulele.

FREE A Beautiful Hawaiian Guitar

$100 a Week

"Wouldn't you like to earn that much, too?"

"I know you would, Bob—think what it would mean to us! It worries me to see you wasting the best years of your life when you could make them count for so much.

"Can't you see it, Bob? Don't you see that the reason men get ahead is because they train themselves to do some one thing just a little better than others?

"If the International Correspondence Schools can raise the salaries of other men, they can raise yours. If they can help other men to win advancement and more money, they can help you, too. I am sure of it.

"Don't let another year slip by and leave you right where you are to-day. Let's at least find out how the I. C. S. can help you. Let's mark and mail this coupon right now!"

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2078, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please tell me how I can qualify for the position or in the subject *before* which I have marked an X:

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

☐ Business Management	☐ Salesmanship
☐ Industrial Management	☐ Advertising
☐ Personnel Organization	☐ Better Letters
☐ Traffic Management	☐ Show Card Lettering
☐ Business Law	☐ Stenography and Typing
☐ Banking and Banking Law	☐ Business English
☐ Accountancy (including C.P.A.)	☐ Civil Service
☐ Nicholson Cost Accounting	☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Bookkeeping	☐ Common School Subjects
☐ Private Secretary	☐ High School Subjects
☐ Spanish ☐ French	☐ Illustrating ☐ Cartooning

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

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☐ Electric Lighting	☐ Architects' Blue Prints
☐ Mechanical Engineer	☐ Contractor and Builder
☐ Mechanical Draftsman	☐ Architectural Draftsman
☐ Machine Shop Practice	☐ Concrete Builder
☐ Railroad Positions	☐ Structural Engineer
☐ Gas Engine Operating	☐ Chemistry ☐ Pharmacy
☐ Civil Engineer	☐ Automobile Work
☐ Surveying and Mapping	☐ Airplane Engines
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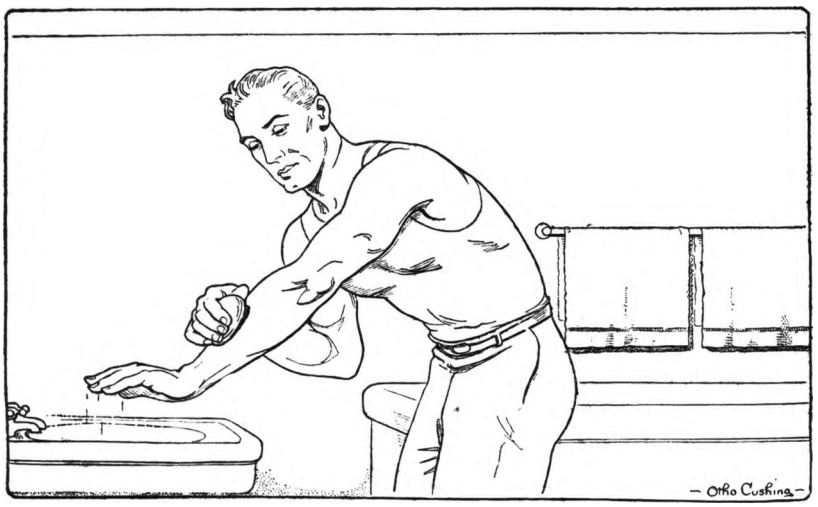
City..... State.....

Occupation.....

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.



Split-second comfort

When you see an earnest face-washer diligently massaging the soap with all the hopefulness of an eager young bond-salesman; when you see his final product, like boiled starch sparsely populated by a few orphaned bubbles, you know this for certain: his soap is not Ivory.

No! With the same effort the Ivoried man would have about a pint of thick, rich, pearly-white lather, lather that ingratiates itself into every pore and gets a warm welcome from everything but dirt.

Now watch your Ivoryless man when he gets to the rinsing stage. As dash after dash of water fails to remove the oiled rubber feeling from his skin, he yields to discouragement and hands the job to the over-worked towel. You know what "rinsing" with a towel means—a skin that feels like owl-wagon pie-crust.

But rinsing Ivory lather is as easy and quick as holing a two-inch putt for a par four. And the face that smiles up from the stainless towel tells a story of gentle Ivory treatment in which justice has been generously tempered with mercy.

PROCTER & GAMBLE

IVORY SOAP

99 44/100% PURE IT FLOATS

Here is news: When Guest Ivory—the handy new cake of Ivory made especially for washstand use—comes into the home, soap-debates subside like ripples on a quiet pool. Guest Ivory suits husbands, wives, daughters, sisters, cousins and aunts.

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LXXIII. AUGUST 7, 1924. No. 2

The Big Fool

By William Morton Ferguson

Author of "Other Folks' Money," "The Edged Tool," Etc.

A story of deep-dyed villainy, of slaughter by stealth and by violence, of confidence betrayed and of friendship forsworn; a recountal of such acts, a delineation of such scenes, as are possible to-day in but one remote corner of the world—Haiti, the Black Republic, where the dreadful fascination of the African voodo holds a nation hypnotized still in the spell of prehistoric superstition. Mr. Ferguson has achieved here a tale of modern piracy in the stronghold of the ancient buccaneers fit to stand with any romance ever born of the bloody days of the Jolly Roger.—THE EDITOR.

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

THE ISLAND OF SECRECY.

HAITI, land of mystery, of romance, of fascination, strange bewildering paradox and utter secrecy! The Black Republic; a stage on which the African has strutted as king, his few white neighbors merely supers; a stage whereon for a hundred years and more he had the opportunity of working out his own destiny in a noble play and succeeded only in achieving a grotesque and pathetic farce. Haiti, ringed about with civilization, connected by cable, circled by the shipping of two continents to which her ports were open; Haiti, with a fringe of civilization for all the world to see, like a toupee on the forehead of the bald, and yet, a few miles inland from her coast towns, a thing of naked barbarism which the eyes of few whites had ever seen.

All that has been changed now; a hand, long restrained, has turned the key and opened the door to its mysteries, and all the old evils have passed or are passing. But on the morning when Beryl Sefton first gazed on its frowning dark-green mountains—and it wasn't so long ago—the world knew little of the real Haiti but what its people chose to reveal. And Haitians, being nothing if not polite, never inflicted the unpalatable truth.

Rumors of the latter, however, Beryl

Sefton had heard on the trip down, heard vaguely from those who lived on the neighboring islands, people who should have been able, even anxious, to speak minutely and authoritatively, as is the habit of neighbors, but who had nothing better to offer than rumor and report. They knew no more of the real Haiti than the few *blancs* who had lived for years in the coast towns. All were agreed, however, that it was even worse than Panama in the matter of filth and fevers, and that death came oftener, more mysteriously and suddenly, than anywhere else in the tropics. Miss Sefton was merely taking a peep in passing? Well, that was different. It was no place for a white woman, of course, but Port-au-Prince was tolerable; at least there was one fairly decent hotel. Now if it was Picolet or Jacmel —but, of course, Mr. Smith would know.

Mr. Smith did, as he appeared to know everything. Florian Steller had experienced no difficulty in explaining to the girl why his name figured on the passenger list as Julius Smith, or enlisting her loyal support. There is nothing so convincing as the truth delicately blended with a lie. Steller was an artist at blending.

"You're not a business woman," he had said, "and yet I know you're quite capable of understanding the necessity of this small deception, common in big business as it is in diplomacy or among royalty. I shall make no mystery of it with you, and I'm telling you simply because I must. The fact is we're about to secure a valuable concession—you know what that is? Yes, and from the Haitian government. It's mahogany. I needn't tell you how valuable that is."

"So *that's* what my father does? I never really knew."

"Yes, he's a timber expert. Now you must understand that it's extremely difficult to get a concession down there of any kind; there is that island, as big as Ireland, chockfull of virgin forests of valuable timber and yet the beggars are too lazy to export more than a fraction. And they don't want anybody else to, either. A sort of dog-in-the manger business. It's against the law for any white person to own land. Haiti for the Haitians; that's the watchword. And that means not even mulattoes, but the pure African black."

"Well, that's only natural, isn't it? It's their land."

"So might the Indians say of these United States, and with infinitely more reason. Consider the history of Haiti."

"I haven't one handy," said the girl with her whimsical smile. "I've forgotten all I ever knew about the island—if I ever did know anything. I thought it was like Central America and Trinidad and Bermuda rolled into one. And though my father has been in so many places, places I've longed to see, you'd think from his letters he lived in jail. He never tells me anything about them. Somehow it's funny to think of a republic of negroes, and yet why shouldn't there be? They were originally slaves, like our own here?"

"Yes. You know—or don't," he smiled, "that the word Haiti means the land of mountains. It has the highest range in all the Antilles. It was called originally Española or Little Spain, and it was here our old school chum Columbus landed."

"Fourteen ninety-two! That's one date I do remember."

"Good. Well, under the Spanish rule the natives died out and so slaves were brought to do the work. You remember the colorful pirates of the Spanish Main? Yes, Tortuga; it's a small island off the northern peninsula. That's where they got the name 'buccaneer,' you know; the natives called smoke-dried meat which they sold to them 'boucan.' These freebooters, English and French, fought the Spanish and drove them to the eastern part of the island—and that's how San Domingo was started, a mulatto republic speaking Spanish, while Haiti is black and speaks a French patois. France, you see, annexed the island and it was ceded by Spain later.

"But to return to ourselves, you can imagine that if business rivals knew we were after this concession, and how valuable it is, they would do their best to beat us to it. I needn't go into all the intricate details; enough that if they even knew I was down here they would smoke the whole business. And so for your father's sake—for the success of this thing means a lot to him and to me—you'll remember that my name is Julius Smith and that you know nothing about me or concessions of any kind."

And so they met on the boat apparently for the first time, and the girl played her part with all the skill native even to the most immature and inexperienced of her sex. She found huge enjoyment in it, apart

from the fact that she was thus helping her father and this wonderful friend of his. What would she not do to insure success, defeat the machinations of unscrupulous business rivals? The success of this enterprise would mean the end of her father's wanderings and precarious method of existence. For, as Steller explained, he was not a salaried employee of the firm and never had been; in fact he had never known him until he came to New York with the proposition.

"Your father has the means, which we haven't, of securing this concession," Steller explained further. "He supplies that and we furnish the capital. That's his business, going about and trying to secure such concessions. But he has been unfortunate, I understand; he has been cheated in the past by governments, partners, or both. This time, if all goes well, he shall have the success he deserves."

She felt like an actor in a thrilling play; at a bound she had emerged from the deadly monotony of village life—dear, good, kind auntie!—but it *had* been monotonous—into this wonderful world. Hobnobbing with "big business," she whose capacity for finance had been sorely tried by the family grocery book; talking glibly in millions where formerly she had thought in cents. If Steller only knew how ignorant she was, how little she really understood it all. But that was just like him, to credit her with such knowledge and not treat her like an ignorant child. The friend and confidante of such a man! If she had not been quite unspoiled, and with a lot of unsuspected sound common sense tucked away behind her inexperience, she would have lost her head completely on that down trip with its wonderful reality and more wonderful promise. And perhaps but for a certain memory, she would indeed have lost her head and heart.

For it was impossible not to regard Florian Steller as a romantic figure, the fairy prince who had brought all this about. He intrigued her mightily, the more so as he appeared so unheedful of her sex. It piqued her somewhat. She had no thought of a possible flirtation but—well, he might at least confirm by word or look the fact that she wasn't wholly ugly. It was impossible to think of him as being over forty—a vast age to eighteen—though he talked like a sage of seventy. His pale regular features, the sweet pensiveness of his velvety eyes that spoke of some great secret sorrow heroically borne; his charming manner; his background of wealth and great business enterprise; his goodness and kindness that he dismissed so lightly—here was material enough to feed the romantic mind of eighteen.

Naturally they saw a great deal of each other, in fact were together incessantly, for there is no life so intimate, if fleeting, as that aboard ship. The secret they shared was a bond and discouraged intimacy with the other passengers. The latter exchanged knowing winks but Steller's attitude could not have been bettered by Plato himself. He was a fluent and interesting conversationalist and she could listen to him by the hour. He talked with authority of many things and told her more about the Black Republic, how it had sprung from the French Revolution and the society, "Les Amis des Noirs."

"But their ideas of universal liberty didn't appeal to the French colonists who, they say, treated the slaves pretty badly," he continued. "Whatever the truth of the matter, the slaves rose and there was a long and terrible struggle, massacres and reprisals. Then the English interfered, as they do the world over, and tried to get the island for themselves. It was worth getting. But they failed for once. You've heard of Toussaint L'Ouverture? Yes, one of the few great blacks; in fact the only one, the Washington, you may say, of Haiti. He won the whole island. He would have been friendly with the whites, glad of their help in opening up the country, but he was captured treacherously and died in France. Then yellow jack finished the rest of the troops and the negroes made a clean sweep of every Frenchman, woman and child. After Dessalines and Christophe became emperor in turn, and the independence of the island was acknowledged—that was in 1838—another huge massacre followed, this time of the mulattoes. Yes, a land steeped in blood, from the days of the Spanish down through these countless revolutions. The obvious moral is that the negro isn't fit to govern himself and never will be."

"But did they get a fair chance?" she ventured. "They must have suffered terribly, been exploited by one nation after the other. From what I've seen, the negro

seems to get most of his bad points from us. And then this mixture of blood——"

"Nine tenths of Haiti is pure black, and the pure black is the worst of the lot. That's just the trouble," said Steller. "San Domingo is a hundred years ahead of its sister republic. Why? Because of the white blood. Doesn't it show his status if the negro, from contact with us, prefers to acquire our vices instead of virtues?"

"But doesn't a lot depend on the sort of white with whom he comes in contact?" She was surprised at her own ability in argument.

"There's something in that," said Steller, "but don't run away with the idea that the white settlers were confined to buccaneers and riffraff. There are many highly capable people in Haiti, people capable of governing properly, but they don't get a chance. Why? Because they're mulattoes. They comprise the best element and they're hated like foreigners. They are ashamed of their country, the way it has been misgoverned and degraded by the black. *Un peuple de singes.* That's what Haiti is called, and a nation of monkeys they will remain so long as the watchword of the great majority is 'Haiti for the blacks.' Some day, if things keep on as they have been going, Uncle Sam will step in and form a protectorate. In my opinion it should have been done long ago."

"If the foreigner is so disliked how was my father able to get this concession?"

"That's his secret—though, remember, he hasn't quite got it yet. But he has the inside track, he has made himself solid with the powers that be as no other white man has been able to do. That's his trade, you may say. Concessions of any kind, as I told you, are almost impossible to secure; either they're refused or the wily politician, by various dodges and delays and restrictions, leaves you at the end with a worthless bargain. The government, of course, is hopelessly corrupt. But in this instance, thanks to your father, we will be assured of straightforward treatment. It will be the first great concession granted any foreigner, a triumph in itself. It may lead to the opening up of the whole country. It's not merely a question of gain for ourselves; civilization, enlightenment, progress go hand in hand with trade. If they hate the white, they can't do without him. Though he's allowed to exist on sufferance, all the trade of the coast towns is in his hands. He's the little leaven that keeps the republic from being an entirely unbaked mess."

"How many white people are there?"

"I suppose about half a hundred whom you could call pure white, and about ten times that who call themselves white. There used to be something like fifty thousand."

"You know a great deal about the place, as much, I'm sure, as my father."

Steller shook his head. "The real Haiti is as great a mystery to me as to any one. But you may discount whatever you may have heard from sensation mongers. I'm sure you won't find it half bad, as such places go."

Beryl Sefton was sure also, especially when the steamer, that dropped the mails seven times a year, came to anchor in the roadstead and she saw the white houses of Picolet against their vivid green background, the white surf breaking gently on a golden strand, the feathery palms and the dazzling blue sky. It was precisely like the traditional picture of the South Seas. Picolet, from the steamer, which never came any closer, looked invitingly cool and beautiful.

"Oh, it's lovely!" she exclaimed, to the graceful figure in smart white—Steller, though he had left his valet in New York, still preserved his sartorial splendor—that stood at her side. "I knew it would be just like Bermuda. No wonder my father loves to stay here. I'm just dying to see him. Won't he have a tremendous surprise?"

They were the only passengers for shore and, with their baggage, were soon aboard the quarter-boat with its scanty load of mail. The girl sat beside Steller, a look of utter trust, expectation, and happiness in her eyes.

CHAPTER II.

BAD NEWS.

PICOLET, on closer acquaintance, proved anything but the cool delightful town it had seemed from the steamer. The dock—it was no more than a rickety-looking landing stage—was crowded with negroes of every possible hue, the black predominating; not the negro she had known at home, or even for so brief a time in Bermuda, but such an assemblage as she had never expected to see off the stage or out of a book.

The most simple costume consisted of a piece of cloth with a hole for the wearer's head; the most gorgeous, a vivid green or pink uniform festooned with gold lace, and a cocked hat from under which protruded the inevitable goatee. It was strange, she thought, to see them with such beards, strange as their gestures and the French patois. She imagined these gorgeous warriors, who bore themselves with admirable aplomb, to be the gendarmerie, there to preserve order, but learned later that everybody of any consequence was a General—it must be spelled with the capital—and that these were merely some of the hundred or so who commanded almost twice that number of soldiers quartered in the town. The real police she mistook for street cleaners, ignorant of the fact that the streets were supposed to clean themselves automatically, for they wore a dirty double-breasted blue-linen coat and red-banded képi. Some affected only the official hat but, however ragged or coatless, all were armed with a heavy bamboo club, the "big stick" of the republic, and called the cocomacaque. This efficacious instrument, however, was not confined to the police force; most of the private citizens carried it or a machete. The women wore gay bandannas, like the old Southern mammy, and a supposedly white garment kilted above their bare knees.

The girl, not Steller, was the focal point of interest; the landing of the mail might be an event, but that of a young and beautiful female a sensation. They stared and jabbered, the gorgeous martial gentlemen strutting and shaking their gold lace while bestowing oblique glances from appraising and curious eyes. There was something very naïve in their obvious self-esteem, their complete confidence in the glory of the wonderful uniforms, the way each vied with the other in trying to center attention upon himself. The faces in general were friendly, good natured, hospitable looking, frankly admiring and inquisitive.

Her French was good and she caught a phrase among the jabber that brought a faint color to her cheek. They imagined she was the *blanc's* wife! Well, no doubt that was a natural, almost inevitable, inference. She hadn't thought of it in that light. Of course when they learned who she was—— Was her father here? He knew of Steller's coming if not hers. Steller had cabled in the secret commercial code. And though, as a precaution, they were supposed to be no more than acquaintances, and her father wouldn't make a point of meeting him, it would be a natural thing for him to stroll down, like all these others, to meet the mail. There were several white men on the fringe of the crowd; one she noted particularly because he was so tall and broad. He lounged, hands in pockets, smoking a pipe. She could not see him clearly but there was something about the whole pose that caused her heart suddenly to skip a beat.

An altercation arose somewhere in the crowd, and smash! went a cocomacaque in the hands of a policeman. The disturber's fuzzy head bubbled blood and he was kicked up the street leading from the dock. Yes, a friendly, childish people, perhaps, and with all the frank brutality of the child.

A whistle blew; the mail boat had returned and the steamer was heading out the bay. The girl shivered in the scorching sun as a strange feeling of desolation swept over her amounting almost to a premonition of disaster. The departing steamer seemed to be severing her one link with civilization; and the thought came, supposing she were alone here without money or friends? She who had never been alone anywhere. She felt actually frightened; those frowning green hills seemed a curtain hiding nameless terrors. Then the momentary depression passed. Was this not civilization? Even though the water front of this town had proved a sad disappointment was Picolet itself not more progressive than many a town at home? Was there not electric light everywhere, railroads, hospitals, schools—everything done in the best style by the most enlightened and paternal of governments? So she had heard more than one Haitian, bound for Port-au-Prince, boast on the boat. Nor was she alone; had she not her dear father, and good, kind, able Mr. Steller——

Steller had been proving his ability. A couple of ragged soldiers, representing the general of the customhouse, had searched their baggage and inspected their papers, and now the baggage, in charge of a couple of blacks, was being loaded on as many mules, wizened little animals apparently accustomed to such gross burdens. There seemed to be no vehicles of any description, an obvious fact which caused her to ponder.

Steller, some distance off, was now talking with a white man, not the figure that had given her such a start, but a rotund one adorned with a fair beard and glasses. Perhaps that was Tarling. Steller had told her all about him. Most of the foreign trade was in the capable hands of the Germans and Tarling was one. German-American. He shipped coffee to a house in New York and, though a comparative newcomer, was very intimate with her father. In fact, while ostensibly concerned wholly with coffee, Tarling was helping to secure this concession. She knew also—Steller had explained when she happened to see him send a cable—that all the firm's correspondence with her father was done through Tarling, an excellent blind. And, as further precaution against their business enemies, "Mr. Smith" was ostensibly a member of Tarling's firm, down on an annual inspection.

One of the military gentlemen had pushed forward and was now being introduced by the fair-bearded man to Steller. If the others, she reflected, were generals, this one must be a field marshal at least, from the utter splendor of his person and the respect accorded him. He was enormously fat and the color of good black ink.

"Good morning, Miss—er—what is the name, please?"

She turned with a start to find the tall, big-shouldered man at her elbow. He had solemn eyes, a lurking smile, and no pretensions to beauty either in face or dress. There was too much nose and chin, the former burned a ripe mahogany and the latter rather in need of a razor. There was a grand carelessness about his khaki drill as though on occasion it officiated also as pajamas. He held the redolent brier in one big brown hand and a crumpled Panama in the other, his thick dark hair seemingly an effective foil for the pitiless sun. His age might have been thirty.

She stared, her heart hammering. "It is no matter to you what my name is."

"On the contrary——" He waved the pipe vaguely. "A very great matter indeed. And one shouldn't forget a name; it's not right, not even polite. I wish to apologize, to welcome you to these hospitable shores, and yet—what *is* the name, please?" He bent toward her anxiously, deferentially, as though to capture a hallowed whispered secret, and she caught a whiff of something that seemed to explain a good deal.

"I—I don't know you," she said, quite conscious of the untruth, the stares and grimaces of the thinning crowd. "I don't wish to, either."

"Ah, a very different matter." He waved the pipe anew. "Insurmountable. Not that I'm astonished; on the contrary. That day in the Hamilton—or was it night? Night, I think. Yes?"

Memory leaped to her eyes, and anger. She colored hotly. "Go away, please. At once!"

"Certainly. I've always wanted to explain about that," he continued confidentially. "And now that you've come all the way here to listen to my apology—I can't say how good it is of you. If I could only remember the name. How can one apologize if one doesn't know the name? I ask you that in all fairness. It's a problem. You see my dilemma?"

A relentless hand fell on his shoulder and he swung around to meet the stare of Steller. The man with the fair beard, and the gorgeous black warrior, were with him.

The big sunburned man very gently but inexorably broke Steller's grip and removed his hand; and Steller, for all his elegant slimness, was no weakling. Then with the battered Panama he brushed the shoulder where the hand had rested, as though a priceless garment had been soiled. "We haven't been introduced," he said reprovingly. "And I don't like being pawed, especially by strangers. It's an id—idio—idiosyncrasy of mine—you'll admit that's a difficult word for this hour of the morning—which I'm sure you'll pardon."

"Perhaps. But not your conduct," said Steller.

The other seemed to have forgotten him. He had turned and was making a deep obeisance to the mountainous military gentleman. "Hail, your majesty. And you, friend Tarling."

"M'sieu," said the general sternly, "this gentleman, M'sieu Smeeth, an American——"

"Welcome, sir, to these hospitable shores," said the sunburned one, as though seeing Steller for the first time. He waved the pipe and Panama. "Smith? I seem to have heard the name before. And your face seems familiar too. Haven't we met somewhere? May I ask if you've been in

jail lately? One meets the best people there. However"—he waved the pipe again —"I welcome you as a fellow American. Speaking confidentially and fraternally, we have a lotion here that knocks the eye out of Broadway. I can strictly recommend——"

"American!" said Steller, looking him up and down. "What a credit you are! And now you shall apologize to this lady, and at once!"

"Thanks very much," said the other. "That's just what I've been wanting to do for a whole year. What is the name, please?"

"But yes, you make the apology at once!" thundered the black warrior as he drew himself up and quivered all over. "It is that you make the insult to this lady, to this gentleman and in the place public. You insult her, you insult him, you insult this mighty republic, and you insult *me*—General Napoleon Bonaparte Bobo!"

"Not so, your omnipotence; you've got that down wrong. You know me, general——"

"Oho, it is that I do! None better, M'sieu Gros Sot. And now, look you, this time you have gone too far. My patience it is as the sands of the sea and I have overlooked greatly, but now, oho——" He beckoned imperiously to a red kepi. "Arrest me this man!" he commanded with a regal gesture. "Take him away."

"At your peril, Cæsar!" said the sunburned man, watching the approaching policeman with suddenly brightening eye. "You know me, general; I'm a man of peace, a singularly sweet and gentle character, but you try to throw me to the lions or make a Roman holiday of me and I won't leave enough of this great republic for Uncle Sam to blow to kingdom come. You hear me, Cæsar? Don't start anything you can't finish. Call off your myrmidons. I know that little jail of yours, and sooner——"

"Arrest him, I command!" thundered General Bobo. "At once, I say it!"

The policemen, with reënforcements, were about to rush with uplifted cocomacaques when Miss Sefton found herself galvanized to action. She saw once again that fuzzy head and bubbling blood. "Oh, don't!" she exclaimed. "Mr. Steller—Mr. Smith, he didn't insult me. You don't understand. I know him; we—we've met before. And—and can't you see that he —he's drunk? He doesn't know what he's saying or doing."

"That is the unkindest cut of all," said the sunburned one in grave astonishment. "That I, the most sober and industrious inhabitant of this great republic—— But it was ever thus. I am consistently misunderstood. But *you* know me, general; a man of peace, a singular sweet and gentle character. And see here, you Broadway squad, clubs or no clubs I can lick the lot of you. *I* don't draw the color line, and I don't want any big purse either. I'll do it for fun, one at a time or all together. Step right up, gentlemen."

"For the love of Mike, cut it out! You're making a thundering fool of yourself as usual." The newcomer was Mackenzie, the American consular agent. He was a fox terrier of a man, red haired, and worried looking beyond his years. "Come along now while you've the chance. You're drunk as a fiddler's goat and you know it."

"But I don't, Mac," said the other plaintively. "That's just the point. And what's the good of being tight if you don't know it? I ask you that as man to man. On my word, I've had no more than the usual solitary rhum. However," waving the pipe and Panama, "if you say so—you always seem to be right somehow——"

The mere presence of Mackenzie seemed to have a sobering effect on him. He turned to Miss Sefton. "I—I'm sorry," he said like an abashed schoolboy. Then he smiled —and it was a very engaging smile—at General Bobo, who was breathing stertorously so that his gold lace and medals trembled. "No hard feelings, general. You know me. I salute your magnificence. *Vale, Cæsar!*" And he walked off with meticulous care, arm in arm with Mackenzie, who came hardly to his shoulder.

With folded arms and majestic frown General Bobo permitted them to depart. He never quite knew how to receive the extravagant titles bestowed on him with such gravity and apparent sincerity by this most eccentric and troublesome of *blancs*. Notwithstanding his high position he could neither read nor write, but then there had been even presidents who couldn't do so either. Such parlor tricks weren't necessary to a man of real ability and character; the great republic, in conferring its highest

honor, looked to the man and not the frills. Of course it made mistakes sometimes; witness the present incumbent of the office —Delannes who was all frills and no character. But though incredibly ignorant, General Bobo was in many ways no fool; he had, however, all the vanity of his type and to him these extravagant titles had a very soothing and gratifying sound, even though he didn't know what some of them meant. Omnipotence! Oho, there was a new one for you, a fine, rich-sounding name.

"It was very good of you, general, to let that fellow off," said Steller. "If he'd been at home he'd have got what he deserved. I know the type, the sort that makes one ashamed of being an American, the sort that makes trouble everywhere."

"That is so, m'sieu. Oho, there is a character for you—Le Gros Sot, they call him. But my patience it is as the sands of the sea, and if he is the friend of mam'selle——"

"No, no," said the girl, coloring. "I said I had met him, that's all."

"Her friends aren't of that type," said Steller. "But pardon me, general; I don't think I've presented you to Miss Sefton."

General Bobo bowed, clicked his heels together, displayed the gold lace and medals to the utmost advantage, and breathed heavily. "Permit my card, mam'selle," he said with a bow and flourish as he produced a large square of pastboard that had evidently seen some service.

She felt it incumbent on her to read all that the strange visiting card contained. It was in prominent French type and was as follows: "General Napoleon Bonaparte Bobo, General of Division to the Armies of the Republic, Former Honorable Aid-de-camp of His Excellency the President of Haiti, Commander of the Town and Commune of Picolet."

Waiting only to see that she had read it all, General Bobo gravely took it from her, wiped it carefully on his gold-laced sleeve and returned it to his pocket. There was that in the action, no less than in the whole attitude of this large shiny black figure with the amazing uniform, that caused Beryl Sefton to bestow on him one of her very nicest and most winsome smiles.

The general returned the smile, pulled his goatee and engaged in some polite conversation, during which he astonished her considerably by mentioning, as though it were a known fact like the contour of the world, that the Boers of South Africa were a nation of blacks who had wrested their freedom from the tyrant England. "Just as we did," he added, tapping his bosom. "Your country, mam'selle, she beat the tyrant too; but *we* are the only nation who have beaten both England and France."

"Is it any wonder," smiled Steller when at length Bobo had withdrawn with many polite bows and flourishes, "that they have such an exaggerated opinion of themselves? It's just what I told you."

Tarling now was introduced and made his bow. His fingers were thick like his speech and lips, his fair skin a scalded vermilion. The eyes behind the glasses, little blue beads, appraised her carefully without appearing even to see her. It was different from General Bobo's round stare of admiration. She felt uncomfortable.

"Where is my father?" she asked.

"Ach," said Tarling, mopping the back of a creased neck. "Your dear father and my goot friend—I am the bearer of bad news, Miss Sefton. Yes."

The former premonition of disaster assailed her, now complete and overwhelming. It was not so much the words as Tarling's expression. "Oh, not—not *dead!*" she whispered. "No, no, you can't mean that!"

"No," said Steller gently, a hand on her arm. "Mr. Tarling has been telling me. I don't want to alarm you unnecessarily, but at the same time you wouldn't thank me for saying what you must so soon disprove. Your father is ill, seriously so, and you must face that truth like the brave girl I know you to be. We'll hope for the best, of course, but at the same time I understand he's pretty bad."

"Yes," nodded Tarling. "It's beriberi —acute. He got it about three-four days ago. Everything possible is being done but —well, acute beriberi——" He shrugged and spread his hands.

"Please take me to the hospital at once," she said, biting her trembling lips.

"Hospital? Himmel!" Tarling's eyes and shoulders went up. "Ach, dis isn't Port-au-Prince. You don't know what dey call the hospital. No. I take my worst enemy there, yes, if he let me. No, he is at his home, the best and only place. How could he be moved to the capital? He couldn't, I say. Twenty miles and more, Miss Sefton, over the mountains on a road

that's no road whatever. And how? On the back of a mule. Yes. For railways, vehicles of any kind, there are none. No. Such a country! No, impossible; you see that. But I have brought one of the best doctors. At such a time no money or trouble is too much."

"That goes without saying," said Steller. "If money and trouble will do it——" His hand closed again on the girl's arm. "We'll hope for the best. Never cross a bridge till you come to it."

"In dis country," said Tarling, still mopping his creased neck, "the proverb is: 'When you come to a bridge, go round it.' For the bridges are rotten like everything else. Ach, I'm glad you've come, Mr. Stell —Schmitt. Such trouble! Everything was going beautiful until dis. My dear goot friend Sefton—but we hope for der best. Yes."

CHAPTER III.

"THE BIG FOOL."

"THE Lord knows," said Mackenzie, "I've got enough to worry about without playing nurse to you. And so has the chief. The sooner you hit for home, the better."

"I'll admit your chief has something really to do," said Carteret. "Port-au-Prince, of course, is a great metropolis. But this?"

They sat in the door of the consular agent's office, the only cool spot, and Carteret flung out a lazy hand at Picolet's main thoroughfare, a dirty narrow street of wooden buildings and no sidewalks. It started at the water front and became even less of a road as it left the straggling town and meandered toward the frowning green hills. The houses had the usual piazzas, the lower floor of some converted into stores. Many were mere fire-tortured shells, it being the accepted thing when a revolution was on to first burn the town. On a veranda, farther up the street, a group of ragged soldiers loafed and diced, their stacked weapons ranging from a fairly new Mannlicher .to a rusty old Enfield. They were supposed to be on duty, the republic being under military rule, but their chief concern, no doubt, was their next meal. It becomes a problem on the pay of twelve dollars a year, uncertain at that. For by the time the paymaster took his toll, and it passed through the hands of all the generals down to the captain and lieutenant, the original sum had shrunk scandalously.

There were no street lamps of any description, no traction or even sanitary system. Why expect it when the capital itself was almost as bad? Electric light, railroads, schools—such things existed only on paper. Somehow the elaborate plans of the enlightened and paternal government never got any farther; there was always so much else to do. The din in the narrow street was terrific, the noon sun implacable. The colorful gesticulating crowd still hawked its wares with ardor, guinea-grass, mangoes, bananas. Here and there a row started to be quelled by the ubiquitous and official cocomacaque.

Diagonally across the street from Mackenzie's office was the local club, a place where the few white residents—and this meant every one not obviously black —tried to forget their troubles with billiards, cards and liquor. There was no other more respectable form of diversion. It was not a high-class institution, though the best Picolet offered, and his Britannic majesty's consular agent, Mackenzie, Carteret, and Tarling were perhaps the only four entirely white members, though one might be pardoned for doubting even Tarling's purely Teuton origin. The official who presided over the club's destinies, while also classified as a *blanc*, was a half-caste Syrian who called himself Kadry. Among other things he owned a daughter about whom, unlike his other possessions, he was not given to boasting. There were quite a number of Syrians in the island and, at one period, you would have found Kadry, like all his ilk, with a pack on his supple back peddling cheap trinkets from town to town. As a class they were anything but desirable adjuncts to the country.

"And so," added Carteret, "your chief having real work to do, I'm paying you another visit."

"While God knows where you've been in the meantime," said Mackenzie. "Disappearing for weeks and months at a time. You'll end with a knife in your back as sure as you sprawl there."

"No, Mac, you've got this gentry down wrong. You persist in mixing 'em up with Latin America—which I'll admit you may know something about. A little poison perhaps on occasion, if they think you've offended them, but never a knife. You

needn't grunt; don't judge the real native by what you may see here in the coast towns. The hill fellows, they may be ignorant and superstitious and lazy, but they're gentlemen. A fact, Mac. I've been over the whole shop many a time, clear up to Lake Fundo on the border, and I've never had anything but the finest sort of hospitality and kindness. I've had a man get up and give me his bed when there wasn't another. And you can't buy their hospitality either; not with filthy lucre. That's more than you can say for the natives of New York, eh? Danger? Piffle! I've a lot of good friends up there, Mac," waving a hand to the north.

"You've a lot of friends everywhere, Larry. You know as well as I do that that's just the trouble."

"I know what you're insinuating, you blighter. But you're dead wrong; it's got nothing to do with the bottle. A little tafia now and then, that's all. Drink isn't one of their vices."

"No, not theirs."

"No, nor mine either, if that's what you mean."

"Maybe not; but it's coming mighty near it, Larry, if you should ask me."

"Hell!" said Carteret, "can't a man take a rhum or two? I suppose you think I hike off to the hills for a grand quiet old soak, eh? And this nickname the beggars call me—you take our equivalent for sot, eh? Well, you're wrong again; in their lingo it means fool or blockhead. 'The Big Fool'—they call me that because—well, because I am one. I guess nobody but a fool would put up with you."

Mackenzie's eyes twinkled appreciation; there was Scotch blood in him and it showed in more than his long nose. "Well, I'm a bit worried about you, Larry, all the same. It isn't that I care a hoot personally what happens to you, understand, but there's Washington to consider. If you were only a nobody——"

"But I am, my buck. I don't want any influence. I can stand on my own feet; they're big enough."

"That's all very well, but if you weren't who you are you'd have been buried a dozen times. You know what chance a white man has here, in the civil courts and otherwise, especially if he's a nobody. Bobo would have canned you long ago if he'd dared. But you can't be stuck up against the arsenal wall or left to rot in the cooler. It's up to the chief to see you aren't, and it's up to me too when you're here. And we're getting pretty well fed up with the job."

"Huh, you should thank me instead of bawling me out. Looking after me's about the only thing you do—and you don't even do that. No, sir, you don't. You and the chief be damned! I don't need the consul in Port-au-Prince, or his agent here, or any blamed influence in Washington to protect me."

"Yet the combination does, all the same," said Mackenzie composedly. "You may be safe in the hills with your heathen friends, but here on the coast——"

"Oh, great Cæsar's whiskers! Instead of being the most singularly sweet and gentle disciple, you'd think I was——"

"You blacked Tarling's eye the other day."

"I did. And, God willing, I'll black his other one if necessary. Tarling's a blown-in-the-glass swine."

"Agreed. All the same—why did you do it?"

"On general principles and for the good of his soul, if he's got one, which I very much doubt. Justice in this great republic, my friend, is even a little more lopsided than elsewhere; it's my duty and pleasure to help adjust the balance wherever possible."

"It's not your duty to play knight-errant to Bijou Kadry. The rôle may possibly be misunderstood," said Mackenzie dryly. "Oh, I know all about it. Her estimable father is quite able——"

"He may be, but he doesn't. That's just the point."

"Well, it's no concern of yours. Aside from all else, Tarling will never forgive you, though he's good at the smiling and hand-shaking business. Also, he's very thick with Bobo; far more than it would appear."

"Then I'm sorry for his omnipotence; he can learn nothing good from Tarling. Bobo's a decent sort and we're really very friendly."

"Wait till he consults a dictionary and finds the meaning of some of the names you call him. Tarling will tell him how you've been pulling his leg. That's what I want to warn you about. If Bobo's convinced you're making fun of him—well, his

vanity is one of the biggest things about him, and he's dictator here."

"I never meant to make fun of him. Honest, Mac. I like and admire old Bobo. I do indeed. He's a living miracle—an incorruptible general. Yes, he's that, whatever his other failings. He's something like the old Christophe type, only he isn't corrupt and he wouldn't go burying a fortune like the Black Napoleon; he'd use it for the good of his country. He's a true patriot, away ahead in character, if not education, of this rotten administration. No, I wouldn't hurt his feelings for the world. How do you know he's so thick with Tarling?"

"I know more than I see. Tarling goes up to his villa nights, presumably to play checkers."

Carteret looked thoughtful. "Of course, as regards women, they copy the French like they do in everything, and make a caricature—just as Port-au-Prince is a caricature of Paris. But it's different with Tarling. Fellows like him are the curse of this place; they bring all the vices of the white race and precious few of the virtues. I'm no saint but—— And I'm not sure that his interest in this country is confined to coffee or even women."

Mackenzie shot him an oblique glance. "Well, to return to yourself, I've been worried about you—strictly in my official capacity, such as it is, you understand. I may be only a consular agent but I'm also an American."

"Sure, I understand," grinned Carteret. "Unofficially, you hate me same as I do you. That's why I put up at this shebang, that and because there isn't a hotel or lodging house of any kind in this blessed, blistering hole."

"A steaming cesspool," said Mackenzie. "You've been in it too long."

"My home isn't Picolet," said Carteret. "It's the whole island. Mighty fine spots in it; yes, sir. I'm not wasting my life at all. Not a bit of it. I don't like to brag, being a singularly modest sort, but I've been where no white man ever was. Seen things, too. Exploration, adventure—a second Livingstone. I'll write a great book some day—'The Real Haiti as I Alone Knew It'—and give you a complimentary copy. And if you're very good, Mac, and stop preaching, I may be able to smuggle you into a real voodoo show where they have the 'goat with horns'—if you know what that means."

"You're drinking too much, Larry, and you know it. That crowd at the capital—yes, I've heard about it from the chief."

"There's a conspiracy against my reputation," said Carteret gloomily. "Now that I come to think of it, there was a girl this morning fresh off the boat—there was, wasn't there? Well, even she said I was drunk! I remember that. Can you beat it?"

"Miss Sefton was right."

"Who?" said Carteret, glancing up quickly.

"That's her name. You hold your liquor too darned well, Larry, and you've slept it off wonderfully, but you were even tighter than I thought if you don't remember the mess you nearly got into down there."

Carteret ran a big brown hand through his thick untidy hair. "Oh, I remember—now; most of it anyway. Do you mean the Sefton of the Villa Verd? She's his daughter, eh? I never knew he was married, not that I know much about him."

"Nobody does; he's flocked pretty much by himself since he came here. Very upstage. Tarling seems to be his only friend, and now this Mr. Smith."

"Smith? Oh, yes, I remember. What's Sefton thinking of to bring his daughter here? Aside from all else—well, I'm just from the Cap, Mac, and I don't like the look of things—or rather I do. You know the old saying that every successful revolution must start at the Cap. Of course it may be only the usual froth and bubble, but sometimes I hear a few things that maybe others don't. There's something going on up there on the quiet, and has been for some time. Delannes is yellow and that's not the popular color, and he hasn't been such a howling success. And, of course, if a real show should start it won't be confined to the capital."

"That's another reason I wanted you out of here."

"Thanks. And me waiting all this time for a real bust-up! But how much do you know, Mac?"

"About a fraction of what I'd like to, Larry—not that we could do anything if we knew a bookful. It's their inalienable right and privilege to revolute when and how they darned please, and the more the merrier. And you know the prescription—

go for your nearest enemy in the name of liberty, equality and fraternity. That would give Tarling, and maybe others, a crack at you. However, there may be nothing in it. All the same, it's a poor welcome for Miss Sefton; you see, her father's down with beriberi. I guess she'll be just in time for the funeral. Yes, they say it's hopeless. Vernit's there from the capital and you know he's a good man."

"Take him from any angle you like," supplemented Carteret. "Beriberi, eh? I guess I'll amble up there, Mac; I've an apology in me that's been trying to work out for a year, and now it's gone and doubled itself. You see, when Miss Sefton and I parted last, I was tight, right royally so; and now, when she meets me, I'm tight again. And I suppose she thinks, if she thinks of the matter at all, that it's the same old drunk—sort of lasted for a year, see?"

"It would be a natural inference," said Mackenzie dryly. "You've only yourself to blame if people take you for a confirmed booze artist."

"Yes, I suppose so. But you know I'm not, though I came riding in here this morning all lit up like a ferryboat, and maybe some other mornings too. But last night—well, tafia and an empty stomach don't blend. What drinking I've done, and I don't claim I haven't done my share—— Well, I'll take a tumble to myself, Mac. You'll never see me tight again. That goes, see? When I think of what that girl looked and said! Say, was I pretty awful?"

"Drunk or sober, Larry, you're never that. Will you shake on that promise?"

"You bet," said Carteret, sticking out his big brown hand.

CHAPTER IV.

A MISSION.

THERE were several pretty-looking villas, deeply embedded in their green bower, on the outskirts of Picolet, villas such as those occupied by Tarling, the Général de la Place, the general of the tin custom-house and others, but the Villa Verd wasn't one of them. It was a rambling verandaed structure built on the ruins of what once had been an imposing-enough house which legend said had been intended for the terrible Emperor Christophe himself but never occupied. It was suggested also that that lover of noble vistas and broad roads had planned a palace, such as that of Sans Souci, at Millot, when he was overthrown and met the violent end which seems to be the portion of most rulers of the republic.

All this would appear to be merely another of the stories, the truth lost in the mists of a hundred years and more, that grew up around the Black Napoleon, that masterful and merciless tyrant who imposed his complete dominion for fourteen years. For it was said also that he had hewn out a park from the virgin forest with the native labor which he knew so well how to drive to superhuman effort. Certainly there is no record of "Henry the First," as he loved to style himself, living or planning to live so far south as Picolet, and the ruins of all the gorgeous pleasure palaces he erected for himself may still be seen about the plain of the Artibonite, overlooked by his greatest monument of all, the crumbling fortress of La Ferrière.

At all events a house of some pretensions had once occupied part of the site where the Villa Verd now stood, and its ruins had remained even if the forest had obliterated all trace of the supposed park. And if ever there had been a noble road leading from it to the main highway—itself the merest apology for a road, following the river bed as it doubled and twisted over the mountains to the capital—there was now no more than a rudimentary path for whose existence Sefton fought but indifferently. Indifference seemed to be the keynote of his character; and when he elected to make Picolet his home, he considered it easier and cheaper to build on these ruins than to erect an entirely new house. The result was not impressive but apparently it satisfied the occupant, which, after all, is the main consideration. It was government land, the property having long since reverted to the state, and he had no difficulty acquiring it though he could never own it legally. If the eccentric *blanc* wanted to build, why, let him; nobody wanted the site. If seclusion was Sefton's object he had attained it.

To Beryl Sefton it seemed a nightmare, everything being so entirely different from what she had pictured it; the trip through the mean, dirty, scorching town, the long ride on mules to this house shut in among the trees that seemed to grudge it existence, and finally her father. She hardly recognized him, stifled a cry of pity and sheer

horror. Could this be he, the handsome man she had known? With Sefton the dread disease had taken the dropsical form instead of extreme emaciation, and, a big man, he was now swollen into a monstrous and grotesque caricature of his former self. He was also partially paralyzed, unable to move from the bed whereon he lay. All this, the wreck and distortion of a fine physique, had happened with merciless suddenness. He was quite conscious, able to speak, but death looked out of his eyes and he viewed its coming with a lurking ironic smile. He seemed to savor in secret some bitter jest. He appeared the sort who would appreciate a joke, however brutal, on himself.

The look changed when Vernit broke the news of his daughter's arrival; but when he saw her there remained only a very fine semblance of undiluted pleasure and delight.

"Your dad's a pretty sight, girlie, and no mistake," he said with a twisted grimace. "You ought to have been saved it. There, don't cry now. You don't know how I've longed to see you, and a fine surprise like this is all that's needed to put me right. I'll get better now; see if I don't."

But, when at length alone with Steller, his sunken eyes flamed. "In God's name," he rasped, "why did you let her come here?"

"For the simple reason that I couldn't help it."

"Bah!"

"It's a fact, Sefton. Didn't she tell you about her aunt being dead? Don't you understand that now she has no one but you, and that she can't live on nothing?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that she had only enough for her passage down. We wanted her to draw on the firm but she refused. She came to the office and declared she was coming here. We couldn't stop her, and too much opposition would have only aroused a natural suspicion. She made me promise not to cable you about the sudden death of her aunt and to say nothing about her coming here. In any case what would have been the use? She was determined to come whether I came or not. She isn't a child, Sefton, and there's no arguing with a woman. There was nothing else to do. The Lord knows it's about the last thing I expected or wanted."

Sefton was silent, his burning eyes boring into the other.

"And, of course," added Steller, "she doesn't know anything, though I had to make some explanation."

"What did you tell her? She never knew what I was—nor I either, for that matter."

"That it's a mahogany concession." And Steller, dropping his voice still lower, proceeded to relate minutely what he had told the girl. Suddenly he paused and raised his head; then with quick feline grace and utter absence of sound, he stepped to the door and flung it open.

A gigantic and astonishingly ugly negro stood in the hall. He was barefooted and dressed in a dirty singlet and drill trousers. His color was coal black, one eye was merely an empty socket while the white of the other was streaked with yellow. He seemed startled at the sudden opening of the door, as well he might, and silently stared at Steller with a foolish grin.

"What do you want?" demanded Steller.

"Nothing, sah, boss," replied the negro in ostensible English of which he seemed inordinately proud. "Bah Jove! I come to see how I can do foh Massa John. Yes, sah, boss."

"He doesn't need you. Where's Doctor Vernit?"

"With Missy Bar'l. Yes, sah, boss. Bah Jove! she make foh a faint but she come all right now. Yes, sah, boss."

Steller dismissed him, locked the door and stood listening.

"It's all right," reassured Sefton. "Petit Beau—that's the ironic name he rejoices in. He's a Jamaican originally, hence the 'Bah Jove!' I've had him and his woman since I came here."

"And is this beauty to be trusted?"

Sefton nodded, smiling faintly. "Quite aside from any personal attachment—well, you can trust Tarling for that. I got him through him. Now about my daughter——"

"I hated to have to lie to her," said Steller, frowning as he resumed his seat by the bed. "She's so innocent, so confiding. But you mustn't let this worry you, Sefton; it's just as well now in a way that she's here. There's no particular rush, you know, and once you're on your feet again——"

"Yes, once! Why, man, I'm pretty near cooked if ever a sinner was. I'm in a mighty bad way, Steller, and you know it. So do I. But I haven't checked out yet."

"No, and you won't. That's the way to talk. You've got to fight."

"You bet I will! If I hadn't fought every inch of the way I'd have checked out the day after I was taken down. For I've caught, God knows how, one sweet dose of this cursed thing. And now I've got to fight all the harder, put up the scrap of my life. My daughter——"

The iron-gray head turned with difficulty on the damp pillow; only the eyes seemed acutely alive. "That girl's all the world to me, Steller, and she always was. I've realized it more and more since I've been lying here. I've had time to think of a lot of things, things that maybe I didn't think enough about before. You know how it is. I never meant to neglect her, though it may look that way to an outsider. I've been a rolling stone, with all that implies, and I wanted to bring her up—well, as her mother would if she'd lived. And now just when I've hit pay dirt at last and we could be together, and I could do the things for her I've always wanted to do—— But that isn't what I want to say, Steller. I can't talk much at a time—but look here, if I should happen to peg out—I'll fight to the last, but I may, you know—can I rely on you to do the right thing by her in every way?"

"Absolutely," said Steller. "Don't worry about that. I've always been a woman hater, and I don't know much about the sex, but since I've known Miss Beryl—well, we've become very good friends. No one could help being that with her. What an ignorant old bachelor can do——"

"I'm glad you're that," said John Sefton quietly. "Though, of course, you aren't really old as years go. That's why I asked you. You see—well, Tarling isn't a woman hater. You know what I mean? We all have our failings. I can't send Beryl away now, and if she should happen to be left here alone—I don't mean to do Tarling an injustice; we're the best of friends and have worked harmoniously. But sometimes you might trust a man with your purse where you wouldn't with your womenfolks. I haven't any other friends, any one to turn to, and it would relieve me greatly to know that you'd look after Beryl."

"I understand," nodded Steller.

"Now," continued Sefton with an effort, "there's the other matter. About our agreement——"

"That's all right too," said Steller. "We needn't go into it now. Don't let that worry you either. It can be adjusted satisfactorily, now that I'm here to discuss it in person. I'm sure we can come to an agreement; pending that, Braunheim and I have done nothing further regarding our arrangement. As I say, there's no particular rush and we can mark time for a while. All you've got to think about at present is getting on your feet again."

"You're a good fellow, Steller," said Sefton. "I need a friend like you."

Meanwhile Doctor Vernit was talking with Beryl on the veranda where he had brought her in search of such fresh air as there was. Overcome by the stifling heat and her emotions, she had fainted for the first time in her life, and was very angry with herself in consequence. She wanted to be a help, not a hindrance. A cinnamon-hued woman hovered at intervals in the background, her kindly face alight with concern and the desire to be of service. A pickaninny, sucking a foot of sugar cane, peeped shyly from behind a corner of the veranda. This was Mrs. Petit Beau and her offspring.

"Please tell me the truth, doctor," Beryl was saying. "I didn't mean to faint, and I won't do so again. It was very stupid of me. What is this awful disease my father has got, and what chance has he? I'd much rather know the worst."

Doctor Vernit pulled his gray beard and looked distressed. He wore the inevitable straw hat and black frock coat which, despite the hottest weather, fashion decrees as the one correct garb in Port-au-Prince. Much of the good he did brought in no dividend in francs and centimes. An educated, enlightened man, he battled valiantly against the sloth, the incompetence, the ignorance of the land he loved so well. He had studied medicine in Paris and had served in the island's one real hospital, that at Cap Haitien which was under French management. At Tarling's summons he had put aside all other matters and ridden, the previous day, over the mountains to the Villa Verd where he had since remained.

"Nothing more could be done for your father, mam'selle, if we had him at the Hospice Justinien at the Cap," he said in his excellent precise English. "No, nor anywhere else. That is one consolation. No, nor even if I had been in attendance the

day he was taken ill. It is, mam'selle, that we have many strange and terrible diseases here, many that are avoidable. And this beriberi, nobody really knows the cause. Some say it comes from the eating of raw fish, others from rice that has lost its outer layer or pericarp; others again that it comes from a parasite. Le bon Dieu alone knows. But that it comes from some deficiency in food, there seems no doubt. It attacks the nervous system, you see, and then the heart becomes involved. That, of course, is the danger."

"And—and does nobody ever recover?"

"But yes, mam'selle; it all depends. But in acute form—well, three or four days—it distresses me to say it, mam'selle——"

Doctor Vernit was glad of the interruption; there was no use raising false hopes but it came very hard to tell the brutal truth. And so he turned with relief to the man, leading a mule, who emerged from the thick undergrowth into the little clearing.

"Bon jour, m'sieu." Doctor Vernit raised his straw hat and then shook hands with evident surprise and pleasure. "I thought you were—well, anywhere."

"Hello, doc," said Carteret, and then stood turning his hat round and round in his big hands while he shifted from one foot to the other.

"Ah," said Vernit, "it is perhaps—— Pardon me, mam'selle; permit me to introduce my friend Monsieur Carteret."

The girl bowed stiffly with suddenly heightened color. Carteret returned the bow stiffly, looked anew at his hat as though it were some ingenious novelty that intrigued him vastly, then decided to try it on his head. He was freshly shaven and tubbed and wore a less reprehensible suit of white drill. A sense of injury cut athwart the girl's deep concern and grief, as the most trivial thoughts invade the deepest emotion, as she looked at him. This man had no right to appear so fresh and fit and, yes, even distinguished—she admitted the fact grudgingly—as though he wasn't a dissolute ne'er-do-well, shamefully intoxicated but a few hours ago. His astonishing powers of recuperation were really wicked.

Carteret cleared his throat, tugged at his collar. "I was sorry to hear about your father, Miss Sefton. I just heard it——" He paused and looked up as Steller came out on the veranda.

Doctor Vernit hastened to introduce them. Carteret put out a hand but Steller did not appear to see it. Carteret looked at his hand thoughtfully and then decided to put it in his pocket.

"This gentleman," said Steller, accenting the word, "and I have met before."

"Yes," nodded Carteret. But he looked puzzled as though striving to recall the meeting, and he stared earnestly at the other.

Steller returned the stare with interest. "What is it you want?" he demanded at length.

Carteret made a vague gesture as though his thoughts were elsewhere. "I came here—I was sorry to hear about Sefton——"

"Are you an intimate friend of his?" interrupted Steller.

"No, I can't say that; hardly know him, in fact. Still—well, I came up to see what I could do."

"Why, are you a doctor?"

"No, I can't say that either." Carteret grinned sheepishly. "Just on general principles, you know. I thought there might be something I could do. You're new here, and—and——"

"Thanks," said Steller, "but we've all the help we require—qualified help. May I suggest that this is an occasion solely for relatives and family friends? Good day, sir."

"But—but it was awfully good of you to come." Beryl spoke the words almost unconsciously. "Thank you very much."

"Thank *you*," said Carteret. He raised his hat, hesitated, looked again at Steller, and then moved off with the small patient mule.

Doctor Vernit followed, walked with him through the trees and thick undergrowth toward the highroad.

"You and M'sieu Smith have met before—unpleasantly, yes? That he should so receive you——"

"It was coming to me," said Carteret. "I'd a bad hang-over this morning and ——" He narrated the incident briefly. "But about Sefton. Just how bad is he, doc?"

"Absolutely hopeless, and was from the first. I give him till to-morrow night, no more."

Carteret, leaning on the rump of the mule, tamped plug cut into his odorous brier. "And it's beriberi, the real stuff? You're dead sure of it?"

Vernit looked up. "Why do you ask that, my friend?"

"Because I guess you know, maybe as well as I, that there's a mighty fine imitation."

The eyes of the two men met. Vernit tugged at his beard. "Have you ever known a case, not hearsay?"

"More than one," said Carteret quietly. "It can be bought; easily enough if you know how."

Vernit paced a few steps under the tamarinds and returned. "It is true, between ourselves, that this case has puzzled me. It has all the appearance of beriberi, and the result will be no less fatal, but—there was a man at the Cap once who didn't yield to treatment either. But, you understand? In either case what can I do? Absolutely nothing. It is undeniably true that the Papaloi possesses a knowledge of vegetable poisons unknown to any pharmacopœia, but that would mean——"

"Exactly," nodded Carteret. "And you never can tell who's gunning for you, doc."

"But it is only suspicion, if that. No more. I may be entirely wrong. And I can do nothing."

"No, but maybe I can," said Carteret, blowing smoke. "I've knocked round a bit, you know, and I've an acquaintance up the line it won't do any harm to have a palaver with. There's an antidote to every poison if you can get hold of it. That's all I wanted to know—if you were dead sure. It's a chance worth trying."

"I'm very glad you came up, that you happened to be in Picolet," said Vernit. "It may relieve all doubt. It's evident, my friend, that your firsthand knowledge of such things is greater than mine. Your proposed mission, for any other white man, would be worse than useless, but you——"

"Yes, there are certain advantages in being a roving loafer," said Carteret gravely. "Of course we'll keep this strictly under our hats, doc, even if there should prove to be something in it. Meanwhile it won't do any harm to stick close to Sefton and keep your eyes skinned, though one dose would do. I'll be back in about five hours."

Carteret threw his long legs over the small mule. "Gee up, Amelia! Push along, old girl." His heels drummed into the ribs of the philosophic animal which he had named in honor of a paternal aunt. That it had no claim to the feminine gender made no difference to Carteret. It had a temperament like his aunt, together with some small facial resemblance, and so that settled it. He had his own name for everything, including himself.

CHAPTER V.

CARTERET'S LAW.

HIS destination was the abode of a venerable and iniquitous humbug who styled himself "Le Roi Rouge," for reasons best known to himself, but whom Carteret fraternally called John, for similar reasons. His majesty would have resented the name even from his favorite wife, and certainly from any other *blanc*, but somehow few minded what Carteret called them. The most endearing term or majestic title can be made opprobrious.

It was only some ten miles to the Papaloi's house but the alleged highway led ever upward, there were innumerable fords to cross, and Amelia had his own ideas about pace. Slow but sure was his motto, and, with his stable companion, a pack mule, he had taken Carteret successfully into many strange places. Like his master he knew every foot of the hills by heart. The narrow tortuous road, bordered with creepers and trees, offered no distractions to the seasoned eye and Carteret gave himself up to thought.

None knew better than he the secret of the Papaloi, the secret of his power and strength and how it was the root cause of most of the ills from which the country suffered. Until Haiti got rid of her iniquitous priests, those transplanted witch doctors who had practiced their hideous rites for centuries in West Africa, she could never be anything but what she was. The power of these mercenary charlatans pervaded everything from high to low, and but for the few whites of the coast, whose influence was out of all proportion to their numbers, that power would have been invincible. The government had always been too unstable to cope with the evil, but did it really wish to? Hadn't even a president himself been a votary? The better class closed its eyes and pretended that many things didn't exist. And what could the whites and mulattoes do when they had no political power? Even Vernit had said more to him, Carteret, than he would to any other foreigner. The fact was that the great ma-

jority of people were afraid; the sect was too powerful, the votaries of the old religion everywhere. Superstition is one thing but when it is coupled with an unrivaled knowledge and unscrupulous use of secret vegetable poisons, knowledge handed down from father to son—well, was it any wonder that the ignorant native, while professing the state religion, secretly laughed at the *blanc's* god? Could the Virgin and Child, say, remove an enemy from one's path like the sacred snake? Assuredly not. Look you, you go to the *blanc's* priest and say, 'So-and-so is my enemy and has done thus and thus; he will destroy me utterly if I don't destroy him first.' Oh, and what happens? Why, look you, you are told to offer up prayers on a string of beads and to forgive your enemy an incredible number of times; and while you are about such foolishness your enemy destroys you. Why and how? Oho, because he is a true believer and has gone straightway to his own priest, Papa the King, instead of following false gods. And Papa the King has forthwith put voodoo on you; you walk mayhap over a heap of refuse at your door and straightway you sicken and die. You can die many strange and terrible deaths, or maybe you live but with your reason gone; sometimes it goes with great pain, sometimes with none at all. Sometimes too you may fall into the sleep that resembles death. It all depends what the sacred serpent wills, and through it, Papa the King. If Papa the King is great and wise and considers you worthy, he can bring many wonderful things to pass, not merely in the next world, like the *blanc's* god, but here and now where it can benefit you and you can prove it for yourself. He can make a loved one love you, he can find something you've lost, he can bring rain from the heavens; he can protect you from the juju of an enemy—he can do anything. Which then is the greater god, I ask you, which the greater priest? The one who promises to help you in the next world—of which we all, m'sieu, have our private doubts—or the one who does so in this? Oho, the answer is plain for all but the fool to see. The *blanc* knows his god is no good and he wants to make us desert ours, the better to weaken and despoil us.

Charlatans, humbugs, yes, but possessing a sinister and tremendous power, and immune from all punishment. If official cognizance had to be taken of some particularly atrocious incident, it was some poor obscure votary who was dealt with—never the Papaloi or Mamaloi. A redeeming point, apart from any they might display in private, was that they didn't distribute their deadly doses wholesale; they did so either for pay or personal spite. Also, a bargain was a bargain and they generally kept their word.

After some two hours' riding Carteret turned off the highway and at length came within sight of a scene, peculiar to the hills, that might have been lifted bodily from West Africa—a rude stockade and a group of palm-thatched huts. In the shade of a tamarind tree an old man sat smoking a pipe with a red-clay bowl, while against the background of mangoes and banana palms half a dozen women, ranging in years from eighteen to eighty, came and went, busy with household cares. There was a large assortment of children of all ages and attire, the youngest being quite naked and others only with a loin cloth or gee string. A dog or two, a few black goats, some pigs and a number of white fighting cocks, the latter symbolic of a man's wealth and standing in the community, scraped a living from the dirty compound.

This was Le Roi Rouge in the bosom of his family, three of the bosoms not being visible at the moment; for he had nine consorts. A man's matrimonial obligations were limited only by his purse, and Le Roi Rouge was rich. To the initiated he was known far and wide, and many votaries came to pay him homage. Like many another purveyor of religion, he found it a sublime way of solving the problem of how to exist without working. There is a proverb in the island to the effect that nobody works but white men, women, and asses; and Le Roi Rouge was a hearty and enthusiastic believer in it. Why have wives if not to work? Except when officiating in his priestly vestments at some sacrifice, or giving guidance to a votary, he did nothing from morning to night but sit under the tamarind and smoke.

There are two sects of voodoo worshipers and, as his name suggested, Le Roi Rouge belonged to the more sinister. This was symbolized also by the red handkerchief bound round his head. He wore a venerable pair of trousers and a sleeveless cotton shirt, and he was very, very dirty. Personal filth had nothing to do with his religion, as it

has with some; it was the natural result of profound and inherited laziness. His face was yellow as a lemon, seamed and wrinkled by time and wickedness, his eyes deep and penetrating. For all their humbug, the shrewd trading on the ignorance and superstition of their followers, the pandering to the basest human passions, there was no doubt that many of these priests possessed a certain hypnotic power and skill in legerdemain. It has always been so, from the days of the Pharaohs down to the modern Indian fakir.

Carteret knew this engaging rascal for what he was, though by no means did he know, or think he knew, everything about him. But that fact didn't prevent him hobnobbing with Le Roi Rouge on occasion. He took men as he found them, which is to say that, stripped of veneer and hypocrisy, he found them fundamentally all pretty much alike. Le Roi Rouge had his human side; he could be a generous and entertaining host.

"Well, John," said Carteret in creole, "here I am again."

Le Roi Rouge waved him to a seat under the tamarind. "So I see, Gros Sot," he said, using the name with perfect courtesy and respect. "Oho, off on your wanderings again? A bird always on the wing. Picolet is too tame a cage? What is the news from there? You spend the night at my humble abode?"

Carteret shook his head. "This is a business visit, John. I want something to cure a bad case of beriberi."

"If it is bad," said John, sucking the red-clay pipe, "there is no cure. You know that."

"Yes, but I also know, like you, that cases can be cured—the way they've been got. You savvy me, John?"

"Perchance," said John, his face inscrutable and a dreamy far-away look in his sunken eyes.

Now Carteret knew that even for him it would be absolutely useless to try and get any information out of the old Papaloi. There were well-defined limits to their acquaintance which both scrupulously respected; and, apart from all else, a *blanc* is a *blanc* no matter who or what he may be. The wall of racial difference is never penetrated, though one may exchange fraternal greetings over the top. Moreover, if Sefton had been poisoned secretly that poison in all likelihood had been procured here, though it didn't follow necessarily that Le Roi Rouge knew for whom it was ultimately intended. But he would never tell to whom he had given it, any more than he would divulge the jealously guarded lore of his priestcraft.

"He's a friend of mine," added Carteret, "and I've come to you to save him."

"Is he a worshiper of the sacred snake?"

"No."

"Then, Gros Sot, why doesn't he call on his own god to make him well? I ask you that."

Carteret scratched his head. "I don't know such an awful lot about such things, John; maybe his god wants him to die—but he doesn't and I don't, see? We're putting up a kick. Or maybe his god stuck it into my head to come and see you about it."

"That may be so," agreed John meditatively. "There are many strange gods, it seems, but the sacred snake is all powerful. It may be that even an unbeliever can be saved; I don't know."

"But you could find out?"

"Perchance, Gros Sot."

Carteret produced his wallet, took out twenty-five dollars in French notes, and laid them on the ground. He would never have insulted the other by offering money for a night's lodging, but business was business.

Le Roi Rouge eyed the money speculatively. "A difficult matter, as I say, Gros Sot. It is again that I don't know."

Carteret added another ten to the pile. "That's all, John; not another centime. It's going to be a long hard winter."

John promptly gathered up the notes, counted them, disposed of them magically about his person. "I shall see what the sacred snake wills, Gros Sot. Remain here."

He went into one of the huts and presently Carteret could hear his voice raised in a sort of droning chant. Finally he returned, bearing a red-clay jar and the leaf of a banana palm tied up with grass. These he placed on the ground and proceeded to bless lavishly after his own fashion, muttering incantations and cutting fantastic capers.

"The sacred snake is merciful, O Gros Sot," he said at length. "I have received a sign, and by my magic these simple herbs will work the cure. Make a warm bath of this," pointing to the jar that was filled with a dark sticky substance, "and place

your friend in it. Let him remain for an hour at one time. And of what you find in this," designating the leaf, "prepare a cooling drink. Let him bathe and drink freely and he shall recover, whether his god wishes it or not. The sacred snake is all powerful, and through it and by my magic I make the cure. It is so."

"Now that's mighty good of you, John," said Carteret heartily. "You're certainly some wonder and make mighty big medicine."

Accompanied by Le Roi Rouge he went to the mule, tethered outside the stockade, and placed his precious burden carefully in an old duffel bag hanging from the pommel. The bag held a strange assortment of objects, among them a .45 Colt's in a shoulder holster that had seen long and faithful service. Carteret took out the weapon and spun it expertly on his finger, the westering sun striking a line of liquid fire from the blue barrel. Then he swung out the cylinder and extracted one of the six live cartridges. The Papaloi watched him with mild interest.

"John," said Carteret meditatively, holding up a cartridge for the other to see, "if that slug happened to drill a hole in your venerable skull—and, believe me, it makes some hole—could the sacred snake plug it up again all right?"

Le Roi Rouge backed off a few steps. "Per-perchance. Don't point that pistol this way, Gros Sot, if you please. I don't like such things, and it's foolishness to play with them. Why do you ask the question?"

"I'm just curious to know, John. You've got a mighty powerful god, it seems, and I was just wondering. But I hope an accident like that will never happen to you."

"I hope not," agreed Le Roi Rouge fervently. "It is not wise to ask too much of one's god."

"That's right," nodded Carteret. "And so, John, I don't. It seems to me we're put in this world to help ourselves all we can; for all ordinary pinches I rely mainly on this. I'm not much on praying, you see, but I know how to shoot. I could guarantee to blow out your right eye at forty paces, John."

John took another backward step and mechanically raised a hand to the optic mentioned.

"I'm a man of peace, as you can testify," added Carteret, "but there are times when only a bullet will do. And it's much quicker than poison, John."

"Perchance that is so, Gros Sot. But this is strange talk and I hope you aren't thinking of walking in places of danger. The times are troubled."

"And so am I," said Carteret as he swung into the saddle and sat looking down at the Papaloi, the Colt's on his hip. "Between ourselves, John, the name of this sick friend of mine is Sefton—Sefton of the Villa Verd. Maybe you've heard of him. I take your word for it that he'll recover, but I'm troubled at the thought that he may catch this beriberi or some other perishing thing again. Now I hate to pay good money for the same thing twice; it's a constitutional failing of mine. And if that should happen I'm afraid I'd get so riled, John, I'd start shooting under the table and probably hit one of my friends."

"What table, Gros Sot?"

"A mere figure of speech, John; what you call poet's license. What I mean is that if Sefton gets sick again I'll make it my particular business to find out all about it; and whoever gave it to him, indirectly or not, will come to a sticky end. He will so, John, even if he should happen to be one of my friends. That's just the way I feel about it."

"There is a law for all such matters, Gros Sot."

"Yes," smiled Carteret, "and it's right here." He tapped the Colt's, replaced it in the bag and waved a cheery farewell.

CHAPTER VI.

STELLER GIVES A WARNING.

"IF I had any idea," Steller was saying, "that things were as primitive as this, I should never have let you come here. Never."

It was the first time since their acquaintance that he had said anything remotely maladroit. The words jarred her. One would think he had a proprietary interest in her. And what did it matter about conditions, about anything, when her father might be going to die? She had learned the worst—or thought she had—and she could do nothing. Nobody could. Her father was sleeping now and Doctor Vernit had said, very kindly but firmly, that no one else should remain in the room. She was out on the veranda again—the house

was intolerable—Steller at her side, and the long shadows from the forest were like predatory animals creeping from ambush. The distant hills were turning from purple to mauve, and from mauve to black. The tropic night was getting ready to pounce.

"Of course," continued Steller, as though aware intuitively of the mistake he had made, "it's a mighty fortunate thing you did decide to come, no matter what the conditions. And, you know, things may not be so bad as they seem. Vernit said there was a chance."

She shook her head, as though not trusting herself to speak, and Steller put a hand on her shoulder. "Come, cheer up; we'll hope for the best. Meanwhile we must see about your quarters. Unfortunately there isn't a hotel in the place, but Tarling has a very comfortable home, a proper housekeeper and all that, and he has offered to place a suite at your disposal. He did that first thing, and he expects me to stay with him too. So you won't feel alone, you see."

This seemed to rouse her and she looked up in evident astonishment. "I'm sure that's very kind of Mr. Tarling, but why should I go to his home when my father's is here?"

"Because, my dear girl, you can do nothing here—nobody can—and there's no use harrowing one's feelings needlessly. Come now, is there? Besides, this is no place for a woman, especially you. It's no offense to your father to say so, for he never intended you to stay here. The house may be big enough and all that, but the loneliness, the lack of facilities——"

"And do you really think I would leave my father, and at such a time?"

"But Tarling's place isn't so far away, and, I repeat, you can do nothing here. You must have a good night's rest. Your father would be the first to ask you to go. Sentiment is all right, and I appreciate your feelings, but we must be sensible too. You've had a very long and trying day; you're tired and worried enough to catch anything. We can't have you getting sick too, you of all people. And I don't think this place is at all healthy; it can't be, built as it is on ruins and with all this rank vegetation about it. And at night it would scare you to death. Tarling's place is entirely different, and you can come over first thing in the morning."

The night had suddenly shut in like a closing hand. Fireflies began to spangle the darkness, and all about there sounded the loud chirping of crickets and croaking of frogs. Then from the mysterious forest there came a low, weird throbbing note which, once heard, is never forgotten; it rose and fell, appearing to come at intervals from different quarters, now here and now there. It was the beating of the black goatskin drum, summoning the voodoo followers to worship. This instrument can be heard for miles, yet close at hand the same sound may be almost inaudible, most difficult to trace to its source. It is mysterious and inexplicable, but unquestionably there was here displayed some trick in acoustics, which the white man has not yet learned, found most useful and even necessary in baffling the curiosity of the uninitiated.

The girl shivered and turned to Steller. "What is that?"

"Oh, some native festival, most likely, or a dance. They're always dancing, you know; it's one thing the beggars can do. All these new animal dances, the turkey trot and so on, originate here. I wonder what's keeping Tarling."

"I am going to remain here," she said with that occasional and unexpected incisiveness that took him rather aback. "Nothing could induce me to leave. Julia—Mrs. Petit Beau—is here, and I like her. She is kind and capable and we've become good friends already. I'll be quite all right. I may be of use in some way; I know how to keep house if nothing else. Anyway I wouldn't think of leaving."

"And I wouldn't think of leaving you alone. If you stay, then I must."

"But I shan't be alone; there's Julia and her husband, and Doctor Vernit."

"A couple of negroes and a mulatto."

"Doctor Vernit is a gentleman."

"That isn't the point; and we really know nothing about anybody, if it comes to that. I feel responsible for you, and I may as well tell you that your father asked me, if the worst should happen, to look after you. I intend to do so."

"I—I don't need looking after. I shouldn't like you to think you had to."

"But *I* like to think it," smiled Steller. "I do, if you don't. It isn't a hardship, I assure you. Surely you don't mind me staying here?"

"Oh, no. Indeed I shall be glad. It *is* lonely, and—and everything is so strange.

It will be only one more instance of your goodness and kindness."

"Nonsense," said Steller, and placed his hand on her arm again. "There are some people one doesn't find it hard to be good to. I'm awfully ignorant about women—never had the time to know any—and so I'm no hand at pretty speeches and all that sort of thing. But it's the simple truth, Beryl—you don't mind me calling you that? —that I've never met anybody like you. Funny, isn't it, at my time of life?"

She caught her breath; could this be the purely platonic friend she had known? And what exactly did he mean?

She was quite woman enough to resent in a way the sudden appearance of a figure at the foot of the veranda steps. It was Joe Mackenzie. He introduced himself, inquired after Sefton and then Carteret. "He left my place around one, saying he was coming up here, and I haven't heard anything of him since."

"He was here for a few minutes," said Steller. "That was about one thirty, I should say. No, he didn't mention where he was going. You see, we don't really know him."

Mackenzie, standing in the brilliant moonlight, looked worried. But then he always did. "I expected him back," he said slowly. "It's not like him——"

"He seemed sober enough," said Steller. "But, of course——" He shrugged.

"It's a rare accident when he isn't," said Mackenzie curtly.

The girl spoke before Steller. "Won't you come in? Perhaps Doctor Vernit knows where he went; they were talking together."

Vernit, possibly hearing the voices, appeared in the doorway. He also looked worried as he shook hands with Mackenzie, whom he knew. The two men entered the house, Vernit saying that his patient was still sleeping.

"Where did you meet this fellow Carteret?" asked Steller, dropping his voice. "Who is he, and what do you know about him?"

The darkness hid her blush. "Does it matter?"

"It may—very much."

"In what way?"

"My question first, if you please."

She shrugged. "But I've really nothing to tell. He happened to be at the same hotel where I was stopping once; it was last year at the Hamilton in Bermuda. I was only there for a few days. I don't know anything about him."

"H'm!" said Steller. "Nobody else seems to either. Apparently he's one of these remittance men, paid to keep away from his own country in the hope that he'll drink himself to death in some other one. A loafer, knocking from pillar to post. I know the type. Tarling says, and he should know, that he disappears for weeks at a time—up in the hills with a bottle and worse. He's gone native—if you know what that means. He herds with the lowest of the negroes, makes the white man's job here all the harder. Certainly, at best, not a character to encourage."

"Surely you're not suggesting that I've done so?"

"You received him to-day far better than he deserved."

"I merely thanked him for his kindness. It was the least I could do. And it *was* kind of him, no matter what he may be."

"If everybody in the world were like you, Beryl, there would be no need of a heaven. I hate to open your eyes to some things in this wicked world but I've got to; remember, we're business partners as well as the best of friends. You know what I told you about this concession and spies? Well, I'm not at all sure that this fellow isn't one. I had the idea, from what Tarling said in a letter, before I came down here. That's one reason why I came."

She stirred in the darkness. "Oh, but surely—he's so different. I mean——"

"Now wait a minute, please; there are spies and spies, my dear girl. You know what any of our rivals would give to grab this concession, and that some of them are by no means scrupulous regarding the methods they use. I needn't mention any names, but there are firms in my line of business who, if they got their deserts, would be in jail. They have no real ability of their own; they rely mainly on spying——"

"But how could they get the concession, even if they should find out about it, if my father is the only one who can?"

"In dealing with a country like this anything's liable to happen. It's fundamentally corrupt, and we don't want to have to bid against anybody. That goes without saying."

"Do you mean you have to bribe the government for the concession?"

"No, not as things stand now; but we might have to. Of course the government will get a percentage on all mahogany shipped—that's the usual procedure—and it's satisfied that our development is for the good of the country. The present government is honest, and it's your father's friendship and personal influence with it that will secure us the concession. But if our rivals learned of it they would try to beat us with money. At the worst they might start a revolution, try to put in power a puppet who, for being made president, would give them what they want. Oh, it's been done over and over again, and not only in this country where revolutions are the national industry and as easy to start as a fire. Many a revolution in Central America, for instance, has been engineered from New York by firms after some great concession like this. All wars, you may say, have the same secret origin."

"Really? I can't believe it. It's too terrible."

"It's true, nevertheless, with very few exceptions," said Steller. "You may label it patriotism, anything you like, but it's really money. Money is the real ruler of the world." There was a strange exaltation in his voice and his eyes glowed through the darkness. "You don't believe it? Ah, well, keep your illusions while you can, my dear girl. But we only know what money really means when we're poor."

"We have always been poor, my father and I," said the girl. "I know what money can do, but I know also what it can't do. My father would give all of whatever his share of this concession may be worth, to be well again. So would I, of course. But you were speaking of Mr. Carteret."

"Well, I repeat that at worst we would have to face bribery and a possible revolution; at best, open bidding for the concession from the more reputable of our rivals. Naturally we don't want either. Now it doesn't necessarily follow that this fellow is a paid spy of any firm camping on our trail; from all accounts he has been knocking about this island, off and on, for quite a time. But he's just the kind to ferret out and sell information, and there are plenty of people, reputable and disreputable, who would buy it. In either case he's a person to avoid. Tarling thinks he's got some inkling of the business and that, in consequence, he's been trying to scrape an intimacy with him and your father. Tarling was forced to tell him plainly that he preferred his room to his company, and Carteret assaulted him. He's a bully, you see, besides all else.

"I only want to warn you, Beryl, of what in all probability is back of this concern of his for your father," concluded Steller earnestly. "Failing all else, he may try to get the necessary information through you. You must be on your guard, not only against him but everybody. You share our secret, you are the guardian of your father's fortunes, Tarling's and mine. I know you would never betray us knowingly but you might do so unwittingly, through innocence and misguided charity. You might be trapped into saying something that would give him the clew. If Carteret is after what Tarling suspects, then he's a far more cunning and able rascal than he even looks. That's why, and not merely because of his unpardonable conduct on the dock, I froze him out. We can't afford to take the smallest chance, and I cannot impress on you too strongly the absolute necessity of trusting nobody and suspecting everybody—especially Carteret."

"You may be sure," said Beryl, who had listened attentively in silence, "I'll try to be worthy of my trust. But I do wish in a way that you hadn't told me anything about the concession. I hate to suspect people, read the worst motives into all they say and do. I see that even expected wealth brings its own penalty and obligations. This great adventure, which I thought so wonderful, now seems petty and immaterial because of my father's illness. But I'm glad you've told me all this, and you may be sure nobody shall learn anything from me."

At the foot of the stairs Vernit and Mackenzie were finishing their whispered talk.

"But he should have been back an hour ago," said the doctor.

"Drunk or sober," said Mackenzie, "he's the last person to get lost. And he isn't drunk; he gave me his word on that and he'll keep it."

"Then what can have happened?"

"Well, if there's anything in this idea—but of course his mule may have broken a leg or something. Anyway, I'll take the

trail. I know where this old voodoo artist hangs out."

Mackenzie stepped out on the veranda, and Steller, destined to be interrupted, released Beryl Sefton's hand.

Then Carteret appeared, a ghostly figure in the moonlight. He was afoot, a bundle of some sort flung over his shoulder. He walked as though drunk, and his left sleeve was all black as though he had rolled in mud.

"Hello, Mac," he greeted, swaying on the veranda steps. "Fetch old Vernit; I've a present for him. It's the lotion, bottle to be shaken and taken as before. It knocks the eye out of Broadway. You don't appreciate a good drink but he does. He's a friend of mine and I want him to try this beautiful lotion. I've been all the way to Jacmel for it."

"The fellow's drunk again, just as I expected," said Steller. "Take him home, Mr. Mackenzie, if you please. This is no place for him."

Carteret suddenly collapsed. The girl ran to help, and her gentle hands became sticky with blood.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LETTER AT THE FORD.

"OF course he can't remain here," said Steller, in the lamplighted living room with the split cane blinds.

"But there's no other place. Doctor Vernit said he daren't be moved. He'll bleed to death. It's a miracle he got here, walking so far."

"And you credit the yarn? You really believe he was set upon by hill brigands and robbed of everything but this precious liquor? Nonsense! The man's drunk, and he killed the mule, and very nearly himself, by falling into a gully. There aren't any bandits roaming about. That wound was caused by a sharp piece of rock, not a knife."

"Perhaps. But it doesn't matter. He has got to remain here."

"But, my dear girl, the thing's impossible! It's out of the question. There's your father to consider, if nothing and nobody else. Our hands are full. To have this drunken loafer foisted on you at such a time——"

"There is Doctor Vernit, the Petit Beaus, and a spare room. What more do we need? It will be no trouble. We simply can't turn him out, especially after what Doctor Vernit has said. It means his life."

"Oh, nonsense, Beryl. I don't believe Vernit knows what he's talking about. I'll have a good look at that wound. It's more than likely you're being imposed on. There's no reason why he couldn't be shifted down to this fellow Mackenzie's. I'll just go up now and see——"

A knock came on the open door, followed by Tarling.

"How is your father and my goot friend, my dear young lady?" he said, wiping the creased neck. "So hot it is! I should have been here long ago, but business it has no heart for nodding. Ach, always business. A late shipment, you see. And there's always trouble; these natives, they will not work. I have been hurrying and hurrying. Yes."

"You should be careful, going round alone at night like this," said Steller. "It seems there are desperate bandits about. Oh, it's a fact; ask Mr. Carteret."

Petit Beau appeared, his step soundless in grass slippers. "Missy Bar'l, the doctor say you stay by Massa John foh a time. He awake now, bah Jove!"

"Tarling and I will remain here," said Steller as the girl arose. "We'll be up presently if we're allowed. You'll let us know?"

She found Vernit waiting at the top of the stairs, outside the room assigned to Carteret. "I shall be in presently, mam'selle," he said. "Until I come, allow no one else in your father's room, if you please. And M'sieu Carteret, he may remain here?"

"Of course. How is he?"

"He has lost much blood and needs very careful attention. Now, mam'selle, a stout heart, if you please. And it is that your father may have a turn for the better tonight. We shall see.

He watched her enter Sefton's room, then opened the door at his back, closed and locked it.

Carteret sat by a bamboo table on which stood the precious red-clay jug and banana leaf, the doctor's instrument case and a basin of water. His coat and pongee shirt were off, his naked left arm bandaged from elbow to shoulder. His face was gray under its tan. Assuredly he had lost much blood and performed a feat of endurance such, perhaps, as his physique alone was capable

of, but he was far from being in the serious condition Doctor Vernit had intimated.

"She's on the job, eh? Good," he smiled. "And you've perjured your immortal soul? Good again. I'll be able to do a bit of watching that you couldn't. They won't think I'm able, and you know four eyes are better than two. As I was saying, I'm morally certain my old friend John sold the stuff and, though I conveyed a diplomatic hint, he'll probably do so again. Or, if not, then some one else."

"But, mon Dieu!" said Vernit, tugging at his beard, "if Sefton has a secret enemy like that, nothing and no one can save him. The only salvation in such cases is to leave the country. It is that he can't be watched eternally. He couldn't, if he knew, guard himself. No, it is impossible."

"Oh, there are measures," said Carteret. "Do you think I hike around with a padlocked water bottle just for fun? I'll do my best to land the swine that poisoned him; meanwhile we've got to see that he doesn't get another dose—at least until he's fit to fight his own hand. That stuff there will fix him; friend John should know what cures his own dope. He's played straight with me in this, though that isn't saying he mayn't hand me out a dose for myself some day. Their psychology is interesting."

"This blighter," said Mackenzie politely, "who snagged poor old Amelia—do you think he was sent after you by old Rain-in-the-Face?"

Carteret had given them a private account of the ambush and attempted murder, for that is what it amounted to; a rope of stout creepers stretched across the trail where it dipped steeply to a ford, and, as the mule crashed, a knife that flashed from the darkness. He had had to shoot Amelia, and this necessary death at his hand of an old and valued friend hurt him more than his physical wound.

"John hadn't any part in that, not that a good bushman couldn't have circled me," he said. "But he's alone up there, you know, and he wouldn't have had time to get in touch with anybody. And he's too old to pull off anything like that himself. No, somebody knew where I was going, and what for, and they laid for me. It was the easiest thing in life to pick the best spot; they knew there was only one way back and that all they had to do was wait."

"If you'd only been able to see the blighter," deplored Mackenzie. "You don't know even if it was a native?"

"No. You can't see much, Mac, under a kicking mule, and at the ford where the trees meet. He should have got me by all odds, and he's a cowardly skunk that he didn't. He cut and ran when I started to put up a fight. Of course my gun was where I couldn't get at it; it's always the way. But it's the first experience of the kind I've had, or anything like it, since I've been here. I wasn't expecting it."

"You and I are the only ones who knew of your errand," said Vernit. "Who else could have known?"

"It's quite possible, Larry," said Mackenzie, "that you're reading the wrong meaning into all this. It may have had no connection with Sefton; there's really nothing to show that it has. It may have been a private and personal enemy of your own. I told you you had 'em."

"Maybe," agreed Carteret. "But I believe they didn't want the stuff to get here, until too late anyway. I can't help thinking that, somehow. I could have lain out there in the bush and you'd have thought I'd gone on a bust. You may say there's no knowing where Sefton was doped, but I believe it was right here—if not actually under his own roof, then around here somewhere. Anybody might have listened in on that talk of ours, doc; you don't know who might have been hiding in the bush. This jasper Petit Beau and his wife may have done the trick because of some grievance, fancied or otherwise. But I don't think they'd go to the length of laying that trap for me; that isn't like a Haitian native at all. I sort of feel something queer back of all this. I don't know. Anyway, I want to stay here and get a close-up of things, and the only way I can do it is to make out I'm a lot worse than I am. And now I guess you'd better get to work on Sefton, doc, and I'd better be getting myself to bed like a sick man. The strategical beauty of this room, you observe, is that you can see Sefton's room and the whole corridor through the keyhole."

"It is then that even M'sieu Smith is not to know of our suspicions?"

"Nobody, doc," said Carteret emphatically. "Not even Sefton himself. Not for the present anyway. Tell 'em this stuff is a treatment of your own—you know, a last-

shot-in-the-locker sort of business. Transfer the stuff in that jar to something of your own, and the leaf too. Don't let 'em be seen. You can smuggle them out, Mac, when you're going."

"But that is unnecessary," said Vernit, "if, as you think, somebody already knows what you brought."

"Never mind," said Carteret, "the whole point is that nobody's supposed to know. Sefton's got straight beriberi and you're about to work a wonderful cure off your own bat. I make you a present of the full credit."

"My friend," said Doctor Vernit, shaking his head, "I'm afraid they don't give you your nickname for nothing; also that you're making as big fools of us. However, it is that you've got me into this conspiracy with that persuasive tongue of yours, and I'll play my part. If this horrible-looking mixture, with whose ingredients I'm entirely unfamiliar, should cure Sefton—well, in that unlikely event I'll consider your case proved."

"I'll stay the night," announced Mackenzie. "I've got a good excuse, Carteret being so blamed sick. I can give you a hand with Sefton too, Vernit. It boils down to this: somebody's got to be in that room all the time. You can't trust the servants, Miss Sefton isn't able after all she's been through, and you can't ask this fellow Smith or Tarling. They'd want to know naturally what was up. That leaves you and me, Vernit. You were on the job last night, so that leaves me."

"Nothing doing, Mac, thanking you all the same," said Carteret. "Why should you, a comparative stranger, sit up? It would look pretty fishy, to say the least. No, you mustn't stay here either; I'm not supposed to be dying, you know, and this isn't a hotel."

Doctor Vernit nodded. "But yes; that would be only to arouse suspicion and defeat our purpose. If I take Carteret's meaning, we are to give this supposed poisoner every reasonable chance of making another attempt, and catch him what you call red-handed. Eh bien, then affairs must go on as usual, and so I remain with Sefton as I did last night. It is that he doesn't require constant attention, you know; I doze on the spare cot—voilà! we shall see what we shall see. If, as Carteret thinks, the poisoner is one of the servants and is aware we have this alleged cure, then who knows what he may attempt and quickly?"

Thus it was agreed, and, as Vernit left, Carteret finished undressing and climbed into a suit of Sefton's pajamas. Then he took the Colt's from the duffel bag, placed it under the pillow and slid into bed.

"Make youself at home," said Mackenzie. "I wonder, my boy, how much a certain young princess has got to do with this crazy scheme of yours, not that it isn't characteristic. The situation is highly romantic, if stereotyped; the wounded hero, the beautiful maiden——"

"You can be a frightful ass at times, Mac. You know it would be precisely the same if Sefton were alone."

"Oh, of course; neighborliness and all that. The good-Samaritan business in high gear. But I don't blame you; she's a stunner and I wouldn't mind if she held *my* pulse for a time. The only pity is that this fellow Smith has got there first. I caught 'em holding hands in the moonlight. Maybe I should have told you this before you propounded your brilliant scheme. I suppose they're engaged. I can't say I congratulate her, for I don't like this Smith worth a cent, the little I've seen of him. You know how some people get your royal back up right away and all that. He's far too much upstage."

"Do you know anything about him?"

"No more than that he's a member of Tarling's firm. I suppose he's O. K. but he's too slick looking and smooth by half for my taste. And he seems to like you, Larry, same as a cat likes water. It strikes me too as going deeper than your run-in with him this morning. Have you ever met him before?"

"Possibly," said Carteret. "I've met a few Smiths in my time; but I can't place this one."

"Well, all joking aside, what's your real reason for this little game? I've got an idea that you know a bit more than you let on to Vernit—not that you don't trust him, of course."

Carteret hesitated, then said: "Your ideas are generally right, Mac, as I've remarked before. Sling me my coat—hold on! There's somebody coming."

Mackenzie had heard no sound, but a few moments later the door opened and Steller walked in. He found Carteret lying with closed eyes, Mackenzie sitting by the

bed. The shaded lamp cast obliging shadows.

"Able to talk, Mr. Carteret? That's good. I thought I heard you."

Carteret opened his eyes slowly. He had not been fool enough to raise his voice and he knew that Steller could have heard nothing. "I'm feeling a bit better, thanks," he said weakly. "This is rather an imposition on the Seftons, especially at such a time, but Vernit says I daren't move."

"It's certainly awkward," agreed Steller. "We've all we can do to look after Sefton. Of course, under these circumstances, I shall remain here."

Carteret smiled faintly. "Thanks awfully, but don't put yourself out on my account. I won't need any attention. All I've got to do is lie dead quiet for a spell. You see it's an artery, so the doc says, and it pretty nearly went phut."

"You oughtn't to be even talking," reproved Mackenzie. "You know that."

"Well," said Steller, "the sooner you're able to move, the better for all concerned. If this was a civilized country your obvious place would be the hospital; as it is, you'd get more attention, say, at Mr. Mackenzie's place. No doubt you'll be able to be moved down there to-morrow."

Mackenzie bristled. "Vernit's here, not there—and I've no palace either. I'm sure we're obliged to the Seftons," he finished pointedly.

"To Miss Sefton," corrected Steller with an arid stare. "But while her father is ill it's my privilege to act for him. Nobody grudges hospitality in such an emergency, but I repeat that the sooner Mr. Carteret is able to move, the better." And with a curt nod he walked out.

Mackenzie made sure that the corridor was empty before he spoke his mind. "And I'd like to see him when the shellac peels all off; the old veneer seems to be wearing pretty thin. Did you get what he said about 'remaining under these circumstances' —as if you were going to loot the house? That fellow, for all his front, is no more a real gentleman than I am."

Carteret chuckled. "Well, if it's only veneer, Mac, it won't last long in this climate. It's funny how the heat forces things, not merely in the physical soil but the soil of a man's soul, rank growths you hardly knew were there. It would appear——"

"I'll read all that in the great book you're going to write, Larry; meanwhile I'd better hop it or this Shylock will be handing me a bill for a night's lodging. While we've the chance I'd like to know what you wanted with this." And Mackenzie handed Carteret the slashed and bloodstained drill coat.

Carteret rummaged in an inside pocket and brought out a crumpled sheet of paper. "I found that at the place where I was jumped," he said. "Happened to pick it up while I was groping about. You don't usually find such things lying round, and it isn't damp or blurred as if it had been out all night. I guess I'm justified in inferring that it belongs to whoever laid for me; it may have fallen out of his pocket during the mix-up or some other way. It doesn't matter. Anyway, it's one of those little accidents that may have big results."

Mackenzie unfolded the paper and smoothed it out on an angular knee. It bore an apparently meaningless jumble of figures written in ink by a precise cramped hand.

"A code?"

"Evidently," nodded Carteret. "Have you seen a hand like that before?"

"Yes, Tarling's. I know that five and eight—most all of them. I told you to look out for him, Larry. But this proves then, if it proves anything, that it has nothing to do with Sefton. Why should Tarling, of all people, want him out of the way?"

"Ask me an easier one, Mac. Everything's so very much up in the blue that I didn't want to tell Vernit, get him all excited maybe for nothing. Tarling wrote those figures, all right, but that doesn't prove he dropped the paper where I found it nor at the time I found it. It doesn't prove, if he actually was my assailant, that he meant any more than to settle his score with me. Still there are very interesting possibilities."

Mackenzie was frowning at the paper. "Have you any idea what this means?"

"None in the world, my child."

"Well, it shouldn't be hard to dope out. Of course each figure must stand for a letter of the alphabet; and though we

needn't expect such a simple thing as a figure being that letter—such as three standing for C—we can work it out by finding what occurs oftenest. There's a rule about such things, though I don't remember it."

"E is the most frequent letter," said Carteret. "I know the rule for all of them. But I guess we'll find it harder than that. There's sure to be a key—a code word or phrase previously agreed on. It's probably a commercial cipher of no importance to us. I'm not expecting any information from it. But make a copy of it and give me the original. It won't do for Tarling to see it."

Mackenzie made his copy quickly and Carteret slipped the original down the holster of the Colt's.

"I don't like leaving you here," said Mackenzie. "Have you considered your position in all this? If there's anything in it, and it's not merely a servant revenging himself on Sefton in the approved style? Why, this fellow Smith is Tarling's boss and they may be in cahoots, for all we know. If Tarling wants Sefton out of the way, why not Smith too? Oh, you can imagine a whole lot once you start, and it's a fine country for queer happenings. One play has been made for your life already, and you're alone here with a bum wing."

"I'll be as safe as a church, Mac, and your sticking round would only queer the pitch. Weren't you telling me the personal advantages of being so distinguished? It's one thing to try for me in the bush, where any native might get away with it, and quite another here. There will be nothing so crude. And we've only the vaguest suspicions about everything. Interesting possibilities, that's all. We'll see what the night may bring forth."

"Well, have your own way as usual. But let me remind you that there are interesting, and not crude, possibilities in a supposedly damaged artery. Better take care that the bandage doesn't happen to slip."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE NIGHT.

THE Villa Verd was a considerable time settling down for the night, and long after Mackenzie had taken his reluctant departure, and Vernit had come in for a final look, Carteret could hear steps going and coming in the corridor. He had learned already to know them, from Miss Sefton's quick light footfall, to Petit Beau's soft slither and Tarling's solid tread. Sefton was getting his hour's soaking and everybody seemed to be hovering round. Vernit, of course, needed help; Sefton couldn't move himself and a big tub had been brought into the bedroom.

Carteret had a look through the keyhole of his closed door, a door which, for obvious reasons, he dare not lock. Down the narrow lamplighted vista was Sefton's door; it was closed and he saw Beryl whispering with Mrs. Petit Beau. The girl was pale and worn but looked more hopeful. The negress seemed a good type; not the kind, he reflected, to lend herself willingly to crime. A typical Haitian, if looks went for anything, and a better type than her husband.

Sefton's door opened, framing Steller, and Carteret, taking no chances, slipped back to bed. He wasn't a moment too soon, Steller suddenly entering the room in his quick feline way. He supposed Carteret couldn't sleep, what with his wound and all that was going on. Vernit was giving Sefton some sort of bath which he seemed to think might help. These native doctors had queer cures. By the way, the authorities must be told about the bandits; could Carteret give any description of them? How many were there?

Carteret couldn't say, but there must have been three or four at least. He could have licked any one man. He had put up a great fight against overwhelming odds.

"Well, I'll get the servants to fix up this coat of yours," said Steller at length, and whipped the garment off the chair. "You'll be needing it to-morrow." An innocent courtesy? Perhaps. But Carteret smiled in the darkness as he thanked him, and thought of that paper tucked into the bottom of the holster underneath his pillow.

He wondered if Tarling too were going to stay the night. What a queer house party! He had much to wonder about as he lay there, his eyes on the faint golden dot of the keyhole. Wonderful in its way that he should meet this girl again, be lying—yes, and in more ways than one—under her father's roof. She was giving him a wide berth, of course; she would give sanctuary, charity, but that was all. Well, perhaps he could square up for their last

meeting. So she was engaged to this fellow Smith. Or was she? Not, of course, that it made any particular difference. Smith—Smith—where had he seen him before? Why did that sleek seal-brown head and those pensive supercilious eyes seem familiar? Surely he had met him somewhere in his wanderings.

Carteret's mental eye filled with strange pictures as he thought of those wanderings, a trail that led up to the Yukon and down to the Horn, from New York to Yokohoma. But in all that shifting film he failed to identify the features of this particular Mr. Smith.

Tarling wasn't going to stay; he heard him saying good night. It must be pretty late, going on for twelve. No, Tarling couldn't remain; the house had its limitations and there were only four bedrooms, all on the one corridor. He knew that. Petit Beau and his family lived in an annex off the kitchen, the roof under his window. Handy thing that roof; it might bear watching.

Ah, Miss Sefton was bidding Smith good night; she was going to her room if not to bed. Her room was on his left, halfway down the hall, Smith's on the right. A trained ear can be even more useful than eyes and Carteret's had told him much.

The door opened again suddenly, quietly; it was on a line with the bed and he saw Steller silhouetted against the dim swinging corridor lamp.

"Want anything before I turn in, Mr. Carteret?"

"Wh-what? Er—no, thanks." Carteret's voice and wits were apparently clogged with sleep. "Must have dropped off; feeling easier. Sefton any better?"

"Mr. Sefton is no worse. I think he even seems slightly better."

"That's goo'," and Carteret ended on a half snore.

Steller closed the door gently.

Carteret's mind began to fill again with pictures, scraps of conversation, thoughts. Queer chap, Sefton; secretive, solitary, hard to get acquainted with. What had brought him to Picolet? He had seen him as far north as the Cap, met him knocking round here and there, yet he had no apparent business in the island. Yes, there was something going on at the Cap, and not only there; he knew more than he had had the opportunity of telling Mackenzie, and Mac knew more too. Tarling and Bobo were thick, and Bobo was a general with a grievance, not the usual kind but a really first-class one. Sefton and Tarling, and now this fellow Smith——

The merest suggestion of a sound, no more; then, after a long silence, another that brought Carteret on all fours to the keyhole. A nasty spying business this, but necessary.

Steller was in the corridor where the lamp still burned dimly; with an eye on Sefton's door he was tapping gently on another. It opened at length and Carteret caught the girl's startled, hushed query. Then, suddenly louder: "No, Mr. Steller. No, you can't——"

Steller! Carteret straightened in the darkness as though something had stung him. He stood for a moment immobile, then, in a stride, had whipped the Colt's from under the pillow and, in another, had flung open the door.

The hushed voices were still battling, Steller sweetly obdurate. He turned at the sound of the opening door and saw Carteret on the threshold of his room. Carteret did nothing, said nothing; he merely stared, the heavy revolver lying in the crook of his bandaged arm. Miss Sefton's curious and startled eyes looked round the door, then vanished as quickly. He heard a little gasp.

"And what exactly is the meaning of this, sir?" asked Steller suavely, a wary eye on that of the revolver. "Is it a burglary?"

Carteret's voice was as suave. "I thought it might be. I heard somebody sneaking about and I imagined it was thieves. I should advise Miss Sefton to lock her door."

Doctor Vernit appeared, coatless and with admonishing finger. If he wondered at the strange tableau he gave no sign. "Silence, if you please. M'sieu Sefton sleeps soundly. A decided turn for the better. It is so."

"So I was trying to assure Miss Sefton," said Steller. "Your other patient seems to have improved vastly too."

For the first time, apparently, Vernit noted the distant pajama-clad figure of Carteret. "Is it so? Ah, incorrigible! To bed, m'sieu; my orders must be obeyed. You may all retire without further anxiety. For the first time I say with assurance that M'sieu Sefton may recover. I think it is

that the worst is over. But yes, the disease is checked."

Carteret caught a muffled sob as though the girl were crying with sheer relief. Steller slapped Vernit on the shoulder and gave tongue to hushed praise and pleasure. At length Miss Sefton closed her door, Vernit returned to the sick room, and Carteret slid back to bed.

Steller found him propped on an elbow, the door open. As he lay he commanded the corridor.

"It is very good of you," said Steller, lounging in the doorway, "to appoint yourself a watchman, Mr. Carteret, especially at such jeopardy to your life. I must thank you."

"Oh, not at all, Mr. Smith; delighted to be of any service, you know. Sorry if I disturbed you; I thought you were asleep long ago."

"You find difficulty in sleeping too?"

"Yes, it's so beastly hot. Leave the door open, will you? It'll make a draft."

Steller lingered. "Are burglars common here?"

"Common enough—though all of them mayn't call themselves that. And then those fellows that held me up; I thought they might have followed me here and considered the crib worth cracking."

"A valuable, if enforced, guest. I'm sorry you'll be leaving in the morning."

"I'm not so sure of that."

"But I am. You really mustn't be taxed like this. Good night, Mr. Carteret."

"Good night, Mr. Smith. You won't forget about the door? Thanks."

And so behind the mosquito net Carteret kept his vigil, dividing his attention between corridor and window, until the moon died and morning came with a red rush. Then he closed his door but not his eyes.

CHAPTER IX.

PLANS.

SEFTON was better; there was no question of that. The disease had been definitely checked and the swelling was abating. Decidedly the Red King's antidote, external and internal, was doing all that the sacred snake had promised. It was good magic, well worth the money paid.

Beryl sat beside the bed and helped him to breakfast. Steller was having his alone, and Vernit was in dressing Carteret's arm. She had spent a sleepless night and looked it; like Carteret, she had had much to keep her awake. Steller was troubling her, this new and unwelcome attitude of his. She didn't know what to think, and she didn't wish to annoy her father. A far more experienced girl would have found the situation difficult to cope with.

"Vernit's a wonderful man," said Sefton. "I'm on the mend and no mistake. You'll soon have to think about going back home, girlie."

"But I am home. You're going to stay here, aren't you?"

"Permanently? Not much! If I've stayed here at all it wasn't for love of the place. Yes, of course I told you otherwise; I didn't want you to know the sort of hole it was. Steller explained about the concession? Well, once it's been put safely through I'll vamose pronto. We'll be rich, girlie, and have a real home—say, Riverside Drive. How does that strike you? You'll have what your poor mother hadn't—all the luxury you want. Meanwhile you'll be putting in a few good licks at a first-class school."

"Nonsense," she laughed. "I'm eighteen."

"Are you really? Well, it doesn't matter; we're never too old to learn, and you'll get the education I always wanted you to have. You'll go to Vassar——"

"No, please. Auntie taught me a great deal and I'm not the ignoramus you seem to think. And, anyway, my place is with you. I'm never going to leave you again, that is un-unless you don't want me."

Sefton's gnarled, half-paralyzed and still bloated fingers groped for her hand. "I guess you'll never know how badly I've wanted you. But, even if it's a bit late, I want to give you all you've been deprived of."

"All I've been deprived of is your company, father. I never minded the other things. I've been brought up to do without much."

"I should say you had! I never quite realized it before. I've always been slipshod in money matters, and I tried to send what I could."

"Oh, I didn't mean that! You mustn't think I did. We always had as much as we really needed. I mean I didn't mind about not going to theaters and dances and all that. My life with auntie was really very happy. I don't want to go to college or

boarding school; somehow I feel past all that, older in ways than I may seem. And I don't want any riotous time; I just want you, father. And besides you haven't got the concession yet, so we needn't be building air castles. And, anyway, I don't want one that doesn't contain you."

Sefton was deeply moved; in spite of his prolonged absences this girl's love for him held true as the needle to the pole. Yet such a gratifying affection may have its awkward aspects.

"Well, think it over," he said at length. "I only want to please you. You needn't worry about the concession; it's as good as secured and you'll never have to think about money again. You thought your old dad was a failure, eh? Oh, yes, you must have. Well, he isn't; it's been a mighty long time coming my way but it's come at last. The rolling stone has gathered quite a little moss, copy-book maxims to the contrary. You'll have money to burn, girlie! You can make a splurge."

He had become quite excited and she hadn't the heart to tell him how little such a proceeding appealed to her. One could really be happy on so little. Money wasn't the tremendous thing that her father and Steller evidently thought it. But perhaps they were right and she was wrong.

"But in any case," went on Sefton, "you can't stay here, no, not even in Picolet. It's a rotten little hole, full of fever and what not, and the sooner you're out of it the better."

"I'm not going without you, not under any circumstances."

Sefton considered. "Well, I'm going to sell this place—the lease, if anybody will buy it; for I don't own the land—and just as soon as I'm able to travel we'll go to the capital. I've stayed here too long, and you'll find Port-au-Prince a bit different. We can live at the hotel on the hill—that's the best—until this concession business is wound up. So long as you're here—— But, by the way, how did you happen to think about consulting Steller about coming down?"

"Why, it was the obvious thing to do."

"How do you mean obvious?"

"Well, there was no one else, no other friend I knew so well or who could advise me like that."

"And how well do you know him?" asked Sefton. "To my knowledge you met Steller only once, an introduction I couldn't avoid —not that I'd any reason for doing so."

"I met him again after that, just after you came back here from New York," explained the girl. "It was in Gloversville, quite by accident. He had been over in New Jersey on business. After that he called at the house whenever he was in town; he had some business connection in Gloversville. He was very kind and helpful in many ways."

"H'm! You never said anything about this in your letters, Beryl."

"Mr. Steller suggested that I shouldn't, father. He said that he didn't want you to think yourself under any obligation to him, and that I'd be sure to magnify what he'd done. He said you'd worry because you couldn't be there and that you'd possibly think us neglected. I didn't want to tell you all our little troubles when you'd such big ones of your own."

"Do you mean he loaned you money?"

"Oh, no; there was no necessity for that, and I shouldn't have accepted it. But—well, the landlord threatened to raise the rent extortionately and Mr. Steller used his influence to prevent that. Then we had trouble with the gas company, and there was a threatened lawsuit from a cheating grocer who, because we'd lost the receipt, thought he could make us pay a bill twice. And he probably would have if it hadn't been for Mr. Steller. There were many little things like that. Women seem to be imposed on if a man isn't around."

"H'm!" said Sefton again, and fell into a long thoughtful silence. He had not been unmindful of a certain constraint and even embarrassment in her manner. It was difficult to realize she had reached a marriageable age; and decidedly she had blossomed into a beauty. Florian Steller wasn't exactly the sort he would have selected for her husband, and yet, after all, why not? He had been ready to appoint him her virtual guardian, and certainly the little he knew of Steller's private life justified the selection. As for business—well, it was business, let people say what they liked; nor was one to believe all the tales one heard. If Steller had met his fate at this late day, and if Beryl loved him, it wasn't for him to play the Roman parent. However, time enough for all that, now that he was going to beat this infernal disease.

"There's something else I wanted to

speak about while we're alone," he said at length. "It's about this man Carteret. Yes, Steller was in here for a minute, just after Vernit left and before you came, and he told me. He seems to think that Carteret's faking to a great extent and has even fooled Vernit——"

"Yes, and that he's really here to find out about the concession."

"Exactly. Steller wanted me to send word for him to leave the house at once. But the point is this: I know Carteret in a sort of way, and hospitality is sacred. The farther you get away from civilization the more sacred it becomes. Steller doesn't seem to understand that. I simply couldn't turn a man out, especially under such circumstances, on mere suspicion. I think Steller's imagining things, and Tarling too. When you're after something big, like we are, you're apt to get windy and suspect everybody. Not that we can be too careful. But I know Carteret perhaps as well as Tarling does, and certainly better than Steller does. He has his failings but I don't think spying is one of them; and I don't believe he could fool Vernit if he wanted to. And that a man forces himself out of bed, because he thinks he hears burglars, doesn't prove that he's able to be up and about."

"No," agreed the girl without enthusiasm.

"You also think he's faking, eh? You think, like Steller, he didn't hear anything but was just starting to prowl round?"

"Oh, no." She wished to be scrupulously fair, but she did wish that this enforced guest hadn't made his presence more embarrassing by witnessing that incident last night. "There's no doubt he was badly hurt," she added.

"Bandits, eh?" mused Sefton. "Haven't heard of any in the hills; came over the line maybe. Well, you see how I'm placed; Carteret *may* be after the information, for all I know. I know very little about him. Naturally he wouldn't go to the length of carving himself up like that, but he could utilize the incident to play his own game. If he's faking, then out he goes neck and crop. On the other hand I don't want to do the unpardonable, and it shouldn't be more than a couple of days or so before he's able to be moved down. Naturally I'm dead anxious to know if he's fooling Vernit."

"And you think I could find out?"

"I do, if you don't mind. You could do it far better than any one else for he won't be on his guard. All I want to know is if he's really able to be up and about. You may say it's spying on a guest, but it's necessary under the circumstances. I can't do it myself, nor so well if I could. It's for the concession, Beryl, and I'll go by your considered opinion."

CHAPTER X.

A FRAUD DISCOVERED.

"WATCHMAN, what of the night?' And how are you feeling?"

Mackenzie had ridden up early before the day's work and found his way to Carteret's room unaided. Vernit had just finished dressing the wound and Carteret, in borrowed bath robe, his restricted ablutions.

"Personally, I'm in the pink, dear child," said Carteret as he lifted toothbrush and sponge from beside the basin of water and restored them to the duffel bag. "Better lock that door."

"Smith is out," said Mackenzie; but he locked the door. "I met him on the way up and he told me about Sefton being round the corner. He was on his way to pass the good news to Tarling. What's the matter?" For Vernit had raised his brows ironically.

"I've told doc about that paper I found," said Carteret. "You see the plot thickens. There's no question now about Sefton having been doped—and Smith's right name is Steller."

"Also it seems," added Vernit, "that M'sieu Steller is a pronounced blackguard."

"Unquestionably," nodded Carteret. "That's between us three and I've nothing to offer but my personal word for it. He's the Steller of Braunheim, Steller & Co.—if you've heard of them."

Mackenzie nodded and thumbed his lip, the only sign that he was profoundly astonished and interested. "They're thundering thieves, or were—if you can believe half you hear."

"I am in ignorance," said Doctor Vernit.

"They're glorified pawnbrokers, parasites, that's all," said Carteret. "There was a time when they were infinitely less respectable even than now. They deal in natural resources or values that others have created—timber, oil, copper—anything you like. They don't create anything, develop

anything, simply grab what they can, and in any way they dare, and sell out to the highest bidder. Concessions are their specialty and Steller is an expert at values. Though the junior partner, he's the real brains of the firm. They were run out of Alaska and a few other places. There isn't a slicker, more cold-blooded and unscrupulous boodler on two legs than Florian Steller, and he's had a hand in everything from gun running to I. D. B. You can take that from me, gentlemen. As a firm they've had more than one close shave from the Federal penitentiary, and as private individuals—well, Braunheim's old now, and his private life was always pretty decent. Steller's never was, though he kept it hidden. They're precisely the type of wolves that makes it so almighty difficult for any decent firm to get a concession in this country; the kind that plundered Alaska, the Transvaal, the Congo. They're worse than the old buccaneers, for they at least stole openly and in fair fight."

Mackenzie eyed him curiously; it was the longest speech he had ever heard from Carteret, and, though he spoke almost in a whisper, it was with an extraordinary earnestness, altogether different from his customary airy banter. Here at least was one subject on which he evidently felt very deeply indeed.

"How do you know he's Steller and that he's the same one?" asked Mackenzie.

Carteret was averse to giving the entire truth of the incident. "I heard Miss Sefton call him that last night; it was a momentary slip and they didn't know I could hear them. Ever since I met him his face has seemed familiar, and when I heard that name I was able to place him at once. It's no matter where or how I saw him before, and he doesn't know me."

"Then," said Mackenzie, "if Miss Sefton knows his real name her father must too."

"But that doesn't say they know the real Steller," replied Carteret. "I guess few people do. I'm speaking now of his private life."

"But if they connive at this masquerade?" said Mackenzie. "A man like Steller doesn't come here for his health. And, by the same token, Tarling has other interests than coffee. It goes without saying that he's also a party to the masquerade. The obvious answer, you would say, was a concession of some kind—only nobody but an ignorant fool would waste time and money trying to get one here."

"If it's a concession," said Carteret, "then Steller's coming here under an assumed name would be quite understandable, of course. He's the last person to open up the country, or anything like that, and I don't know anything that would promise him a big enough profit. Whatever it may be, I'm absolutely certain that Miss Sefton is acting in all honesty and according to orders."

"Assuredly," nodded Doctor Vernit.

"I would say it was all quite honest and proper," added Carteret, "if I didn't know Steller so well. And then there's the matter of Sefton. Are Tarling and he trying to kill Sefton, and, if so, why? It may be that Sefton has hit a big find—it's only something big that would take Steller's eye—and you know there's everything in the island from copper to kaolin. And though, as you say, Mac, nobody but a fool would believe they could get a decent concession from this government, they might from another one."

Mackenzie nodded and thumbed his lip anew. "And they want to gyp Sefton out of his share? It's a long way from swindling to murder, Larry, even granting your opinion of Steller. And would murder be necessary?"

Carteret shrugged. "I'm only guessing, of course. I'm trying not to let my opinion of Steller prejudice me, and I don't want it to prejudice you, but the interesting possibilities of this business have doubled overnight. It's no longer a case of a nonentity but of a notorious and unscrupulous schemer with money back of him. That Mr. Smith is Florian Steller makes a tremendous difference."

"And there is something in the wind at the capital," said Doctor Vernit. "I have nothing to do with politics—you know we mulattoes are classed with *blancs*—but I have caught an echo at this café or that. I say it to you in confidence. Always there is something in the wind, but this time it is——"

"I know," said Mackenzie. "And it didn't start yesterday."

He glanced at his watch and arose. "Meanwhile I've got to beat it. What's the program, Larry? You can't den up here for the winter."

"No, but for a couple of days more, anyway. I may find out something more defi-

nite by that time. Of course Steller will try to get me out but you can't buck a doctor's certificate. I'm still a mighty sick man, Mac."

"I had a shot at that paper when I went home," said Mackenzie, "but I might as well have tried to read the Rosetta Stone. However, I've been doing a little snooping round and learned that Tarling left the office at one, returned at three and left again at five. Those aren't his usual hours. My idea is that he was coming in here when he heard you and Vernit talking; then when he learned where you were going, he knew there was no use following you all the way. He would have had plenty of time to reach that spot after five."

At length Mackenzie left, saying he would be up again during the noon siesta, and Doctor Vernit returned to Sefton's room. Shortly afterward there was a knock, and Carteret had only time to stretch out in a chair before Beryl Sefton entered.

She had keyed herself up for this interview and there was a splash of color in her cheek; it was a very distasteful business all round, more embarrassing than her father knew, but she must do what she could to help.

"Good morning," she said, forcing a conventional smile. "I hope you are feeling better."

Carteret's natural impulse had been to arise and he checked it only in time. His wound, while it looked bad enough, was really a trivial affair to one of his constitution, and it came very hard to play the serious invalid. He was thankful it wasn't Steller who had caught him thus. He shouldn't have presumed on the other's absence but gone back to bed immediately as Vernit advised. But this girl was innocent, unsuspecting, and her visit opportune; he might be able to learn something from her.

"Yes," he replied in a weak but cheerful voice which he judged to be that of one manfully making light of serious hurts. "Of course I'm not supposed to be up, and I hope you won't tell Vernit. I thought half an hour by the window wouldn't do me any harm. It's cooler, and I'm sure I can lie just as quietly here as in bed."

He regretted an unshaven chin and the misfit bath robe. This girl was even prettier than when he had seen her last.

"Please don't go, Miss Sefton," he added, unaware that she had no serious intention of so doing. "Please give me the opportunity of apologizing for my beastly conduct in Bermuda. You will, won't you?"

"I—I don't think we need discuss that, Mr. Carteret." Her voice wasn't quite so impersonal as she had tried to make it. She was conscious of an interest, a something which had attracted her when first she saw this man at the Hamilton Hotel, and again here at the dock in spite of his condition. Of course he was perfectly odious, and she was here on serious business, not to be drawn into any reminiscences.

"Please give me the chance," he repeated. "You don't know how I've wanted it. When I found in the morning that you'd gone to St. George and met the boat—— And I couldn't get your address; I tried every way but it was no use. Let me apologize now for that night. You know I was intoxicated; that's no excuse, of course, but —but it seems to be the only thing I can do really well."

"Oh, you should be ashamed to say that! And it's nothing to joke about. Some people seem to think that by freely admitting their sins and vices it's just the same as if they hadn't any."

"I never admit any more than I have to," said Carteret. "But what's the use of trying to hide the obvious?"

"And that's all you can find to do? Have you ever tried hard labor?"

"Once, very nearly. Luckily the jury disagreed."

She smiled in spite of herself. She was forgetting about the information she sought; so was he. It was perfectly absurd, of course, but against her firm intention they were slipping back to the footing of those brief delightful Bermudian hours, hours that had taught nothing of each other's personal history but something of each other's personality.

"Can you ever be serious?" she asked, as she had asked more than once before. "I never know when to believe you—not that it's at all necessary."

"It is to me; very. Here I am your guest; you have heaped coals of fire on my head——"

"I had no choice, you see."

"No matter; it leaves me horribly in your debt. I'm not making a joke of my infirmity, but I'd rather you knew me for an occasional drunkard than a chronic cad. It's the absolute truth that I should never

have dreamed of—er—kissing you that night if I'd really known what I was doing. I—I don't mean that exactly—I mean, you know——"

"It is of no importance, Mr. Carteret, what you mean. We won't discuss it, if you please."

"But I must explain. You know that what I really meant was—well, I'm not sure that I really know myself. I mean I know what I mean but I can't put it in the proper words."

"Then so much the better for I don't wish to hear them."

"There! I knew I must have said the wrong thing. I generally do. Really I didn't mean to offend you."

"Offend? Nonsense! Why should I be offended?"

"I'm sure I don't know. But you are."

"I am not!"

"Well, you're angry, and I'm sure I didn't mean——"

"And I'm sure it isn't of the least importance what you mean or don't mean. And I'm *not* angry. I think I should know whether I am or not."

"But I mean you look so angry."

"I do not! I was never more—more composed in my life. To—to be angry with anybody you have to have some sort of interest, which I certainly haven't. I'm *not* angry, and I won't hear you say so!"

She turned to the door, bumped into the bamboo table and sent it flying. A glass of water shot over Carteret like a small geyser. He sprang to his feet, picked up the table and restored its contents.

She stood and watched him, very red in the face. "Sorry," she said perfunctorily. "You must think me very awkward."

"Not at all," he said, mopping himself. "Entirely my fault. If I hadn't made you so angry——"

"I wasn't angry! You've no right to keep repeating that. And—and that thing had no right to be there."

"Certainly not. Tables are beastly nuisances, always getting in the most unexpected places. I hope you're not hurt?"

"No, and I see you aren't either."

"Oh, no, thank you."

"No, and you never were, thank you."

"Eh?"

"I say you never were. You needn't keep smiling like that. You are a—a fraud; you've been pretending all along. You picked up that table—did everything—with that arm that's supposed to be useless. You aren't supposed to be able even to move. You've only been pretending. You're not badly wounded at all and you needn't attempt to deny it."

No, he needn't; useless now to seek chair or bed. He had given himself hopelessly away. He smiled faintly, looking from the table to the girl. A clever trap, the old, old snare? Well, who would have thought it?

"Congratulations," he murmured. "I'm afraid I'm a far poorer actor than you."

The color flared in her cheek under his gaze. "It was far less dishonorable than your conduct. You're hardly the one to criticize it." Then she laughed mockingly. "So you see I didn't knock over the table because I was angry. Yes, I came here for the purpose of finding out if you were shamming—and I've succeeded. You were able to fool Doctor Vernit but not me."

"Admirable," he murmured.

Her color mounted higher. "It is necessary sometimes to meet deceit with deceit, fraud with fraud. *You* are the deceitful one, the dishonorable one. You have abused my father's hospitality shamefully. But no doubt you were intoxicated again and didn't really know what you were doing."

"That last remark is hardly worthy of you."

"You are not qualified to judge. Perhaps you can explain then the real reason for your duplicity and deceit?"

Carteret bowed. "Why, surely it's self-evident."

"Why—what do you mean?"

"That I wished the opportunity of renewing and prolonging a delightful acquaintance."

She crimsoned. "And do you think I don't know the real reason? But I do, you see! Yes, I do. I know why you are here, and you needn't tell any more odious untruths. No, nor act them either!"

Steller appeared in the doorway.

CHAPTER XI.

CARTERET GOES AWAY.

"GOOD morning, Mr. Smith."

"Congratulations on your speedy recovery, Mr. Carteret. I have been able to gather the gist of this unpleasant matter. And now Miss Sefton, you may leave the

rest to me. In the absence of your father I shall see that this—er—gentleman quits the house at once."

"And if he doesn't?" murmured Carteret.

"Not because I know you are armed," replied Steller, "but because I must consider Mr. Sefton, I shall make no attempt to deal with you at the present time as you deserve. But if you refuse to leave the premises I shall send for the police and have you jailed like any other nuisance. You may take your choice."

"Thanks," smiled Carteret. "It's not a difficult one. I know the local jail, and discretion is the better part of valor. But I do think you're dealing pretty hardly with me, considering the circumstances. After all, what have I done? I admit imposing on Vernit, but consider the temptation. However, the path of true love never did run smooth, and I'm sure I apologize to Miss Sefton in all humbleness and contrition."

Miss Sefton, with burning cheeks, turned and almost ran from the room.

"Another insulting remark like that, sir," said Steller, "and I shall forget you are disabled."

"True love is never insulting, Mr. Smith," replied Carteret, shaking his head. "You have surprised my secret. Between ourselves, I met Miss Sefton some time ago and from that moment my fate was sealed. A chance meeting, all too brief, but which left an indelible impression on me, an unforgetable memory with me. It is no matter that she gave me absolutely no encouragement, that she doesn't return my affection and, no doubt, never will. After long waiting, fortune at last brought us together again, and is it any wonder I embraced the stratagem that opportunity offered? The treasurer of a hopeless passion is to be pitied, not derided, sir."

Steller was eying him sharply, curiously. "The object more so, perhaps. You knew that Mr. Sefton was her father?"

"Obviously. And I didn't know where she lived. I hoped, however, if I remained in the island long enough she would come on a visit. My hope has been justified, my patience rewarded."

"You're a bigger fool than I've taken you for, Mr. Carteret, if you think Miss Sefton would ever marry you. Why, what have you to offer her, offer any woman?"

"Myself!" exclaimed Carteret, tapping his breast.

"Yourself! Indeed. Not enough, my dear fellow; not enough by half. And you'd better understand here and now that I don't propose to have her annoyed further in this way."

"And your authority, Mr. Smith? Do I understand that you've the honor to be engaged to her?"

"You may understand what you like. It's enough for you to know that my authority is that of an old and privileged friend and that I intend to exercise it to the full. I mean to see that Miss Sefton isn't imposed on or annoyed further."

"Well, now, there we are at one," said Carteret. "I'm her friend also, and, I repeat, it makes no difference whether my affection is returned or not. Her happiness and welfare, that's all I wish. That's the sort of jasper I am. I should be extremely sorry for the person who caused her any hurt. I should indeed."

"The only way you can serve her happiness is by leaving this house as soon as you can," retorted Steller. "As for her welfare, Mr. Sefton and I are quite qualified to see to that without any assistance."

"Oh, undoubtedly, but so am I. And Mr. Sefton is ill, while I know conditions in this island perhaps better than you. It's a place where strange things can happen, Mr. Smith, and a white woman may need all the protection she can get. At any rate I want to assure you of my heartiest and most complete coöperation in her behalf. I am a man of peace by nature, but the person who happens to harm Miss Sefton will have to settle with me, quite apart from her father or anybody else. I just want to assure you of that truth, Mr. Smith, and to add that it will be a most thorough and satisfactory sort of settling—satisfactory from my point of view."

Steller seemed at loss to find a fitting reply.

"And now if you'll be so kind as to ask Doctor Vernit to come and help me dress, I'll remove my unwelcome presence, not because you order it but because Miss Sefton so obviously desires it."

Steller forced a smile. "You are quite an amusing character, Mr. Carteret; apparently a sort of modern Don Quixote who forces his chivalrous attentions in quarters where they are neither desired nor required.

However, I suppose you must have something to do to keep your mind off yourself. I'm sure I appreciate your most generous offer and only regret that I see no immediate prospect of availing myself of your inestimable services. I am sure when Mr. Sefton is able to be about again you'll hear more of this matter. Meanwhile——" He smiled again and left the room.

A remarkable situation, and, a very difficult one initially, it had now become more so. Of what use to tell Steller that he knew him of old when such information could serve no purpose but to put him further on his guard? As for telling Sefton, supposing he knew it even though his daughter didn't? It might well be that John Sefton was a scoundrel, no better than Steller or Tarling; indeed, the three being so intimate, it would appear to follow logically. It was this probability that made it impossible even now to take the girl into his confidence, even granting she were ready to believe him, which most obviously she was not. And what proof could he offer her? Merely his unsupported word. Was it likely then she would believe—or Sefton either, supposing he were ignorant—anything derogatory about Steller's private life? No, nor could he tell her. And what evidence was there that even if Tarling was trying to murder Sefton, Steller was party to it? What evidence was there about anything? How much was truth, how much suspicion and natural prejudice?

Carteret summed all this up to Vernit behind a locked door while the other was supposed to be helping him dress. "So you see how it is," he finished. "And even if we were dead certain about everything it would be useless, of course, to appeal to the law. Bobo is the law in Picolet and he's Tarling's friend. Besides there's no telling what he may know about all this. It's clear that for the present at least whatever is to be done must be done by us three, you and me and Mac. And though I have to get out, thanks to my stupidity, you remain. The question is how long can you stick it?"

Vernit shrugged and spread his plump hands. "There is nothing to take me back; I left a competent physician in charge. I think perhaps the real question is how long will I be permitted to remain here?"

"I see. Well, Steller was listening in the hall to my conversation with Miss Sefton; I knew he'd been there some time so I let him hear me admit that I'd imposed on you. Every doctor isn't a surgeon, and though you have the surpassing skill to cure Sefton you might be fooled about the seriousness of a wound, see?"

"Moreover and particularly as I didn't possess the skill to cure Sefton," smiled Doctor Vernit. "You have given me undeserved merit in the one case, and demerit in the other. Voilà! it is a fair exchange. For my part I shall admit being thoroughly hoodwinked, but they know we are old friends and the question is will they believe it?"

Carteret considered. "I guess maybe it would be better if you admitted the deception too. Yes, it would. You see the real reason for my wanting to remain here is that I'm supposed to have—er—an incurable and hopeless affection for Miss Sefton. I hated to bring her into the business, of course, but as I knew Steller was listening, and as she demanded some explanation, I hit on that. I think that at least it's got Steller guessing, and if you admit that I prevailed on you to help me for that reason, it will appear quite plausible. It had also the advantage of enabling me to convey a diplomatic warning to Steller. I hate to say this, doc, but you see what I'm most infernally worried about is this: I've got to tell it to you now." And he explained the incident of the previous night.

"Now," he continued, pacing the floor, "if Sefton knows Steller's real record in that respect—well, you see that the girl may need protection even from her own father. I mean that nobody but one ignorant of the real Steller, or a scoundrel, would have let her travel down here alone with him in the first place. If she was any other kind of girl—but she obviously isn't. She may be a pawn in whatever kind of game they're playing, a pawn that her father's willing to sacrifice."

"I don't think Sefton knew she was coming," said Vernit. "I get that impression, not that I really know."

"Well, maybe you're right. And, as I said before, it's precious few who know Steller's secret life. At any rate, doc, you've now got all the angles of the situation and you'll have to keep a double watch on Steller, though I think I've put a bit of a crimp in his plans for the time being. Do you think the job's too big for you?"

The little doctor shook his head and smiled, his eyes sparkling. "It is that I don't have many cases like this one. I'm enjoying myself finely. You may rely on me to hold the fort which, le bon Dieu willing, should be until Sefton is able to be about again."

"Well, you won't be holding it alone, doc; they can put me out but they can't stop me coming here. I can count on Mac too. Now you've got to tell Sefton that he was doped, though you mustn't mention anything about me getting the antidote. You're the only one who's supposed to know, and you haven't any suspicions, see? One man can't do all the watching, especially if he isn't supposed to be doing any at all, and Sefton will take precious good care to help you watch the food and all that. Leave it to him to make whatever publicity he thinks fit; he may not want to make any. Whether he's saint or sinner, Steller's and Tarling's open friend or secret enemy, it can't do any harm to tell him now, and it may do a lot of good. You understand everything?"

Vernit nodded.

"And don't forget Miss Sefton as a possible source of information," finished Carteret. "She may tell you what she certainly wouldn't tell me. But mind and step easy; she may be innocence itself but she's no fool. I've found that out." He smiled. "If it hadn't been for her I could have stuck here the rest of the week."

The duffel bag slung over his shoulder, Carteret shook hands with Vernit, unlocked the door and strode down the hall. His drill jacket had been cleaned and neatly mended, evidently by Mrs. Petit Beau, and in spite of his unshaven chin he looked remarkably spruce and spry. He walked, however, more briskly than his condition actually warranted, for his wound was severe enough and he had spent an anxious and sleepless night.

There was no sign of Steller or Miss Sefton and he hoped to leave the Villa Verd without seeing them again. He was feeling it quite a strain to mask his real attitude toward Steller; it took an effort to keep from striking that perpetual ironic smile from the other's lips. Also he was conscious that in his recent conversation with Miss Sefton he had not been influenced solely by the knowledge that Steller was eavesdropping. Quite apart from that he had found a distinct pleasure in saying what he knew must annoy her. He liked to make her angry, to see her cheeks crimson and her eyes snap. Why? He couldn't say; perhaps because of his own particular devil, or perhaps because it was in the nature of things for flint to strike sparks from steel. There was plenty of flint under his easy-going carelessness, a hard stubbornness that had cost him something in the past and might cost him more in the future. He knew that. And there was plenty of steel under Beryl Sefton's appealing softness. He knew that also. In memory he could feel the tingle of her hand as it met his cheek that night in Bermuda. Well, it was funny; he had really meant to apologize and eat very humble pie; he had really meant to heal the breach between them.

The door of Sefton's room opened and Steller appeared with his smile. "Leaving, Mr. Carteret? I hardly heard you. Just a moment, if you don't mind; Mr. Sefton wishes to speed the parting guest. He would like a word with you."

"Another time," said Carteret. "I'm sure he isn't well enough——"

"You'll find me too well perhaps," came Sefton's voice from the room. "Step in here, sir, if you please."

Carteret found Miss Sefton at the window, her father propped up in bed. He saw at a glance that the disease was indeed abating wonderfully; even so Sefton presented a grotesque and pathetic figure, a helpless mountain of bloated flesh.

His sunken eyes bored into Carteret, alive with suspicion and something that seemed more than normal anger. "This is nice neighborly conduct, young man," he exclaimed. "I would never have thought it, little as I really know you. Because you believe I'm at death's door you think it a fine opportunity to abuse my hospitality and force your attentions where they aren't wanted!"

The girl turned suddenly from the window, her eyes studiously avoiding Carteret. "He—he didn't force any attentions. Please, father, you mustn't get so excited."

"I'm not excited! But I'm not crocked yet and I know how to protect you from experiences of this sort. Attentions or not, it comes to the same thing. And now I tell you, Mr. Carteret, you'd better make yourself mighty scarce around here in future, if you know what's good for you. And while

I'm tied here to this infernal bed Mr. Smith has full authority to act for me, understand? If you think my home is at the mercy of every remittance man in this island, you're pretty well mistaken."

He waited as though expecting a reply, his eyes still on the other, but Carteret simply bowed and walked from the room.

"How—how will he get to town?" asked the girl after a silence. "I don't think he's really able to walk in this heat."

"Nonsense," smiled Steller. "He's quite able."

"Of course he is," growled Sefton. "No, you stay where you are, Beryl; you'll not be offering the stable for his convenience. Let him walk; he's the healthiest-looking invalid I ever saw and it'll do him good. You can't be considerate to that sort."

She turned to the window in silence.

"And now what truth is there in this alleged intimacy between you and him?" demanded her father. "What sort of affair was there, and why didn't you tell me you'd met him before? Yes, Mr. Steller has been telling me."

She flushed and looked reproachfully, even resentfully, at Steller. While she had told her father of Carteret's shamming, she had said nothing of what passed between them.

"I had to tell your father, Miss Beryl," said Steller gravely. "I had no choice. You see when you had gone, Mr. Carteret said some very—er—peculiar things."

"What did he say?" she demanded.

"Why, that he'd met you before and had received—well, encouragement. I put it mildly. He added that he knew you were coming here some day and that—well, you understand? Had he not been injured I should certainly have thrashed him."

"Come," said Sefton sternly, "where did you meet this man, Beryl? I suppose no girl is too young to flirt, but I certainly thought that you——"

"You've no right to say that." She had paled and now spoke quietly; but inwardly she was seething, hardly knowing whether to be more incensed with Carteret or Steller. "I never flirted with him, and if he said I ever gave him encouragement he told an untruth. I hardly knew him. I met him in Bermuda last winter. You know that aunt and I saved up and went down there for a few days. Mr. Carteret had the table next ours. I danced with him one night and that was all. And if I didn't write you anything about it it was because there was really nothing to write about. And if I didn't tell you of his—his preposterous remark about true love never running smooth, it was because I didn't want to annoy you unnecessarily. He—he didn't really mean anything, and he doesn't care for me at all. He has no right to, anyway."

"I'm sorry, Beryl; I didn't mean to pitch into you like that," said Sefton in a different tone. "My nerves are rotten and this thing has got me all upset. Of course I believe you, and I think the real truth of the matter is the concession. That's what he wanted to learn about, and when you caught him out he made the other thing an excuse. It's a threadbare one but only too often it goes down with women. I guess, Steller, your idea of this fellow was just about right."

"Oh, undoubtedly; Tarling's seldom wrong." But there was a speculative look, something more than speculative, in Steller's veiled eyes as he glanced at the girl by the window. "You agree, Miss Beryl?"

"There is no choice," she shrugged.

"Exactly," nodded Steller. "Yes, he was faking the unrequited affection too; quite a capable play-actor in his way. It's lucky for us, Sefton, that your daughter isn't so impressionable as she may appear. If he could have worked on her vanity and sympathy—I believe few women are indifferent to an alleged hopeless passion. Yes, he's a spy, free lance or hired, and we've to thank you, Miss Beryl, for his unmasking. That was a very clever trick with the table."

"Oh, so you heard that too?" She seemed about to add something, checked herself and turned again to the window, hands clenched.

Carteret, a white splash against the vivid green, was disappearing down the winding tree-flanked path. Out of view of the house, as he believed, his walk had become slower, his carriage less erect. The girl watched him, her hands still clenched, until a clump of mangoes hid him from sight.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WINDOW.

CARTERET sprawled in a cane chair at the corner of an open window, a pair of magnification X 12 Zeiss prisms at his eyes. The westering sun seeping through the split cane blinds cast thin golden bars

on the straw floor matting. The blind stopped short of the bottom of the window by a few inches and through this long narrow aperture Carteret was staring fixedly. The heat was stifling and he sat coatless and collarless, shirt wide open at the throat. A tall thin glass and an old bruyère pipe stood on a small table at his elbow. His sleeves were rolled high and his left arm was still bandaged.

Following his gaze with the naked eye one could see nothing but a rear oblique view of the little town as it straggled upward to the north, dense universal green of tree and bush and creeper, and beyond that again the frowning purple hills. But looking through the high-powered binoculars at the spot on which they were now trained, one could pick out clearly amid the green a small yellow-white square in which was framed a window.

Carteret's attention had been directed to that window, off and on, for the past hour; he was just out of bed for his forced march the previous day from the Villa Verd in the scalding sun, coupled with his condition, had resulted in a fever which he was only now shaking off. This was Mackenzie's bedroom in which he sat; the consular agent lived over his office and occupied the whole second floor. An aged negress came in by the day and he generally took most of his meals at the local club.

The door opened and Mackenzie, the day's work over, entered. "Hello," he exclaimed, "what's the bright idea?"

"It came to me when I was lying there," said Carteret, nodding at the bed. "I get an occasional one that's quite intelligent in a way. It occurred to me that possibly from the angle of this window—— Do you know that you can see the Villa Verd from here?"

"I do not, and you don't either."

"Take a squint," said Carteret, proffering the glasses. "You see between that cleft in the trees—no, not there. Let me show you. There, got it now? Well, that's the window of Sefton's room."

"By George, you're right!" said Mackenzie. "I never would have thought it. These are some prisms of yours, and that little hiatus in the scenery seems to have been made for this window. A brain wave, my son, but what's the blooming use of it? It is true that a princess resides in yonder ogre's castle, but simply to sit down and stare at it is very small satisfaction to my mind."

"You're more than ordinarily fat-headed to-day, Mac. The use is obvious; Vernit can communicate with us."

"Get out! Do you mean to say he's going to stand at that window and make signals which you'll be able to see, even if nobody else should happen to? Why, that window isn't as big as a postage stamp even through this glass."

"There are signals and signals, thick one. For instance, Vernit could work the window blind; there would be no trouble seeing that, and even Sefton himself wouldn't suspect. And at night it would do too, for there's always a light in the upper hall, even when Sefton's is out, and the door's on a line with the window. We don't need any elaborate code; the only thing we really want to know is if anything unusual is up or Vernit needs us in a hurry, see?"

"Verily," nodded Mackenzie, and patted Carteret's head. "I'll admit there's something there besides bone, though few would guess it. Not a bad idea at all; anything that tends to save me a hike up that infernal hill is distinctly valuable."

"You've only been up there once."

"Once is enough. And, as I told you, friend Steller clearly doubted you'd any fever and that I wanted quinine from Vernit. I'd hate to have his nasty suspicious mind. And what other excuse have I? I can't pretend to be in love with the princess too—my face is against that—and Sefton doesn't need any more inquiries made about him. Moreover, mooching about that place in the dark, waiting for a maiden's call of distress or a murderer's war whoop, and then bribing the sentries when you sneak home, is not my idea of a festive evening. For one thing it's too gosh-darned expensive."

"Ah, the Scotch blood again. Well, I'll be on the job to-night, Mac, and henceforward."

"The Harry you will! You're not fit and there's no necessity."

"I am, and there is."

They wrangled happily in their customary manner.

"Shut up," said Carteret. "You've your day's work to do, I nothing. I suppose by this time Vernit has told Sefton the truth about his fake beriberi. I wonder what he

said. I'll have to manage somehow to see Vernit to-night."

Mackenzie was looking at several sheets of paper on the table; they were scribbled over with figures and words. It was the result of Carteret's abortive efforts to solve the cryptogram.

"Nothing doing?" queried Mackenzie. "I thought you were supposed to be a whale at this sort of thing; at least you were willing to admit it."

"If you knew anything at all about it," said Carteret, "you wouldn't expect miracles even from me. I've made some headway even though you mayn't notice it. It's not the usual sort of commercial code; I mean those figures don't stand for words in a code book. And the law of frequency or recurrence, applicable to most cryptograms, doesn't work here either. It's what I thought—there's a key phrase."

"Meaning exactly?"

"One, of course, that contains all the letters of the alphabet, or all but those seldom used. You know the idea? Well, I'll show you. Let us take, say, the word 'peripatetic.' You see, of course, that the lowest figure on this paper is one, the highest nine, and that there are many with a period or decimal point after them."

"Those may stand then for numbers above nine, seeing, as I'm led to believe, that there are twenty-six letters in the alphabet?"

"Sure," nodded Carteret. "Now if we number the letters in 'peripatetic' from one to nine, you see that P is represented by one and five; I, by four and one with a period; T, by seven and nine; E, by two and eight. It's obvious then that the one letter may have three or four different numbers, according to the length of the key, and that they can be jumbled up in a way that defies the usual law of frequency. And, of course, you could make up and agree on any phrase you liked."

"Then the darned thing's impossible to solve?"

"No, it's not, Mac; there are mighty few, if any, specimens of secret writing that the expert can't solve sooner or later, though I don't claim to be an expert or that I can solve this one. But I'll keep at it and I may stumble on the key, not that I really expect any nourishment out of it."

Tea was announced and served in the front room by the open windows that commanded an oblique view of the little bay. There hung a pall of smoke to the south and under it steamed four vessels in line ahead, their soiled white paint glistening against the violet sea. With the exception of the armed presidential yacht, *Presidente Antoine Simon,* it was the entire navy of the Black Republic, and a large and appreciative audience had gathered at the water front to watch it pass. The van was led by the *Umbria,* a venerable light cruiser of some two thousand tons with a main battery of four six-inch guns, bought the previous year from Italy; then came the *Capois la Mort* and *Alexandre Petion,* three-hundred-ton gunboats, and finally the converted yacht *Ferrier,* also bought the previous year. The navy obviously was returning to the capital from Jacmel; its maneuvers never took it farther south than that port, nor farther north than Cap Haitien. And though the *blanc* might be hated and mistrusted, the valuable navy was commanded by a Britisher by the name of Armstrong.

"By George!" said Carteret as the big square-rigged yacht rounded the southern horn of the bay, "the *Ferrier* brings up old memories. She was the *American,* you know, owned by a man called Watts. Or was it Watt? The last time I saw her before coming here she was lying up for the winter in the Hudson. Hearken to the plaudits of the populace!"

"You'd think the North Atlantic Battle Squadron was passing," said Mackenzie. "Yes, and you couldn't convince Bobo or the rest of 'em that those four old tin cans couldn't lick any fleet in the world if once they deigned to put their mind seriously to the business. They've recovered characteristically from that German tragedy, the sinking of their pride and glory, the *Crête-à-Pierrot,* by Kaiser Willie's *Panther.*"

"No, they're not much to look at," agreed Carteret, "and yet, in this extraordinary country, you know their double value and just how important they are."

"Yes, the navy isn't so much for external foes as internal."

"Chiefly internal application, Mac—like a good cough mixture. No revolution can be successful without it; you may capture the capital, but so long as these ships command it with their guns, where are you? In the soup."

Mackenzie nodded and poured tea. "And though a successful revolution has also to

begin at the Cap, it may have its real start in the south."

Thus sight of the fleet reopened the subject that had been engaging them chiefly during the past twenty-four hours.

"The thing's a blooming puzzle," said Mackenzie. "Bobo may think himself another Toussaint L'Ouverture but he's nothing but an honest bonehead. You know that, Larry. Yes, he's honest and even more ignorant than the average general; and where does an honest boob get off in a game like this? He hasn't the national gift for intrigue, the politician's knack of raising the popular vote."

"No, but Steller has; and it isn't his first adventure in the spick countries. Bobo's only a figurehead, of course. But he's coal black—you can't deny that—and the present incumbent isn't. He's been treated shabbily by Delannes, given the order of the boot and farmed out down here among the goats after distinguished service. Those boodlers don't want him at the capital. No, he's not even a well-known figure, but I mean there's enough material that could be worked up by a skillful hand into the national hero effigy."

"True enough," agreed Mackenzie. "And though he's a dumb-bell, Bobo would be far better than Delannes. He's no boodler, and I guess there's no doubt he's a true patriot—maybe because he hasn't got enough brains to realize even yet that a true patriot, the world over, always gets it in the neck. I'm a true patriot, and look at the job I've got! And of course Bobo could be induced through his vanity to believe it his patriotic duty to oust Delannes. That part is understood easily enough. But Delannes and his party, Larry, aren't to be knocked out of the box by any busher like Bobo. If the present administration is rotten it's also mighty strong. And the navy——"

"There have been good Britishers in command of the tin cans," said Carteret, "but the present admiral of the fleet doesn't happen to be one of them. Armstrong's nothing but a mercenary adventurer. His coup helped to put Delannes where he is, and a man who's been bought once can be bought twice."

"Agreed without argument," said Mackenzie. "But the point is, not that Armstrong's incapable of serving Delannes as he served his other master, but that he wouldn't back a rank outsider like Bobo."

"He'd back anything if there was inducement enough."

"Agreed again. But why Bobo? Why should Steller and the black party throughout the island back such a busher? You know as well as I that there are half a dozen men who'd make infinitely better candidates, stand a far better chance of pulling the thing off."

Carteret nodded and filled his pipe. "That's one of the angles of the business that makes you think Bobo has got nothing to do with it and that we're all wrong in our guess. But how many unknowns have become presidents at home, Mac? Better not to be known at all than to be known adversely. And what's the use of a candidate if you can't control him? Supposing Steller's satisfied he can get from Bobo what he couldn't from any one else, not merely the promise of the concession but the knowledge that that promise would be kept to the letter? Anybody will make you promises here but how many will keep them? Now Bobo is honest, and nobody knows better than a crook just how valuable honesty is—in the other fellow. Better to try and put in power a man who you know will keep his pledges faithfully than an easier candidate who probably won't."

"Yes, there's something in that. But, devil take it, what *is* the concession and where is it? That's what I want to know. Obviously Bobo is convinced, or has been led to believe, that it'll be for the benefit of the country if he grants it; otherwise he wouldn't do so, even as the price of Steller's help. I think we're perfectly safe in saying that Bobo wouldn't want to be president at any such price. If Sefton has struck big copper or silver deposits, bigger than anybody ever thought was here, Bobo wouldn't hand over a thing like that. And yet Steller isn't the sort either to play for small stakes. I don't know; it beats me."

"Same here," agreed Carteret. "And yet we both know it must be something like that, and that Steller isn't the sort to back a fizzle. If I know anything about him, you can bet his plans were made down to the last detail and set running months ago. Of course Tarling and Sefton aren't his only friends; he'll have agents at the capital and the Cap. And his arrival here means that things are pretty nearly ready to be touched off. Everything has been kept far darker than the general run of such shows;

that, and Steller's complicity, proves it's not one of these night-blooming revolutionary flowers."

"But Sefton would never have a real show start with his daughter here," said Mackenzie. "Delannes mayn't have much of a following in Picolet, but all the same you know what it would mean. These beggars, poor devils, never know what they're fighting for; and I guess they don't care a great deal, so long as it means loot and license."

"Which should go to show," said Carteret, "that even if the fireworks are ready they'll have to wait till Sefton's better. I guess Sefton himself won't want to be here, any more than Steller, for fear of getting into trouble with Uncle Sam. They'll light out just before the crash and return when the dust has settled. That's generally the way. And Steller, you see, isn't supposed to be here at all. He'll know nothing about it, the innocent. Now does he want to kill Sefton so that he won't have to postpone the show? Yet why take such heroic measures?"

"Does he want to kill him at all?" countered Mackenzie. "We're talking, Larry, as if we knew everything when, as a matter of fact, we don't know a darned thing."

The sudden and unexpected entrance of Doctor Vernit put an end to the discussion for the time being. Vernit had made the excuse of coming to look at Carteret's arm and to learn if his fever had gone. No, they need not be alarmed about his leaving Sefton alone for, you see, Steller had left the Villa Verd. Yes, Monsieur Smith had departed a few hours ago on mule back for the capital, accompanied by a native guide. He was possessed of the necessary passport, stamped with the imposing blue seal of the communal council of Picolet, which, in the name of liberty, equality, and fraternity, permitted him to travel the highroad to the capital, and called upon the military and civil authorities to give him such aid and protection as he might require. He had gone on business connected with his firm, a pressing matter which, now that Sefton was so obviously better, he must attend to without further delay.

"Thus for my consumption," concluded Vernit, "but what he told Sefton, I don't know. They talked in private before he went. And he went with the full knowledge of the poisoning. Yes, I informed Sefton last evening. It was very interesting, as you shall hear."

CHAPTER XIII.

SEFTON LEARNS THE TRUTH.

WHATEVER Sefton may have heard during his residence in the island, or learned at firsthand, regarding the secret poisoning which formed so sinister a background to the whole life of the republic, it was clear he had never suspected for a moment the true nature of his illness. At Vernit's announcement he seemed unable to speak; his face went gray and, knees hunched up, he sat in a desolate sort of silence.

"How do you know?" he asked at length harshly.

Vernit shrugged. "Consider but one fact, m'sieu—your condition yesterday and today. If it had been genuine beriberi you would now be dead. One doesn't recover so quickly, if at all. It was the antidote, you see; the bath of the juice of herbs, the medicine. I have known cases such as yours cured completely in three days, but with you it will be longer."

"If you knew from the start——"

"But obviously I did not. It is most difficult to distinguish the true from the false. But when the usual treatment fails utterly—well, m'sieu, there is the alternative, though it is not every one who knows about it or the antidote."

"Nor who could get it if he did know. None, I guess, but a native doctor. It seems then that I owe you far more than I imagined."

"No, m'sieu," protested Vernit, "you don't. I do not deserve, nor wish to appropriate, the smallest amount of extra credit. That is not why I am acquainting you with the fact. It is for your own safety; what has been done once may be done twice."

Sefton nodded and was silent. And Vernit, describing it to Carteret and Mackenzie, declared he had never seen such eyes in any man; eyes of awakened suspicion, torturing doubt, haunting dread, devastating impotency. He lay there silent while these things fought for mastery and the sweat broke out on his brow. And Vernit waited, hoping that in this moment Sefton would reveal something. But Sefton didn't.

At length he looked at his bloated hands, raised them tentatively, let them drop on

the coverlet. "How long will it be before I'm able to use these and my legs?" he asked almost casually.

Vernit couldn't say. "Youth is no longer with you, and even before this unfortunate —er—accident, it is evident that your system was greatly run down. You have been neglecting your health, m'sieu; one cannot have health with prolonged worry and strain. There is no surer road to destruction."

Sefton stabbed him with an oblique glance. "I've had no worry outside business," he said shortly. "Wall Street's been through a hard time, you know, and my dividends have been cut. Nothing serious, but perhaps I've worried too much. I hope you aren't suggesting that I'll be half paralyzed like this for—for the rest of my life? Come, out with it; no shuffling. I was never yet afraid to hear the truth, and I must know the worst."

"The worst is that your complete recovery will be a matter of weeks instead of days," replied Vernit. "Cured you shall be, but it will be slow. That is my opinion, which is not infallible."

"I guess it's good enough for me," said Sefton. He was silent, then added: "Of course you know as well as I that this was no accident; I didn't poison myself, and stuff like that isn't lying round. I'd heard of such cases but never thought I'd fall a victim. I'd like mighty well to know where I got it."

"That," said Vernit, "is a problem. And half the solution, m'sieu, is knowing who would be likely to give it to you, though indeed it is a wise man who knows all his enemies. Yes, and friends."

Sefton digested this. "I haven't any enemies that I'm aware of, not in this country at least," he said at length. "The stuff would begin to act pretty soon, eh? Well, that seems to narrow down the field to my own household. I haven't been away—no, hold on; I lunched that day at the club."

"Alone?"

"No." Sefton, who had been talking as though thinking aloud, now bit off whatever he had been about to add. "The usual crowd," he said with a change of tone. "Kadry, Forsythe—fellows I hardly know. They stopped to pass a few words. No, it couldn't have been at the club. I came straight home and was taken down just before supper."

"And you had nothing to eat in the meantime?"

"No, not to eat. But I'd the usual sundowner and, before that, a peg of gin and ginger. That was just after I came home. It seems to put it up pretty stiff to the natives, eh? I've had no particular trouble with 'em, but you never know how you may offend some of their pet superstitions. Petit Beau's strong on voodoo, though being a Jamaican, obeah, of course, was his native religion. But since coming here he's taken to the worse cult, the kind of juju his ancestors made in a wattle hut beside the Congo and that's going on here to this day. Yes, it's the obvious thing a negro would do, not a white man. Where could a white man get the stuff even if he knew about it?"

Vernit had no answer, and Sefton went on: "From trying to kill your enemy by charms, it's only another step to getting something more potent. That's the difference between obeah and voodoo—and, of course, human sacrifice. I don't think the woman's in this; but Petit Beau belongs to the red sect and I spoke to him about some beastly orgies up in the hills that I got wind of—not that I could prove anything. You never can. But there's one of the witch doctors, an old rogue who styles himself Le Roi Rouge—you've heard of him perhaps?"

"The extravagant title seems familiar," admitted Vernit.

"It's not so extravagant," said Sefton. "You know the south, Jacmel and around here, is a hotbed of voodooism, and this old rascal's the head of it. And if my suspicions are correct, the sacrifices aren't confined to white cocks or black goats. It's no use saying that such things aren't done any more. Bobo's pure African and, ten to one, he's a votary, not that it makes much difference. The priests have the secret power, and even if I could prove that Le Roi Rouge gave this poison to Petit Beau for my express benefit, I could get no satisfaction from the government. Somebody might suffer but it wouldn't be Le Roi Rouge. He knows that. No, in a case like this it's best to rely on yourself."

"And," said Vernit, "one mustn't overlook the possibility that Petit Beau may have been acting for some one else."

Again Sefton gave him that oblique stabbing glance which the little doctor pretended not to see. "There can be no one

else, I tell you," he said sharply. "I haven't an enemy in Picolet."

He had raised his voice as though seeking to overwhelm in the Johnsonian manner a more redoubtable opponent than little Vernit. "No, it's that cursed negro," he said. "Maybe he was put up to it by his priest because he knew I'd spoken about those orgies."

"Then, if you're entirely satisfied on that head, let us have him in."

Sefton laughed harshly, angrily. "Do you think to get the truth out of a negro? You, of all people, should know better than that. Do you think he's going to implicate —— Oh, bosh! Why, he simply lies and lies, and what proof have you? You terrorize him maybe, but does that give you the truth either?"

Vernit shrugged. "And so you remain here, m'sieu, and wait obligingly until he succeeds the second time? Truly, not an agreeable form of suicide. I have watched successfully so far, and, as I told you, I can remain here until you're better; also, I have informed no one and I leave it to you what measures to take. But you see the difficulty? There is no longer doubt of your ultimate recovery—and you are able to eat. When food comes from the kitchen again—well, we must revive at least the old institution of king's taster. Unpleasant for the taster, but it's an imperative and elementary precaution."

"That's a good idea!" exclaimed Sefton. And, by Jove, I'll elect Petit Beau to the office!" He smiled grimly. "As for the rest, I'll think it over to-night. By the way, you'll find an automatic in that right-hand bureau drawer. Careful, it's loaded. Put it here under my pillow, will you? Thanks. I'm not so paralyzed that I can't make shift to pull trigger. If that fellow should sneak in here and try to dope my medicine, I'll scare him white. You needn't watch to-night, for I won't sleep a wink. I can't thank you for the watching you've done—for all you've done—but some day I'll be able to show my appreciation in the proper style."

The night passed without incident, and in the morning Sefton said he had made up his mind to make the matter public. "You're right, Vernit," he said. "There's nothing to be gained by secrecy, and it's too big a job for the two of us. Ask my daughter and Steller to come here."

"Steller?"

Sefton looked confused. "Did I say Steller? Funny how the mind works. I meant Mr. Smith, of course. He reminds me of a man by the name of Steller whom I used to know, and so sometimes I call him that in my mind. You know how it is."

"Oh, yes," said Vernit innocently. "The mind plays queer tricks, m'sieu."

Naturally the girl was astonished and horrified at the news of her father's poisoning, Steller incredulous and incensed, to all appearance. Was it possible to produce such a disease by artificial means? Vernit must be very clever to have detected it. What poison produced it and where could it be procured? What a diabolical proceeding! Who could have done it? And so on.

Sefton spoke of his suspicions concerning Petit Beau and of the futility of getting at the truth. "And it's only suspicion," he added. "I *may* have got it at the club. I may have an enemy there I know nothing about. We'll say nothing of this—but Petit Beau's going to eat everything I do, and eat it first."

"Well," said Steller, "you know these natives better than I. My idea would be a horsewhip or a gun. I don't like that fellow, Sefton, and didn't from the first. He looks a bad actor."

"You could at least discharge him, father," said Beryl. "Surely that's the easiest and safest thing to do?"

Sefton shook his head. "The woman would leave too, and help isn't easy to get. You can't swop horses when crossing a stream. Wait till I'm better. Besides I may be doing him a great injustice; I could dismiss no servant without conclusive evidence. There can't be a repetition of the attempt now, and I'll see how he acts when appointed to his new job."

Petit Beau acted as though he were innocence itself. Beryl and Vernit were there to watch, when Sefton's breakfast was brought in, and Steller returned later. Petit Beau displayed natural astonishment at Sefton's request but that was all.

"You mean, Massa John, foh me to go eat by you?" he asked incredulously.

"And first," said Sefton, a hand under his pillow. "A little something of everything. I've got the idea that the food will taste better if you eat it first. You'll sample it at every meal. Start in."

"Bah Jove, Massa John!" Petit Beau rolled his solitary yellow eye and grinned as though at a huge joke. Apparently he was far from being averse to humoring the whims of the sick, especially if it meant partaking of such excellent fare, and though he showed some excusable embarrassment at performing before the assembled company, he acquitted himself admirably in all respects. Indeed he seemed quite willing to finish Sefton's entire breakfast.

Such were the happenings at the Villa Verd from the time Carteret left the previous morning. "A remarkable situation," said Vernit, finishing his account. "And, of course, you see that Steller had the opportunity of warning Petit Beau of what was coming. But did he? At all events there won't be any more poisoning. I feel satisfied of that. It has all been dragged into the light of day. Which is not to say that other measures may not be tried in due course."

"And Sefton didn't show that he suspected anybody but Petit Beau?" asked Carteret. "No, he wouldn't at this stage, no matter what he thought. Well, we'll give it time to work in. I wonder what passed between him and Steller."

"Whatever it was, the result seems to have taken Steller to the capital," said Mackenzie. "I suppose we're justified in inferring—always granting that there's something in our idea—that Steller's gone to put back the clock, order 'em not to go ahead with the show till Sefton's on his legs again. Anyway, that guess is as good as another. You don't know how long he'll be away, doc?"

Vernit shrugged. There was much he didn't know, much that was puzzling, including Steller's attitude toward Miss Sefton. The girl seemed to be avoiding him, but Vernit was bound to say that during such occasions as they met, he could detect nothing remotely incorrect in Steller's attitude.

"When the cat is away, the mice will play—perhaps," said the little doctor. "Now that M'sieu Steller has gone, it may be that Sefton, if satisfied of my trustworthiness, will tell me something of interest. Of course I cannot force a confidence. And mam'selle, she has inquired concerning you, Carteret. Oh, but yes. Clearly it distressed her to learn of your fever. Ah, such duplicity and deception! It has occurred to me, are we treating her fairly in all this, I ask you?"

"But maybe it isn't deception," said Mackenzie. "Maybe Carteret's hopeless and chivalrous affection for the princess isn't such a fake after all. How about it, Larry?"

Carteret, rather red in the face, was understood to mumble something about Mackenzie's idiocy. "And where's the harm," he demanded of Vernit, "when she hates me like poison? Oh, yes, she does."

"All the same it's iniquitous to trifle with such sacred subjects as a maiden's affections," said Mackenzie, shaking his head. "I admit the impossibility of any one falling in love with you, but it would be funny—indeed, poetic justice—if you ended by being in dead earnest. It's been known to happen before this. However, we must pay the price of inquisitiveness and so you'd better hike up there in the morning; if the princess is in a relenting mood, and you work the invalid business properly, she may tell you something about this confounded concession. Wash your neck conscientiously, and I'll lend you an almost clean shirt."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE VAMPIRE GIRL.

HE found her seated on a grass mat on the top step of the veranda, pretending to read a book. She looked serene and fragrant as the early morning, and considerably cooler. Much too cool for a visiting penitent, he thought. But he was blithely ignorant, like Vernit, of what Steller had told her and her father the previous day. He was likewise unaware, nor could it have been inferred by the most optimistic and sanguine from her manner, that, from a window, she had seen him coming up the hill, and had chosen her place unerringly by instinct. We are told that instinct, not reason, rules the world. This man might be a spy and everything odious, but still——

"My father told you never to dare enter this house again."

"Therefore I'm not," replied Carteret, and sat down on the step below her. "I wouldn't think of disobeying him."

"It is evident you know Mr. Steller—no, of course, you don't know him."

"Did you say Steller?"

"A friend of my father," she said coldly,

longing to kick herself, and Carteret too. "We knew him in New York. I was thinking of him."

"Lucky beggar. I knew a Steller too—up in Alaska. I wonder if it could be the same."

"No, I'm sure it couldn't. I suppose Doctor Vernit told you that Mr. Smith was away?"

"He did."

"I thought so. And of course you're aware I've no means of forcibly removing you?"

"Yes, I'm aware of that too," admitted Carteret. "Circumstances appear to favor me unreservedly this morning.

"Of course *I* could go—but I won't. I refuse to be driven off my own doorstep."

"It would be cowardly," he agreed. "And what harm am I doing? An invalid, resting in the shade—surely you won't deny me that?"

"You're not an invalid, and—— But I won't talk to you. If I can't prevent you trespassing in this brazen manner, at least I don't have to speak to you. If you think, after your conduct yesterday—— But I'm not going to discuss it. I won't talk to you."

"Never mind; I'll talk to you."

"I won't allow you to. What were you going to say? More untruths, I suppose."

Carteret picked up the book. "Let us discuss a quite harmless subject, say, this great work 'Redemption' by that popular and highly gifted author Louise Lavender."

"You needn't sneer at it. Have you read it? Do you know anything about her?"

"Of course; everybody does. A prodigal and enthusiastic purveyor of sentimental tripe."

"What? Nothing of the sort! That shows your ignorance. Her books sell by the million."

"I don't doubt it. The uneducated masses——"

"*I'm* not uneducated, thank you." Beryl's eyes were snapping. "She's my favorite author, and—and I have a perfectly lovely letter from her. She's a great writer, a very great writer, and she has more wit and wisdom in her little finger—— But I'm not going to talk to you."

Carteret put down the book reverently. "Dear Louise Lavender," he said, patting it gently. "There really must be something good in you, after all, to have such a champion. Are you very angry with me, Miss Sefton? Forgive me; I had no idea you took dear Louise Lavender so seriously."

"That's right, make fun of her! I think you're perfectly o-odious. How like a man—or rather you—to criticize what you've never read and couldn't understand! Her books are full of poetry, of music, of inspiration—— But I'm not going to talk to you."

"I'd like to understand and appreciate stuff like that," said Carteret, looking into his hat. "I would really. I suppose you've got to be born with the taste."

She eyed him sharply but his face was serious, quite serious and rather sad. "No, you haven't," she said, mollified. "It can be cultivated, like all beautiful things."

"Like a thirst, for instance?"

"No, not like a thirst. If you insist on being——"

"I mean it takes time to cultivate beautiful things," he said hastily. "And when one has been knocking round like an old tin can——" He shrugged.

"And whose fault is that? Whose fault is it if you've gathered weeds instead of flowers?"

"You mean sown as well as gathered, don't you? My fault, of course; mine entirely. I've neglected my opportunities. I studied for a doctor but it didn't take. I had a vice, you see." He smiled sadly and shrugged again.

"I understand," she said in a low voice. "But the drink habit can be cured just the same as any other evil one."

"So the advertisements say," he nodded. "You buy some magic dope and drop it unseen into the victim's coffee, and in a day or so the most hopeless drunkard shies violently even at near beer. It's wonderful."

"I don't mean that at all. And you can't expect to conquer any evil if you approach it in that vein. It's all a question of will power, of environment, mental and spiritual outlook."

"Spirituous?" he suggested, but she didn't hear him.

Apparently she had read a great deal on the subject, and the old fascination, common to her sex, of reforming a young and not wholly bad-looking male sinner, was

strong within her. She talked earnestly, eloquently and sympathetically; it was just like a scene out of "Redemption," she thought, and, perhaps unconsciously, she borrowed freely from the distinguished Louise Lavender. She made a charming picture, and Carteret, bareheaded and leaning against the step, looked up at her with mute appreciation.

He clapped his hands softly as she finished. "I've heard many a spellbinder laying out John Barleycorn, Miss Sefton, but none to come up to you. Have you ever appeared on the Chautauqua circuit?"

Are—are you making fun of me, Mr. Carteret?"

"Why do you always think that? No, what you've said hits me in the right place; it goes straight home to mother. It's what I've often thought myself. It makes me *think*—and, believe me, it takes something powerful to do that."

"It's all here!" she exclaimed triumphantly, holding up the book. "Louise Lavender has expressed the same ideas, and far better than I can. Shall I read you some of it?"—eagerly.

Carteret shuffled his feet. "I'd far rather hear you, Miss Sefton. I no longer deny that Miss Lavender—that is, if she is a Miss——"

"Yes, she's not married. I'll show you her picture some time. I asked for her photo. You would know she was the author of such books—so dainty, sweet and noble looking. Now I'm going to read you some of the finest passages in 'Redemption.'"

And she did, with great feeling and expression, while Carteret gazed anew into his hat.

"Beautiful," he pronounced as she finished. "I know it's beautiful even though I mayn't be able to understand it all. Maybe I could with practice. I'm sure if you were to read to me some of Louise Lavender every day it would do me an immensity of good and I'd get to love and understand her like you."

"I knew you really couldn't help appreciating her," said Beryl happily. "It just shows you what prejudice does. And so, you see, as in this great story, the habit *can* be cured if only one goes about it in the right way. But you must have a purpose in life; that's the essential thing. Surely you're not going to knock around like an old tin can for the rest of your life? There's nothing to keep you from becoming what you set out to be, nothing to keep you back but yourself. The worst place for you is a place like this. What ever brought you to Haiti?"

"Well, one place is as good as another. I've a small independent income, you see, and living is cheap here."

"You had—had no particular reason for coming here?"

"None that would interest you."

She colored faintly and looked away. "H-how do you know it wouldn't?"

He shrugged for reply and a long silence followed.

"You should go back home," she said at length. "Go back to New York. You require a place where living is dear, not cheap; something to pull the best out of you, keep you up to the mark. Just like Rodney Armitage in 'Redemption.'"

"Maybe that's true, but popular fiction isn't real life. You know that things are bound to break out, sooner or later, for the chief characters. They haven't even silver linings to their clouds; no; they've eighteen-carat-gold ones. Rodney Armitage had the biggest incentive of all—somebody to care what became of him."

"And you—haven't?"

"I am a poor, friendless orphan."

"Not friendless; no one is quite that. There is Mr. Mackenzie; he's a friend, isn't he?"

"One of the best; the only one."

"No, not the only one. I—I——" She had begun impetuously, faltered, continued bravely: "I, too, care what becomes of you. I mean I wouldn't like to see you—any one—live for the worst instead of the best. Nobody likes to see a person ruin himself. If—if my friendship means anything to you, if it can help you in any way in the stern fight against this terrible evil habit, it is yours, Mr. Carteret, without the asking." That this was almost a verbatim report of part of the heroine's speech in one of "Redemption's" big scenes, did not detract from its value. One can read a favorite author so faithfully as to be unconscious subsequently of plagiarism; and Beryl's own heart, if not her own thought, was in the words.

"Thank you," said Carteret gravely. "Thank you very much. It's most generous

of you, especially after yesterday. You forgive me for what I said then?"

"Yes. I—I knew you didn't mean it, of course. Shall we talk of something else?"

They were still talking when, some time later, Doctor Vernit appeared for a moment. "I am sorry," he said with raised brows and lowered voice, "but your father has wakened, mam'selle. His window is open, you know, and it is that he objects to M'sieu Carteret occupying even the lowest step. Also he desires your presence."

From somewhere down in the little town a bell tolled the hour of noon, the tinny notes coming clearly on the still air. The heat haze had long since begun its daily dance. Noon, and she had been sitting there since ten! It had seemed minutes instead of hours. She sighed and arose.

"May I hope," said Carteret, "for another time when you won't talk to me?"

"Have I been talking? But if I hadn't decided to forgive you I shouldn't have uttered a word. No, I shouldn't, and you couldn't have made me."

He pointed to the red-and-yellow bloom of a tamarind tree some distance from the house. "That is a beautiful tree; it has no steps. I wonder if I happened to stroll up here later—surely your father wouldn't deny an invalid the shade of a lowly tree?"

"Shall I ask him?"

"Perhaps it would be better if I took his consent for granted. Do you like tamarind trees, Miss Sefton?"

"Sometimes. It all depends, Mr. Carteret."

"I do want to hear more of Louise Lavender," he said earnestly. "She does me an immensity of good."

"Well," said Mackenzie at lunch, "what did you find out?"

"She is very beautiful," said Carteret, "and most captivating. Eh? Oh, I am referring to the works of that gifted author Louise Lavender. You should read her, Mac; I mean have her read to you. You don't know what you've missed in life."

"Pah!" said Mackenzie. "Come alive. What did you find out about the concession?"

"Concession? Ah, yes; just so. Well, you see, I found out absolutely—er—nothing. Yes, I saw Miss Sefton, but somehow the subject of the concession didn't happen to crop up. Strange, wasn't it?"

"Pah!" said Mackenzie. "And you've been up there for over two blooming hours! What *did* happen to crop up? What on earth were you talking about all that time?"

"Many things; many very interesting things, Mac. Beautiful and captivating—Louise Lavender, I mean."

"Pah!" said Mackenzie. "If you can't do better than that I'll lend you no more shirts. There's an almost clean one absolutely wasted!"

Beryl Sefton was experiencing something of the same difficulty in explaining a misspent morning to her father. "But I couldn't remove him by main force, father. And—and so long as he insisted on remaining, I—well, I thought I could find out about the concession."

"And did you?"

"N-no. Somehow there was no opportunity."

"Did you expect him to admit his interest? You know very well there's nothing more for us to find out," snapped her father. "You know perfectly well that that's all he's after."

"No, I—I don't," said Beryl. "I mean—well, I think we've misjudged him; in fact I'm sure we have. I'm sure he knows nothing about the concession, and cares less."

"Then what did he come here for?"

She was reasonably sure of that also, but she didn't care to say, even to herself.

"Was he faking or was he not?" pursued Sefton inexorably. "Now there are only the two explanations; either he's after the concession or he's after you."

"Oh, no, not me, father. That's absurd."

"Then it's the concession, as I've always thought. If he dares to come here again, Beryl, you mustn't see him—even on the veranda. Understand?"

"Yes, father."

How fortunate he had said nothing about the tamarind tree! Now if her father had thought of forbidding her to see Mr. Carteret there—not that she really meant to keep the appointment. Why, she didn't know that there really had been one. But in case there should have been, if Mr. Carteret had gone away with such an absurd idea—well, she couldn't have him wait there. No, in common decency, she couldn't. At least it would do no harm to see if he was there; and then she could tell him very nicely but firmly that she couldn't

remain under any circumstances. That would be deceiving her father, even if he hadn't thought about the tree. No, she wouldn't remain more than a moment. And of course it would never do for her to be there first, to be found waiting as though she really expected him; that would give an entirely false impression. She could slip through the thick undergrowth and take a peep; not wait in hiding, of course, but merely see if he was there.

He was, and somebody else—a slim amber-hued figure with blue-black hair and vivid lips. A bold, bad, exotic creature; a horrible vampire type of woman. Her arms were twined about Carteret's neck, her small head thrown back, her dark eyes upraised to his. The soft murmur of her throaty voice came in passionate pleading.

Beryl stepped back, her cheeks crimson, and the heavy curtain of creepers again shut out the humiliating, unforgetable picture. Not even a white woman, but a mulatto, and almost at the very spot where he had arranged to meet her, Beryl! Such was his manner of whiling away the time. And against all reason she had even fancied, poor fool—— Oh, the shame of it! It was intolerable!

She blundered toward the house, her face now white and strained, unaware that Steller, leading her father's mule, was taking a converging course along the path. Steller's smile seemed to be in very good working order.

"What's the matter, Miss Beryl?" he asked with apparent concern as they met at the veranda. "What has happened?"

"Nothing. Why?"

"You look so fearfully upset."

"I have a headache. It's the heat."

"I'm so sorry. I thought that fellow Carteret might have taken advantage of my unavoidable absence to annoy you again."

"No. Why did you think that?"

"Because he's hanging round here. I glimpsed him as I came in—him and that Beauregard hussy."

"Who?"

"I believe that's her name—or one of them." Steller shook his head. "Her mother was a negro. I told you the fellow had gone native. Oh, it's common knowledge, and it's quite the usual thing here with a certain class of white. Not a story for your ears. But you may as well know now why, aside from all else, I didn't want him in the house. This Beauregard girl is only one of his affairs, and from what I saw she was evidently pleading—but we needn't discuss such a matter further. I'm glad he hasn't been at the house again."

"He was here this morning for a short time," she said with studied calm. "Oh, no, not in the house. I could hardly avoid the meeting. I hope he'll never come again."

"He'd better not," said Steller. "But I don't think he will, now that he knows I've returned. I think he saw me come in."

CHAPTER XV.

BIJOU.

CARTERET was thinking that Mackenzie had been right as usual; at least it would have been much easier to let Miss Kadry settle her own affairs. Not that she misinterpreted his knight-errantry, but that she had selected such a spot for demonstrating her appreciation. To her, however, it seemed an eminently fitting one, this secluded nook off the highroad. She had wished to see him alone, ever since he had returned to Picolet, and had followed him more than once with that purpose in view. If she did not appreciate Tarling's black eye, she appreciated Carteret's interest which led to it.

Carteret was sorry for her, sorry she had such a father and loved such another undesirable as Adolf Tarling. She had no legal claim on Kadry, of course, and he refused to recognize her, even repudiated her. But Picolet knew the truth, which went back to the days when he carried a pack. Of such parentage and upbringing she might have been anything, yet she was a good girl, far better than she was given credit for being. Kadry let her help about the club and called it charity—"The daughter of an old friend, m'sieu," he would explain, when necessary—and the price, apart from her really valuable help, was no embarrassing claims on her part. He called her Bijou Beauregard and she answered to it; but in private the town referred to her as Kadry.

It is quite possible that but for the advent of Tarling she would have married some mulatto and made him an excellent wife. It might appear a mystery what she saw in Tarling; but the fact remained that,

though obese and unbeautiful, he was a *blanc*. Such a fact produced an infinity of trouble in Haiti, it being the root cause of racial hatred. The average negress preferred a *blanc*, and, failing that pinnacle of achievement, anything not her own color. This preference the black male quite naturally resented. And what applied to the negress, applied equally to the mulatto woman. There were many citizens of her own color whom Bijou ignored for the sake of Adolf Tarling. Being undeniably good to look upon there were undoubtedly other *blancs* to seek her favor, yet Tarling alone had succceeded. Picolet might refuse to believe this, yet it was so. And as it was by no means his first conquest, it is to be presumed that Tarling was not without a certain fascination of his own when he chose to exert it. Also, he had received the support of Kadry where others had failed.

Carteret was no censor of morals, and to his mind the unpardonable feature about it all was the promise of marriage. That was what had induced him to black Tarling's eye. The girl was a simple, primitive soul and actually believed that Tarling meant to make her his wife. Hadn't he sworn to? It wasn't mere ambition in her case; a wife, of whatever status, meant the real kind of love. But Tarling hadn't taken her to be mistress of his handsome villa; instead he seemed to be avoiding her. Carteret had found her in tears one day and learned her story. He had left for the hills, following his muscular interview with Tarling, and, since his return to Picolet, he had not been anxious to see her. And now——

It was embarrassing; he could not tell her that he hoped soon to meet Miss Sefton near that distant tamarind; nor could he send the girl away without a word. She had followed him like a dog, and this faith of hers in him was touching if, at present, exasperating. Why did she believe he had the power to work miracles? Assuredly nobody else did. Perhaps because he was the only *blanc* who had offered sympathy and understanding in her trouble. And what could he tell her now? What can you do with a swine but kick him?

"Yes, I've been dodging you, Bijou," he said. "I didn't like to tell you the truth if there was a chance of your learning it any other way. But it seems you haven't. Now you'd better have it straight from the shoulder: The result of that talk of mine with Tarling was just what I expected; he said there never was any question of marriage, and he told me to darn' well mind my own business."

"Did not say I was to be his wife!" she exclaimed slowly, opening smoky brown eyes and wringing her brown hands. "Surely—surely he did not deny his oath? Oh, but, m'sieu, I say again it is God's own sweet truth——"

"Not to him; it was quite bitter. I don't doubt you, Bijou, but the point is you've no proof. And in dealing with a gentleman like that you must have proof if nothing else."

"He does not wish to take me to wife," said the girl tonelessly to the trees.

"And never did," said Carteret, determined, now that the knife was in, to make the operation complete. "He laughed at the idea. Don't you understand even yet? He's a swine; you aren't the first, Bijou, nor the last. He was never worth a single one of your smiles nor tears. Cut him out; forget him. That's the only thing."

Mere words, as he knew, but one must say something.

"He laughs at—*me!*" she exclaimed, her eyes flaming as she pointed a slim finger at her heaving bosom. "I am not a black, to be treated thus!"

Her mood changed as swiftly and it was here that she began to plead in the passionate abandoned manner of her kind. M'sieu could make Tarling keep his oath; he could make him love her again. Oh, but he could. For a time Tarling had been much nicer to her since m'sieu had talked with him. Look you, Tarling was afraid of m'sieu; m'sieu had a way with him. She would not say a word if he struck Tarling on the other eye; it was for the good of his soul. Look you, she didn't expect the impossible; she didn't expect now to be mistress of the villa nor anything Tarling owned; nothing he owned but himself. See, a wife he would not abandon, sail off beyond the horizon some day and leave. He could have another wife, a real *blanc*, if he chose. She would not ask the church marriage if Tarling didn't think her worth one hundred dollars. Perchance that was it, eh, m'sieu? He thought so much, so very much of the gold. Well, what are mere forms, I ask you? A nominal wife, that was all; a nominal wife, such as usage sanc-

tioned, the offspring of which the law acknowledged. Please, please, m'sieu. Tarling might be all that m'sieu named him, but that did not alter the fact that she loved him dearer than life itself. A nominal wife, a tangible hold on him; she did not want to lose him utterly. Please, please, m'sieu.

Her reasoning was as naïve as her morals and actions. Carteret was conscious of a certain mordant humor in the situation as he gently broke the amber strangle hold and glimpsed Steller stealing on among the trees.

"I don't see what I can do, Bijou," he said. "I'm not his mother, you know. I might black his other eye for him but that wouldn't be any use. I want to help you all I can but I haven't the magic influence over him you seem to think. I wish I could make you see that you'd be getting off mighty lucky not to be his wife. Your father's really the only one——"

"Oh, no, no! As I tell you, he knows nothing whatever. Oh, not for anything, m'sieu! Ie thinks me, oh, so good a girl."

Yes, she believed that Kadry knew nothing about it. There seemed no limit to her belief. That was the pity of it; so trusting, so credulous, so ignorant. She could neither read nor write.

"And you *are* a good girl," said Carteret. "Don't go getting the idea you're not. The trouble is you're a bit too good for this climate. Now run along home and don't cry any more; we'll see what can be done."

"Oh, m'sieu——" He had difficulty restraining a further demonstration of her ardent appreciation. She smiled at him through her tears, entirely confident of his ability to arrange everything satisfactorily.

"Oh, but m'sieu is kind to me, a poor girl!" she said. "May God reward you, m'sieu. And I, I give you something, a small token. Yes. It is not much, it is all I have, but it is good."

She fished in the bosom of her print dress, brought out a small round piece of metal and pressed it into Carteret's hand. It was about the size of a twenty-five-cent piece, worn and battered, tarnished to the color of rusty black. On one side it bore some vague vertical and horizonal lines that imagination might picture as the ruins of some old temple; on the other, the ancient cross of swastika.

"A luck piece, m'sieu," she said. "It is good." Apparently to her reasoning it was good because it had brought her his help. Characteristically she ignored the fact of being in need of that help.

"No," said Carteret, "I can't take it, Bijou. It's very kind of you——"

"But you must, m'sieu. I know it is not worthy of what you have done, and are going to do, for my poor affairs, but it is all I have, and it is good. Please, please, m'sieu. A luck piece. Please to accept it from Bijou."

"Well, if you put it that way—let us hope it will bring both of us luck. Thank you very much. Where did you get it?"

She nodded in the direction of the Villa Verd. "Petit Beau, m'sieu. A luck piece; it is good."

An unlucky piece, to be more correct, thought Carteret when at length he was alone. He rubbed it on his sleeve, dropped it into his pocket. Evidently Petit Beau had been vain enough to aspire at one time to the favor of Bijou; perhaps he still aspired. If so, then the luck piece had brought him no luck. No, nor to the girl. No, nor to himself. Steller had seen him and, of course, would lose no time reporting the incident to Miss Sefton. Useless now to expect her; still he would wait. There might be a chance. If she didn't come should he go to the house and precipitate the long-deferred row with Steller? No, that would be idiocy; it would ruin everything.

At the end of half an hour Carteret abandoned his vigil, and, his spirits sinking with the sun, took the road to Picolet. The Big Fool—truly a fitting name. Bijou had queered him, no doubt of that. Just when he had succeeded in making his peace with Miss Sefton. Why couldn't he mind his own business? Perhaps she had even seen that strangle hold of Bijou's. It would be hard to explain that. And as Mackenzie had known the cause of his row with Tarling, no doubt the town knew also and had its own pleasant opinion of the matter. Oho, two *blancs* fighting for the favor of a nameless mulatto! An enjoyable and not uncommon spectacle. A nice tale for Steller to tell Beryl Sefton.

Hang Bijou!—or, rather, damn Tarling! Yes, and Kadry too. No, it wasn't Bijou's fault. But the little fool believed he could work miracles, and he, the Big Fool, tried to. To get rid of her, because he was sorry for her, he had virtually promised anew his help. And what could he do? What could

anybody do? He hadn't even public opinion behind him; public opinion, such as it was in Picolet, shrugged and laughed and said charitably it was all the girl's own fault. An impossible situation. She didn't want money, damages; didn't want even Tarling's name. She wanted Tarling. And he didn't want her. He never wanted any one woman long.

A strange girl, strange compound of ignorance and superstition, dreamy romanticism, simple faith and trust. Yet there was another side to her character: "I am not a black, to be treated thus!" She had been almost awake then for a moment. Tarling might yet find that this time he had picked the wrong victim. West African blood, Syrian, a strain of perhaps most of the races of southern Europe. A queer compound, capable of anything.

"There's nothing I can do," said Carteret. "I'll keep out of it. I've made myself silly enough. She'll have to look out for herself."

Having thus decided, he turned into the club to see Kadry.

CHAPTER XVI.

KADRY GETS A WARNING.

EMANUEL KADRY had waxed plump with the passing years so that now in shape, as well as color, he bore a striking resemblance to an olive. A rotund, greasy, smiling man. A born money grubber, his bank account came from many questionable sources, not the least of which was the so-called club. He humbly styled himself steward but was owner, manager—everything. Apart from a more or less moribund membership committee there were really no officers; Kadry was the club, the club Kadry. He supplied an excellent table d'hôte and reputable enough diversions for such as wanted them; but Carteret, from distant Port-au-Prince, probably knew more of the man and place than Mackenzie, who lived in the same street.

He swung round from his desk with a formidable scowl as the door of the private room opened; then, as he recognized the daring intruder, the ready oath died on his lips and, almost automatically, he pulled down the top of the cheap Grand Rapids product.

"Pardon. I did not hear you knock, m'sieu." He affected the French mode of speech, appearance, bearing. The republic models itself on its great sister whom it sincerely admires and respects. One of Kadry's ambitions was to be taken for a French *aristo*. He vehemently disclaimed all connection with Syria. Another ambition was a villa on the Riviera. When he had squeezed the last out of Picolet he would end his days in luxury by the blue Mediterranean, forget this febrile hole, the peddler's pack, Bijou, her defunct mother—everything. It was the dream of his life, and that dream was now nearer realization by many years than once he had dared to think possible.

"No," agreed Carteret, "you didn't. I took the liberty of dispensing with that ceremony."

"A very great liberty indeed," pronounced Kadry, pulling his dyed Napoleon. "Even a steward is entitled to consideration, m'sieu. These are my private quarters. No one thinks of coming here without my express desire and invitation."

"Quite so," agreed Carteret again, and locked the door. "No, don't ring, and don't be alarmed. Merely a little quiet talk with you, Kadry, in strict privacy. Knowing the house and your habits, I was able to invite myself."

Kadry looked at him fixedly under the hanging lamp. His first impression was that this unwelcome visitor was intoxicated; but he had to dismiss that idea. He had seen Carteret intoxicated and knew the difference. He knew little of him except by local report which he entirely credited; it was pleasant and natural to believe the worst about every one. A dissolute, reckless fellow, this Carteret; an interfering trouble hunter and source of trouble to others. He had never approved of him. He could have pandered profitably, most profitably, to all his vices, but Carteret, when he came to Picolet, seldom patronized the club. Unfairly he bought his pleasures cheaply in the hills. What you call in your slang a cheap skate, m'sieu.

"This is strange behavior even from you, m'sieu," he said, stressing the old *aristo* pose. "I fail to understand what business you can have with me, or that demands such unpardonable procedure. As I say, even a steward——"

"You don't have to be so humble with me, Kadry. Not a bit of it. Be yourself. But it's not even to the owner of this she-

bang that I want to talk; it's to the father of a certain daughter."

"M'sieu is mistaken. I have no daughter. I had never the good fortune to be married."

"Drop it," said Carteret. "We'll get along faster if you don't believe that nickname of mine. I'm not all fool; there's a few sane spots—and you're one of them. I don't have to live in Picolet to know things. You don't believe it? Well, there's a house not a hundred miles from the Champ de Mars or the President's Palace —yes, Port-au-Prince. A yellow house with green blinds." He paused.

Kadry's eyes flickered. Then he shrugged. "If m'sieu prefers to believe all the evil gossip one may hear—well, let us say even that I have a daughter. A youthful error, perhaps. Have it as you will. M'sieu's interest is flattering. But what then? Bijou Beauregard, she is a good girl; although she has no claim on me I have done my duty by her; yes, and more. I deserve consideration. A girl of many qualities, m'sieu, and beautiful. Now if m'sieu thinks, and has come——"

"Don't finish it," said Carteret.

Kadry smiled, lifted his eyes, shrugged. "You prefer to think I know nothing either, though I do live in Picolet? I have never heard and know nothing of why you fight with M'sieu Tarling? Well, have it so too. N'importe. Have it so."

"Yes, we'll have it so because you don't know, Kadry. You think you know, and so may Tarling, but you don't. And if you did know you wouldn't believe it. But we've come to the point—Tarling and your daughter. What exactly do you propose to do about it?"

Kadry opened twinkling black eyes, spread plump hands. "Why, what is there to do? Bijou, she is a good girl; oh, very. M'sieu Tarling, he is an honorable man. If you are daring to suggest——"

"What was the price?"

"Eh?"

"I say what was the price, Kadry? How much were you paid—or promised?"

"Name of a pipe! A thousand devils! Does m'sieu dare——" Kadry launched out freely in a fine pseudo-Gallic frenzy, a really capable piece of acting. In the middle he choked and his quivering olive face changed its expression. The change was so abrupt as to be comical, though Kadry looked anything but that. He had suddenly run dry.

Carteret, apparently oblivious of the oratory, had taken the luck piece from his pocket; he had begun to toss it from hand to hand as though for want of something better to do while waiting patiently for Kadry to terminate his acting. Then the coin fell with a tinkle on the desk. Previous rubbing on Carteret's sleeve had removed the tarnish so that now it winked and twinkled in the lamplight like a yellow eye, an eye that seemed to mesmerize Kadry.

Carteret glanced up at the sudden silence. At length Kadry followed suit, his gaze lifting slowly from the desk. The eyes of the two met. The silence continued. Kadry moistened dry lips. Carteret smiled suddenly and restored the luck piece to his pocket.

"Notwithstanding the house I've mentioned, Kadry," he said, "your duty to your daughter doesn't include the right of barter and sale."

Apparently Emanuel Kadry could find nothing to say. His expression was a compromise between astonishment, perplexity, and fear.

"If you want to know what concern all this is of mine," pursued Carteret, "I must tell you that I'm not in love with your daughter nor ever likely to be. Nor is she in love with me. We are acquaintances, friends; that is all. And I confess that I don't know what you can do about the Tarling matter. Perhaps you may be able to arrive at some solution that is beyond me. You understand, Kadry?"

Kadry nodded like a toy mandarin.

"Your conception of a parent's duty and mine don't happen to agree," said Carteret. "You've got to treat Bijou a whole lot better than you've done, and you won't let her know anything of this conversation or take it out of her in any way. As you treat her, so will I treat you. Again you understand, Kadry?"

And again Kadry's head worked automatically.

"All right," said Carteret, and unlocked the door. "You'll do well to bear that in mind. I shan't warn you again. Fix it any way you like or can, but see to it that you act for once for your daughter's happiness and welfare instead of your own. The better you manage to arrange things

for her, the better you'll be arranging things for yourself. Remember that even such an honorable man as Tarling mayn't always be able to keep his part of a bargain; unforeseen difficulties happen to crop up in the best of plans. Perhaps you've been more trusting in this than in other matters. Good night."

It was not until after the door had closed that Emanuel Kadry emerged from his trance; then, bereft of an audience, he proceeded to comport himself in a manner very unlike that of an old French *aristo*. The servants trembled as they heard him walking the floor and blaspheming in several languages.

"Qui vive?" challenged a sentry in the moonless night.

The customary centimes failed to appease his curiosity or suddenly awakened sense of duty. True, they were instantly pocketed in the old facile manner, but the recipient explained with apologies that he must summon the officer of the guard. Carteret was inquiring into this new procedure when a lieutenant appeared with a lantern and a file of men.

Recognition was mutual. Once Carteret, with his customary genius for interfering, had extricated Lieutenant Petion from an awkward situation. A subordinate had robbed a market woman of the produce he had been left to guard, and was about to share the very welcome meal with his comrades on duty, when Petion appeared. Like a good soldier the lieutenant confiscated the meal as a matter of duty, and had the bad fortune to consume it entirely himself before his captain heard of the matter. The captain, justly pained at being so treated, declared that General Bobo himself should hear of such conduct. Bobo's predecessor had winked at such pilfering, always providing that the lion's share reached its proper destination, but Bobo frowned on all such procedure and, as an example, had several culprits shot. That was Bobo's idea of honesty, and thieving of all kinds had rapidly become one of the lost arts in Picolet. It had become such a serious offense, even at that time, that it might mean the arsenal wall for Petion. He was poor, as a matter of course, and therefore in no position to restore the meal or its equivalent. Carteret adjusted matters satisfactorily with the irate captain and the affair happily ended for all concerned—even for Carteret who was thankful that majors, colonels, and generals hadn't also learned of the matter.

He now found Lieutenant Petion covered all over with new importance and gold lace. The lieutenant regretted, et cetera, but new orders had been issued—had m'sieu not seen the notice?—that all citizens and inhabitants of Picolet must be within doors by seven. No, Carteret hadn't heard of it; he had been away all day. Well, n'importe; Lieutenant Petion knew m'sieu and had not forgotten a certain incident connected with a fowl and trimmings. He would take it on himself to permit m'sieu to depart homeward instead of jailward. But m'sieu must not stir abroad again. The order was strict; from seven until five, unless one had a special permit from General Bobo himself. No, Lieutenant Petion knew nothing about why this new order—or, rather, the strict enforcement of an old one—came into being. But m'sieu should do well to remain indoors of nights no matter what might happen. A word from a friend, m'sieu.

"Well," greeted Mackenzie, finishing a late tea as Carteret at length appeared, "I was beginning to think you'd been curfewed. Stayed for supper at the Villa Verd, eh? Then the clean shirt hasn't been wasted."

"Depends on how you look at it, Mac. But I've had neither grub nor information from the Seftons. However, I acquired this." And Carteret dropped the luck piece on the other's plate.

Mackenzie scratched his head. "Well, what do you call it?"

"A luck piece, my friend."

"Pah! I've no interest in such trash. Copper or brass; worth about a penny, I guess. If that's all you've got——"

"Don't you know gold when you see it, you dumb-bell?"

"Gold?"

"Yes. What's more, it's a doubloon of the seventeenth century. A real old Spanish-American doubloon, beloved of romance and piracy; the sort you read about. Kidd may have plundered a galleon for that. Gold is where you find it, Mac, as the old saying goes. I found that in Bijou Kadry's hand."

Mackenzie was examining the coin with a new interest which he tried dutifully to conceal. "I'm no numismatist," he grumbled.

"Yes, there's a date. Let's see; yes, 1687. Maybe you're right."

"There's no maybe about it. It's what I tell you; worth originally two pistoles or about sixteen dollars in our money."

"You're rich," said Mackenzie dryly. "You can afford to buy a shirt. Is robbing females a new pastime of yours? I fail to see why you appear so almighty elevated. Maybe you think this is from the treasure Kidd buried up in Tortuga?"

"No, nearer home, Mac. What about the Black Napoleon? Well, you may laugh; but that coin was given to Bijou by Petit Beau, and the Villa Verd stands today where Emperor Christophe's house stood a hundred years ago. A luck piece, yes; I'll call it that."

CHAPTER XVII.

TROUBLE ON THE WAY.

THERE was silence. At length Mackenzie said succinctly: "You're crazy, Larry."

"There's a reasonable doubt about that," replied Carteret, "but none whatever concerning my hunger." And he proceeded to eat.

"You're crazy," repeated Mackenzie, and began to walk the floor. "In the first place Christophe's treasure doesn't exist and never did. No more than Captain Kidd's. I don't believe it. It's only one of these silly buried-treasure yarns you hear everywhere, particularly here."

"Is it?" said Carteret amiably as he poured coffee. "Why is it then that nobody can visit the Citadel—yes, La Ferrière—without a permit that's mighty hard to get? Why are sentries still on guard in that rotten old pile whose stones and rusty guns aren't worth stealing even if they hadn't to be carted off that mountain? Because the government still believes the treasure to be buried there. It's not a legend that Christophe's fortune was estimated at anything from fifteen to fifty million dollars, and that when he committed suicide and the palace was looted, none of it was found. It existed, all right, and you know it. And as it hasn't been found, it's got to be somewhere. You certainly know that too."

Mackenzie grunted. He was familiar enough with the story and that last tragic scene in the Black Napoleon's life. Who wasn't? A great personality, this Christophe who had made himself emperor, this pure African black who hadn't even been born in Haiti but a neighboring English island. Born a slave, and died an emperor. Undoubtedly great, in a sense, despite his ignorance, utter despotism, and cruelty. One of the colorful figures of history. The stories about him were legion. The crumbling pile up north on Mont la Ferrière still testified to his driving force, will power, inhumanity, the ability to accomplish the seemingly impossible. Like all despots he had foreseen the day when his rule should be overthrown, and he had provided accordingly. That immense impregnable fortress had cost thirty thousand lives; every one of its stones, every one of its three hundred cannon, had been hauled up the two-thousand-foot mountain by man power. It was said he had found and robbed the hoard of the buccaneers, and what more logical than that the vast treasure was secreted in this great stronghold, meant to be his last refuge? Yet that treasure had never been found; and La Ferrière, after its terrible cost in blood and gold, had never served the purpose for which it had been intended. No, nor any other save as a monument of man's futility and folly. For when the revolt came at last, and Christophe's personal bodyguard turned against him, he went into the palace and blew out his brains.

"And it's not a legend," continued Carteret, "that such doubloons have turned up before. Ever hear of Bovard, the negro at the Cap? That was in Hippolyte's time, so it's not so long ago."

Mackenzie shook his head.

"Well," said Carteret, "this fellow Bovard walked into a gambling house and planked down some of these doubloons as a bet. He was charged with finding Christophe's treasure and he didn't deny it. Hippolyte tried in every way to coax the secret out of him, then had him tortured; but there was nothing doing. Finally he was released and followed secretly wherever he went; but nothing came of that either. The fellow eventually disappeared, I believe, and that was the end of it. But that's fact, Mac, not fiction; anybody up north will tell you the story. Because the treasure hasn't been found these hundred years and more only proves that there's been no intelligent or systematic search. Consider the country,

the people, their primitive methods. Like Micawber, they're always expecting and hoping it to turn up of itself; that's why they're still guarding the old Citadel."

"All right," said Mackenzie, "we'll grant that it does exist somewhere; but why the Villa Verd? There's no evidence that Christophe ever thought of having a place so far south as Picolet. Why should he? And it's only legend, not fact, that the house stood where Sefton's now stands. You can't get away from that."

"Maybe not," said Carteret, "but there's no smoke without fire. There's got to be truth before there's a lie. A legend doesn't come from nothing. I've been thinking about it a whole lot and, from what I've learned of Christophe's character, he wasn't the sort of bird to leave all his eggs in one nest. Let us use our imagination, our knowledge of his character, and certain facts. Supposing that instead of intending to shut himself up in the Citadel he gave himself the choice of coming south to another place; two strings to his bow, see? And with his fortune hidden both north and south. I don't say that a house ever stood on the site of the Villa Verd; there would be some record if there had. But supposing the foundation had been laid and part of the fortune with it? Then the revolt came and the thing was never finished."

"I'll say you've some imagination, Larry. Have you any idea how much even a million of these yellow boys weighs?"

"Sure. A little over twenty-three tons."

"Just so. And that load was carted all the way from Port-au-Prince over that goat track and those mountains——"

"Would it be as hard as carting those guns up Mont la Ferrière?"

"That isn't the point."

"No? Well, I'm not claiming that the whole treasure was shipped here."

"Well, we'll say even a million dollars, not doubloons. The point is, do you think that such a sum could be carted and hidden here without anybody getting on to it?"

"But wasn't the whole treasure hidden somewhere without anybody knowing?" retorted Carteret. "Of course somebody had to know besides Christophe, just as somebody had to know wherever its been hidden. He couldn't do the job all himself. But it would be typical of him to have the necessary sharers of the secret put out of the way in the approved style, once their work was done. It's a fact that even Christophe's wife and daughters, who managed to escape, didn't know the secret. He trusted no one. There's really no reason, Mac, considering the man and his methods, why the whole treasure couldn't have been buried anywhere and the secret kept. And it needn't have come over the mountains; it could have come by water. It could have been smuggled to Picolet in the building materials for his palace."

"Huh," grunted Mackenzie, still walking the floor, "I suppose it could. But there's absolutely no reason why you should jump to the conclusion that Petit Beau got that coin from Sefton and that it's part of the treasure. That's mere craziness."

"Imagination," corrected Carteret. "There's a difference. I've always said you never had any. Even if it's craziness doesn't it explain a whole lot? It's more understandable than a concession of any kind. And I haven't told you about Emanuel Kadry and the luck piece."

Carteret then proceeded to tell of his visit to the club, Mackenzie listening intently and with an interest he could no longer keep from showing.

"Bijou Kadry," continued Carteret, "doesn't know what that coin really is, and it may be that Petit Beau doesn't either. I didn't myself, not until I managed to rub some of the tarnish off. It was very badly discolored."

"But how did you know Kadry's connection with it? Or when you dropped the coin was it simply an accident?"

"Well, call it a lucky one, Mac. I don't know as much as he thinks I do—and I believed Tarling had squared him. I was doing a lot of figuring and guessing. Anyway, when he saw the coin and acted as he did, any fool would have tumbled to the truth. His price was the promise of a share in that treasure and he might as well have come out and said so."

"And you think such a character as Tarling would pay anything like that?"

"I said a promise, Mac; maybe Tarling means to keep it and maybe he doesn't. A lot can happen between receiving and paying. Kadry had to trust him. And Kadry may have had some knowledge of the secret too, enough to make him pretty dangerous; his complaisance about Bijou would sort of turn the balance, see? You can't tell. But there's no question that Tarling wanted the

girl, and you don't know his type if you think he'd balk at a price. He's precisely the same in that respect as Florian Steller, though his style's cruder. No trouble or expense is too much, no conduct too vile, for the attainment of their ends."

"You mean that Steller——"

Carteret nodded. "I told Vernit, and that's why I wanted particularly to stick around. Steller's all bad that way. I don't believe he's engaged to Miss Sefton, but if he is, it's only a trick in a game he couldn't play straight if he tried. She's merely one of his passing fancies; passing, but he'd wreck the world for it. You know the type. I needn't moralize, but we've all something to drag us down if we give it half a chance. Steller has the brains to be anything, and he might have been anything if it wasn't for his twin greeds—women and gold. They've made a proper mess of him."

"According to you it appears to be a nice situation all round," said Mackenzie. "Your idea then is this: Kadry thinks you know that the treasure is hidden in the Villa Verd, and that it all depends on his treatment of Bijou what use you'll make of that knowledge?"

"Uh-huh, something like that."

"But do you really imagine for a minute that Kadry, if he thinks you possess such knowledge, would believe that no matter how well he treated his daughter, you'd let him and his pals get away with the stuff? Why in thunder should you, especially for a girl like Bijou? Why, nobody but a fool would——"

"Well, isn't that what I'm supposed to be?" inquired Carteret blandly. "You've said so yourself often enough. I'm not worrying about what Kadry's thinking; he may think what he likes. Let him do the worrying. To my mind, he has very kindly solved the mystery of the concession and that's all that matters."

"Is it?" barked Mackenzie. "While we're gassing here, Kadry's been putting Steller and Tarling wise! You can bet your bottom dollar on that. Don't you realize that if there's anything in your crazy idea, your life isn't worth a curse?"

"Maybe it isn't anyway."

"Oh, the devil! I wish to God, Larry, I could distinguish between your infernal imagination and the cold truth!"

"They are one and the same, my boy, as all true genius is. I've an idea we won't be long proving it. Things are starting to move and I've merely given the ball a little extra shove. Steller's back from Port-au-Prince—and the old curfew order's being strictly enforced. A coincidence? Maybe. But a revolution is a necessary part of the game; it's bound up inextricably with Christophe's treasure."

"Why and how? You mean it's to be the war chest? But you know as well as I do that Bobo would never stand for that, never in the world."

"I know it. My imagination suggests quite a plausible solution of the apparently irreconcilable angles of the problem. No doubt yours does too. Anyway, revolutions are handy little things to have around; for instance, we may be disposed of by a stray bullet or some hilarious rebel, thus avoiding diplomatic complications and embarrassing inquiries."

"Did you say *we*, Larry?"

"I said we, Mac. Forgive me, but if my life isn't worth a curse, it follows as an axiom that yours isn't either. They know I'm fool enough to tell you everything. What would be the use of killing me and leaving you—or even Vernit? I imagine we're in for a few funerals."

"Oh, damn your imagination!" said Mackenzie cheerfully.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT THE VILLA VERD.

MEANWHILE events had been moving also at the Villa Verd. John Sefton had been doing a lot of thinking, perhaps more than he had ever done in his life. Seeds of suspicion had been sown and, following a private conversation with Steller, on the latter's return from the capital, they evidently came to flower.

Of all that went to that flowering, Beryl knew nothing. She had shut herself in her room, anxious to escape Steller's blandishments and her own thoughts. The headache she pleaded must have been a very severe one, for when she emerged some two hours later, her eyes testified to the truth that she had been crying long and violently.

Evidently both Steller and Doctor Vernit had gone out during her retirement, and she found her father in a very nervous and excited state, quite unlike anything she had ever seen. She carefully avoided the circle of lamplight near the bed, but he was

too engrossed with his own thoughts to notice her red and swollen eyes.

"Hasn't Vernit returned yet?" asked Sefton querulously.

"No, father. I didn't know he had gone. And there's no sign of tea. The servants seem to be out too. I should have been told. You shouldn't have been left here alone."

"No matter. They said you were lying down with a headache and I didn't want to disturb you. I don't want any tea. The servants haven't gone with my permission. I thought that the woman at least had more decency. But they're all alike. Gone to one of their infernal orgies, I suppose. It's just as well."

"Where did Doctor Vernit go?"

"To see Carteret."

She stiffened in the shadows. "He doesn't require any medical attention," she said coldly. "He's quite well. Doctor Vernit shouldn't have gone. He should know when he's being imposed on. I think he's stupid—I really do. Where did Mr. Steller go?"

Sefton shrugged. "Oh, to see Tarling, I suppose."

"What has happened, father? Something has upset you terribly. What is it? You must tell me."

"Perhaps I've no choice," said Sefton grimly. "It's about Steller. I'm only beginning to learn his true character. You understand I knew him only in a business way, and not very well at that. It has remained for Doctor Vernit to tell me more."

"But he never knew him."

"No, but there's somebody who does—Carteret."

"And y-you believe what *he* says?"

"In this case I can't afford not to."

"And when did he ever know Mr. Steller?"

"It doesn't matter. As you know, Beryl, I was very greatly astonished to learn of Steller's intimacy with you, and the more I've thought of it, the less I've liked it. I want you to tell me frankly—are you in love with him?"

She shook her head.

Sefton looked his relief. "Well, has he ever made love to you? This is a very serious matter, my girl, and I want your intimate and private opinion of him. Leave out the gratitude part and all that; kindness and consideration can be used as so many counters in an underhand game."

She was silent. It was hard, very hard, to give any support to the opinion of such a person as Carteret had proved himself to be.

"I want to know," said Sefton slowly, "that supposing I were dead, and you left here alone and unprotected, is Steller the sort of man you feel you could trust with the utmost confidence? Ask yourself that question and tell me the honest answer."

"No," she said suddenly and quietly, "he isn't. At first I felt that way about him, but since coming here—I don't know, father; it's hard to put in words. He never said anything until the night I arrived here, and again this evening. I didn't want to worry you, but now that you've opened the subject—I don't want to seem silly—but I'm becoming afraid of him."

"I understand; you don't have to explain. Vernit told me of that incident the other night. We've misjudged Carteret, and I owe him a great deal. Don't you understand? He never thought it was burglars—but he knew Steller."

She colored hotly. "You—you've no proof of that," she said at length. "It's merely what Mr. Carteret appears to have told Doctor Vernit. He could tell him anything, and Doctor Vernit would believe anything."

"You're wrong, Beryl. Carteret didn't want us to know, but Vernit——"

"Oh, of course! You seem to have become very confidential with Doctor Vernit, father, to believe whatever he and Mr. Carteret say. I wouldn't believe *inything* Mr. Carteret said. And he's in no position to criticize anybody. Mr. Steller may be bad, but he's worse. Yes, he is. Why should you suddenly change your opinion of him?"

"I've had good reason."

"And I've better reason not to. I don't have to rely on what his friend Doctor Vernit chooses to say; I rely on the evidence of my own eyes. And—and only a few hours ago Mr. Carteret was—was hugging and kissing a horrible colored woman—yes, right on our property and in broad daylight! No, I'm not mistaken at all; I *saw* him! Yes, I did. Doctor Vernit can't explain *that* away or make it appear anything but what it was. That's the *real* Mr. Carteret, a person of absolutely no principle or—or morals!"

"Well, I'm not concerned with his morals, and you needn't be either."

"As if I was! It's less than nothing to me how he acts!"

"He wouldn't be the first *blanc*, Beryl, to have an affair with an island girl. These things happen down here, and there may have been no real harm in it. It isn't always the white man's fault either. At least Carteret doesn't prey on the unprotected of his own class nor make a studied business of it. Steller does. Carteret may be a scamp but he's not a scoundrel. Steller is. And, whatever his failings, Carteret has got a sense of decency. Steller hasn't. I said I owed Carteret much, but the truth is I owe him more than I can ever pay. I owe him not only your safety but my life. It doesn't matter what his motive was."

"Your life? What do you mean, father?"

"That it was Carteret who got the antidote, got what no other white man could. He paid for it in hard cash, and very nearly with his life."

She was silent. Then, in a very small but ironic voice: "I—I suppose that's something else that Doctor Vernit told you?"

"It is; and you needn't presume to doubt it. There's no question of its truth. Vernit never meant to take credit for a cure he never effected. It was Carteret, first and last. He went up into the hills and got the stuff from an old Papaloi he knows; and on the way home they knifed him and tried to rob him of it. That's how he was hurt. That's what he did for me, no matter what the motive was, and I repaid him by ordering him out of the house."

She arose abruptly, went aimlessly to the window with its half-lowered shade, and stared into the night. What an astounding truth! Truth, yes, for she couldn't doubt it. If only it had been revealed before that unforgetable scene near the tamarind; if only that hideous scene had never been enacted!

"If all this is true," she said finally, "I fail to see why he made such an elaborate mystery of it."

"Mysteries are very necessary under some circumstances, my girl. Haven't I said that they tried to prevent the stuff reaching me?"

"And—and who are 'they?' "

"Why, my very good friends Steller and Tarling."

"Father! You don't—you can't mean that——"

"That's just what I do mean, the treacherous, cowardly curs! It was they who poisoned me in the first instance, left me to die like a swollen rat! And that grinning swine, sitting where you're sitting now and urging me to fight and get well! And I asking him to look after you! Can you imagine a better joke? And he perjuring what he calls his soul, pledging what he calls his honor! Yes, I mean Florian Steller, God's curse on him! By the Eternal——"

Sefton's pent-up excitement had at last burst its bonds and for a space he looked and acted like a madman, pouring out a torrent of invective, cursing his impotency, vowing vengeance. He didn't realize what he said, nor did the girl who, with blanched cheeks, finally succeeded in pacifying him. Yet some of those strong and angry words and their full import were to return to her later.

"That's over; I won't have a brain storm like that again," said Sefton quietly at length. "It's the natural result of lying here, thinking everything and being able to do nothing. Yes, I've become confidential with Vernit, as you say; I had to or go mad. He's a good fellow, a true friend. Lucky for me that he is."

"Don't talk any more about it, father."

"I've got to talk a whole lot about it, my girl. You've got to understand that we're in a pretty tight hole. You see they want me out of the way because of the concession. It's the old, old story of avarice and greed; they weren't content with their proper share but wanted it all. And Steller wanted you as well."

"Wanted—me?"

"Yes, there's no question of it. If your aunt had been out of the way sooner, he'd have shown his cloven hoof sooner. She was an experienced woman, and you were brought up carefully. And then when the coast was clear, the old watchdog gone, you decided to come down here. Of course he didn't want you to come! I see it all as clearly as if I could look into his foul and cunning mind. He couldn't stop you coming, but he could stop your having my protection. You understand? It suited him exactly that you didn't want me to know you were coming. He cabled Tarling to have me murdered. They had discussed it all by letter previously, come to an understanding, hit on the best method. I say they wanted the con-

cession for themselves, and Steller wanted you. Two strong motives, you see. I was in the way. Your coming was the signal for my disposal; it helped Steller to decide, forced a decision. I should have died conveniently of beriberi, and no questions asked. And you should have been left here alone, penniless, your only 'friend' good, kind Mr. Steller! All that would have happened if it hadn't been for Carteret."

"But—but father, how do you know all this? What proof have you?"

"None," said Sefton. "None that a court of law would call direct evidence. But I'm not raving, my girl; I was never more sane in my life. I don't need what you call proof. What I've told you is the truth. There are times, great crises, when even the least spiritual among us can read the human heart and mind like an open book. I have read Florian Steller's."

Whatever the truth of this, or whether Sefton based his opinion on more evidence than he cared to tell his daughter, the fact remained that he had made no mistake. He had analyzed and explained Steller's motives and actions as though indeed he had the power to see into the other's mind and read his inmost thoughts. That cryptic cable, which Carteret was destined never to read without the aid of the code, was intended to be John Sefton's death sentence. Tarling, after copying the cable, quickly destroyed it; he was also careful to destroy the message when decoded. But he forgot that piece of paper bearing the cipher, an oversight which may happen to the most methodical and painstaking. Though confident that nobody could make any meaning out of it he had meant fully to destroy the paper; there was no sense in preserving even a remote possibility of danger. An interruption had prevented him doing so at the time, and then he had forgotten. Moreover, he had placed his knife in the same pocket, and, unseen by him in the darkness, when he pulled out the weapon to attack Carteret, the paper came with it.

"But, father," said the girl at length, "why should they wish to kill you when you're the only one who can get the concession?"

"I'm not," replied Sefton, avoiding her eyes. "I was, but I'm not now. It has been secured. That's what took Steller to the capital. I've done all the work and now they can do without me, kick the ladder from under them. It's always the way."

"But Mr. Steller said they hadn't got the concession; he said that your illness had delayed them, that they couldn't get it until you were better. He said they refused at Port-au-Prince——"

"I don't care what he said; he's lying," interrupted Sefton, still avoiding her gaze. "They mean to get rid of me. They think I'm lying here helpless at their mercy. But they're mistaken; somebody else is going to take a hand in this game, somebody who'll play my cards if I can't. I've sent Vernit for Carteret."

"Oh! T-to help you?"

"Yes, to help me, and you—and himself. You understand that he has a pretty good idea of the whole situation, and had from the first. I don't care what he is, what his interest in the concession is; I'll share it with him instead of those dogs. I'm going to tell him everything. If Steller returns before Carteret comes, then it'll be the worse for Steller."

She was twisting her hands nervously. "Supposing he refuses to come?"

Sefton laughed harshly. "He won't, no matter how badly he's been treated by us. Don't you understand? Why did he take my part against those dogs? Because he knows something about the concession, knows that it really belongs to me, and that I'm worth helping. And so I am! Well, I'll make him rich. Rich! I'll put him on his legs, make him able to quit this cursed country. He'll be done with vagabondage and all that. Refuse what I'm going to offer? Not much! Nobody would, let alone a needy adventurer. I'll make him a partner, and that means I'll make him a millionaire! Yes, a *millionaire*."

"I wish you hadn't sent for him, father," she said hurriedly. "If he should come, please don't ask him to help. We don't want to be under any further obligation to him. It's—it's humiliating, degrading. You don't need his help. If all this is true, let me go to the police, to General Bobo——"

Sefton was laughing again, an ugly unnatural laugh. "The police, the army—bah! You don't know how ridiculous that sounds. Why, Steller has bribed them body and soul long ago! They'll do exactly as he says. He's bought them, understand? You don't know this delightful country. I

tell you there's only one person able to help us and that's Carteret."

A long silence followed, Sefton turning incessantly on the creaking bed, his daughter sitting as though part of the chair. There were deep lines of anxious and unpleasant thought between her eyes.

"What time is it?"

"Almost eight, father."

"What? And Vernit hasn't returned! He should have been here long ago. What can have happened?"

She could offer no suggestion that he would accept. Another silence ensued, tense, expectant; both were listening for footsteps, voices in the night. As the minutes grew, dragged on, Sefton's nervousness and anxiety mounted higher and higher. She tried to pacify him.

"I've just remembered something, father. Mrs. Petit Beau told me to-day something about her hearing that an old curfew order was to be enforced. Perhaps it's true, and so Doctor Vernit may have been arrested."

This information served only to increase Sefton's irritation and anxiety. "Servants' gossip! Even if it's true, Vernit's well known and a doctor too. Either they'd let him pass or turn him back; and in either case he should have been here by this time. Go down and see if he's coming."

An unnecessary and futile proceeding; the window was a better point of vantage, though one could see nothing even from it. The moon would be late in rising. But apparently Sefton was unconscious of the absurdity of his request; he craved action of some sort, however futile, and she obeyed without argument as one humors the whims of the sick.

The house seemed strangely silent as she went downstairs and there was no sign of Mrs. Petit Beau or her husband. She stole into the back premises and found them deserted. She thought of rats and a sinking ship—why, she could not say.

"Well?" demanded Sefton when at length she returned.

"He—he is here."

"Where? Why doesn't he come up? What's the matter with you? And—and what's that on your dress? What has happened?"

"He is here," she repeated tonelessly. "I mean Doctor Vernit. He is—dead."

"What!"

"Yes. I found him near the veranda—oh, father, it was ghastly, horrible! He has been killed!"

"Ah," said Sefton, his breath whistling. "I feared as much. They stopped him reaching Carteret. They must have known or suspected I told him. Spies, eavesdroppers, cursed cowardly dogs! Was I right or not?"

Sefton was shouting now. "Do you realize the sort of men we're dealing with? Eh, do you? Murdered in cold blood! Poor old Vernit. Gold, millions of it! What's a few murders, even of the innocent, to that? Gold, red as blood—aye, steeped in blood! And it will be steeped redder yet. Vernit and then me—so they think. So they think! They think they've got me, do you understand? Eh, do you understand, girl? I'm cut off, ready to be butchered. But they haven't got me; no, by God, they haven't! I know a trick worth two of that. The blind, girl! The blind!"

"Oh, father, don't talk like that! Please don't! It's all right. Everything will be all right. I'm here. I'll go for help——"

"The blind!" shouted Sefton, struggling to arise. "Do you think I don't know what I'm saying? Do as I tell you! Pull up that blind and let it stay! That's the signal!"

"Signal!"

"Yes, for Carteret. It's the signal that something's wrong here and that he's to come on the jump. He arranged it with Vernit. Don't stand staring at me like that; I'm not crazy. Do as I tell you! It's our last chance!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PLOT.

WHERE and how had Doctor Vernit been killed? Had he ever left the house, or had he been lying there all this time where she had found him by the veranda steps? So might he have lain, concealed by the shrubbery and the darkness, until morning. She shuddered anew as she thought of what her groping hands had met as she took a false step, stumbled and fell. She had been in a cold panic. But it was no time for thinking of self; she must not give way again to panic. From a curiously sheltered and uneventful niche in life, she had been plunged into a situation, into a whirlpool of base passions and terrible deeds, that demanded whatever heritage of

courage and sanity she possessed. This was adventure with a vengeance, more than she had ever bargained for. How would it end?

Would Carteret see the signal and, if so, would he come? Moreover, *could* he come? Would self-interest be able to surmount all obstacles? Even if so, had she the right to take advantage of that self-interest, to risk another's life even to save her father's? Doctor Vernit had been murdered; why not Carteret too? He would come, if he came at all, in utter ignorance of what had happened, fall an easy victim to any trap. To her father it presented no problem whatsoever; a man had to risk something for gain, and the bigger the gain, the bigger the risk. Carteret wouldn't think twice about it, no matter if he knew the whole island was against him. He could take care of himself, no man better. He was just the man for the job, a needy soldier of fortune like that. Why, what wouldn't he risk to be made rich? Yes, a *millionaire!*

Thus Sefton, a bloated twitching hand tucked under his pillow as he talked febrile scraps and waited, his eyes like burned holes in a yellow blanket. She sensed, rather than knew, what that hidden hand held. If Steller came first—should she not even warn *him?* There was murder in her father's eyes. He seemed hardly sane, spoke to her as he had never done before; ordered her to sit down, to keep out of the line of lamp and window. No, she wasn't to leave the room under any circumstances.

It became unbearable, intolerable. She must do something. She couldn't let him walk into a possible trap. No matter what sort of person he was, no matter how atrociously he had behaved—she would forgive him even *that,* everything, if only he reached the Villa Verd safely. She *must* do something, warn him, go to meet him. Even now they might be lying in wait for him, those murderers of Doctor Vernit.

There was a quick step on the stairs, a knock, and Carteret entered the room. He was streaming with sweat, dusty, dishevveled; but his manner was quite cool and collected as he smiled and bowed to the girl. And she who, a moment before had forgiven him everything, would have given anything to see him thus safe and sound, looked at him almost without recognition as she stifled a yawn.

"Pardon this intrusion," said Carteret, "but your servants seem to have taken a night off. Where's Doctor Vernit? I saw the signal—at least I took it for that."

"Quite right," nodded Sefton. "Yes, I know about it; Vernit explained. And now, Beryl, you may leave us."

"Is that necessary, sir?" asked Carteret.

"It is," said Sefton. "I want to talk business. Keep an eye out for Mr. Steller, Beryl, and let us know at once when he appears. I don't expect him for an hour at least—but he may come sooner. Be sure and let us know."

"Don't go out on the veranda, Miss Sefton," said Carteret. "Those fellows who attacked me the other night may be on the prowl again."

"Thank you," she said coldly, "but I'm quite capable of looking after myself."

"My daughter," said Sefton, when she had gone, "knows the truth about that holdup of yours. So do I. Vernit and I came to an understanding about things. I sent him for you—and he's been murdered."

"What!"

"Yes, that's the meaning of that signal. Now sit down; you can't do anything—at least not now. We'll fix the fellows who killed him, all right. But you must understand the situation. There's only one thing I didn't tell Vernit, and that my daughter doesn't know either—and that I don't want her to know; it's the nature of this concession. Now, Carteret, it's no time for beating about the bush; I know all that you've done for me and my girl, and *why* you did it. Well, you won't find me a man to balk at a price, nor am I in a position to; those dogs, Steller and Tarling, have me where the hair is short, and you know it. I'm ready to make a deal with you; I'll put all my cards on the table and expect you to do the same. Is it a go?"

"Yes," said Carteret.

"All right. Now it'll save time if you tell me what you know about this concession."

"I know that it isn't one, that it's Christophe's treasure—hidden here in the house."

Sefton looked his astonishment—and suspicion. "How do you know all that? If you knew that all along——"

"I didn't. I was only sure of it to-night. I'm not trying to play my hand for more than it's worth. Nobody told me; it's simply—well, imagination. I needn't go into all the deduction that led me to the conclusion, but I know that I'm right."

"You are," said Sefton after a moment's

silence. "Dead right. Do you know the amount?"

"No. And I don't know how it was found or brought here."

"It's five million dollars, Carteret," said Sefton slowly, and waited for the words to sink in. "About three hundred thousand doubloons worth sixteen dollars apiece! Can you grasp that? It's down there, all ready to be shipped, waiting to be melted down—the good red gold! I've been living over it, sleeping over it, guarding it night and day for—how long is it? An eternity! It's part of the Black Napoleon's treasure, part of what he stole from the buccaneers; only part—but it's enough, eh, Carteret? Five million dollars—and all the time I hadn't enough to keep my daughter in comfort! I hadn't enough to keep her from the attentions of that dog Steller. There it was, and I couldn't use it. D'you understand? Five million dollars' worth of good red gold—and now these dogs—by God, Carteret——"

"Steady on, sir."

Sefton gulped; his eyes cleared under the other's cool gaze and quiet voice. He recovered his composure. "I'll give you the bare facts," he said, and Carteret pulled out his pipe. They had an hour, perhaps more.

It was remarkable how closely the actual account tallied with the imaginary one that Carteret had given Mackenzie. There was little that Carteret hadn't known or suspected, though he did not say this. If Sefton gave merely the bare facts, Carteret could endow the skeleton with flesh and blood, breathe life into it. He could visualize Sefton in his wanderings meeting with the negro in Yucatan, undoubtedly a friend or relative of the man Hippolyte had tortured so cruelly. Perhaps the man himself.

"He claimed to be Sam Bovard, the man himself," said Sefton. "He said he had managed to give his shadowers the slip and leave the island as a stowaway. Hippolyte had put such fear into him, his former carefree and happy life had been made so intolerable, that he decided never to go back for the treasure from which he had taken a handful of doubloons. He preferred poverty to that. It may seem impossible—but if one had been tortured, eh? Anyway, he had been afraid even to breathe the secret to a soul, afraid he'd be murdered for it, or that the government would hear of it, bring him back and torture him all over again. That's what he said."

"And how had he learned of the treasure in the first place?"

"He said the secret was a legend in his family, handed down from father to son. He claimed that his great-grandfather was one of the workers from Port-au-Prince who had helped to conceal the treasure and, with the others, was afterwards done to death by Christophe. They knew or suspected the fate in store for them but couldn't avoid it. Slaves were slaves in those days. It seems that the place was supposed to be built, not for the emperor, but one of his favorite generals—a blind, see? But something of the truth must have leaked out at the time; that would explain why, though there's no evidence, legend persisted in connecting Christophe's name with Picolet. And the place was never finished; not much more than the foundation, containing the treasure, was laid when the rebellion came like a whirlwind. Owing to the fact, successive generations of Bovards couldn't locate the site. Time and the forest had concealed or destroyed it, and their ancestor left no map or precise instructions. He was a poor ignorant slave, his descendants also. They lived in the north and had neither the money nor enterprise to come south and hunt for it. Also they were afraid; it was government money, of course, and the government had no mercy on thieves. There was only this vague story of a site somewhere near Picolet and, no doubt, few of them believed it. At any rate it remained for Sam Bovard to test the truth of the legend. Perhaps it was only accident, though he made himself out as a person of great enterprise and daring who had been fired with the purpose from childhood. Perhaps he merely loafed over the mountains, drifted into Picolet, and then hearing about Christophe—you see? Perhaps he wasn't Sam Bovard at all and merely got it from him, passing it on to me for what it was worth, when he lay dying, for the little help and kindness I'd been able to do him. I don't know; whether he was the man himself or not, whether he believed the story or not, he told me the truth, gave me the right direction—though, of course, I never believed it at the time."

Carteret wasn't very much interested in this part of it; it seemed to follow the ac-

cepted type of story and he might have been listening to some one reading it. But it was evidently true, where Sefton was concerned, and the latter seemed anxious to get it off his mind.

Carteret put in an appropriate word or nod at intervals as Sefton then related briefly the actual finding of the treasure; how he had come to Picolet, not with any faith in Bovard's story—so he averred—but in the hope of a good timber concession. It was only when Tarling and Steller entered the narrative that Carteret became really interested.

"I couldn't do without either," said Sefton. "The thing was too big for any one man, especially for a man who knows so little about business as I do. And I didn't know much about the country either. You see, it was a sort of white elephant; I had it but I didn't know what to do with it. Of course the problem was how to get it out of the country. And Tarling had an inkling of what I was up to. You know Kadry? Well, he also knew or suspected something. Maybe he had got hold of some of the secret in his early wanderings; and Tarling had another bit. But they hadn't been able to piece it together, make anything of it. They had no definite knowledge and precise directions like I had."

"Tarling bluffed you?"

"Perhaps," admitted Sefton. "But when I leased the ground and started to build, with the last nickel I could scrape together, he penetrated my brilliant scheme of making sure of the stuff until I could devise a method of marketing it. He may not have known all he claimed, but I couldn't afford to court investigation. You see that? He saw it too. Of course the government would take every penny and send me to jail. And, as I say, I needed help. So I virtually had to take Tarling in as an equal partner, he to finance me meanwhile and help swing the thing. It was a hard bargain but I had no option."

"And Kadry?"

"Evidently he didn't know as much as Tarling. I didn't think he knew anything, but Tarling said we'd have to square him. That development didn't come till later. Kadry was to get a hundred thousand. He thinks there's only about a million all told."

No, thought Carteret, emphatically Sefton wasn't a business man. He had been an easy victim of these sharks. "And Steller?" he asked.

"That was Tarling's idea," replied Sefton. "He said we needed somebody with capital, somebody accustomed to swinging big things; one, moreover, who hadn't any quixotic ideas, yet one whom we could trust. That naturally narrowed down the field. And we *did* need such a man. You see the situation was this: Tarling hadn't any money either, no more than his salary —so he said—and we couldn't use the treasure. It's all in doubdoons and if any of them got about—you see the whole crux of the matter was General Bobo, Bobo with his obstinate ignorance which he calls patriotism. If only it had been somebody else! Any other official we could have fixed, but not Bobo. And he's dictator here. You must understand that, Carteret; don't make any mistake about it. It's Bobo who makes the problem so infernally difficult. Held up all this time by a negro who can't even write his name! Why should he of all men be Général de la Place here? There isn't another like him in the whole island—no, nor the world. The irony of it! If ever he got wind of the treasure—oh, I tell you it was maddening! Five million, and we daren't move an inch because of that one man, and he an ignorant black! Did you ever hear of such a situation? And yet it's true, true, I tell you. Any attempt to fix him, any hint of the treasure, and we'd be ruined. You must believe that, Carteret."

"I do," said Carteret. "Bobo is a unique character. Quite a remarkable situation. Naturally it would require some time for an amount like that to be shipped, and you couldn't smuggle it out piecemeal. It demanded more than the mere chartering of a ship, the ordinary filibustering sort of thing."

"Exactly," said Sefton. "As we couldn't hope to arrange matters with Bobo, what then was to be done? Yes, remove him. But how? We had to get rid, not only of him, but all his following here. We had to get them out of the way, the coast clear, while a vessel put in and the stuff was shipped. How long would it take for all that gold to be transferred from here to the harbor, and with nothing better than limited mule transport? Well, we reckoned on twelve hours, giving ample time for accidents. We had to have virtual command of Picolet for that time at least. How was it

to be done, without recourse to wholesale murder, without arousing suspicion?"

"Why," said Carteret, "I imagine a revolution. That seems to be the solution for most everything here."

Sefton stared at him. "So you know all about it, eh?"

"No," said Carteret. "But it wasn't hard to imagine, though Bobo's part was puzzling. When I was sure about the treasure, the rest became clear enough. Of course it doesn't matter a straw whether the revolution succeeds or fails so long as it removes Bobo and the army for the time being. Naturally he would lead it. I don't know the details, but it isn't difficult to imagine that the main one is for him to attack the capital by way of the mountains while Armstrong holds the sea. Then you have the capital in the pincers. There must be an understanding with Armstrong, for even Bobo isn't fool enough to think of success without the navy."

Sefton was still staring. "You've a very remarkable imagination," he said dryly. "Anyway, whatever your source of information, you've put your finger on the point. It was Steller's idea—he's an old hand at the game—and, of course, Tarling was his principal agent. They gauged Bobo's character, took his measure to the fraction of an inch. His ignorance and vanity, his sense of being ill-treated, his disapproval of Delannes—all were invaluable assets. Every man has his price, Carteret, though he may not know it. They couldn't bribe Bobo with money but they bribed him with that. Of course he isn't aware of it; he's fool enough, vain enough, to believe that it would be for the best interests of the country if he ousted Delannes and was made president. As for our help, he thinks we only want a perfectly legitimate concession that we couldn't secure under the present corrupt government; a concession that will open up and develop the country. You understand?"

"Perfectly," nodded Carteret. "Instead of being the savior of his country he's going to help, in all ignorance, to rob it of a fortune—not to mention the bloodshed."

"There's nothing to worry about in that," said Sefton, "for there'll be very little, if any. I balked at that part of it—for, after all, even natives are human beings—until Steller explained the brilliant scheme. You see it's to be a sort of sham revolution, a farce, though Bobo and his following don't know it. He thinks that practically the whole country, the vast black majority, are waiting to rise when he makes his historic march; but as a matter of fact his following is confined to only a portion of the south. His vanity and ignorance are invulnerable, and skillful propaganda worked up the rest. He thinks that another army from the Cap will be there to meet him and that the navy will threaten the capital from the sea. In the pincers, yes. But that isn't really going to happen; he only thinks it is. As you say, Armstrong's apparent complicity was necessary, and so he's to get his whack for making Bobo believe that the navy's with him. Oh, it all took time and very careful handling, as you can imagine, but it was worked out as only Steller and Tarling can work such things. My part in it was very small indeed. You've got the idea so far?"

Carteret nodded again. "A very pretty one, entirely possible—even inevitable, you may say—with such a character as Bobo. The only sacrifice, the only goat, is to be Bobo and the army of the south?"

"Yes, such as that army is. You know the sort; ragtag and bobtail. There's nothing else in the country. And when they reach the capital what happens? Why, Delannes will be waiting for them with a reception committee! Armstrong will have discovered the plot in the nick of time, see? and warned the president—thus earning a double reward. Very likely there won't be a shot fired; Bobo, seeing that somebody has betrayed him, the trap he has blundered into and the utter hopelessness of the situation, will surrender."

"Better and better," murmured Carteret.

"Meanwhile what happens here?" continued Sefton excitedly. "Bobo makes his historic march at night so as to attack at dawn; he takes with him every available man. When the coast is clear, Steller's private yacht *Corsair*, waiting for the signal, comes boldly into the harbor. The local revolution has gone quietly enough, because the capital mustn't be warned, and Delannes' adherents are either dead or in jail. The American and British consular agents have been confined to their quarters; we need expect no trouble from that quarter because they'll follow the old prescription of keeping out of the line of fire. It's no affair of theirs. There is practically no-

body of consequence left in Picolet, nobody but Steller, Tarling, Kadry, myself—all supposedly hand in glove with Bobo. If a stray captain or so is left in nominal command, he is dealt with as circumstances demand. Steller's crew lands and we have the town. The pack mules are all ready, Bobo is twenty miles away over the mountains, there is no communication with the capital. Armstrong has the navy concentrated there, safe from interfering. The gold is shipped and before daylight we're on our way to New York. It being Steller's private yacht, the gold is eventually smuggled in quite easily. Nobody ever knows anything about it—the crew, Bobo, any one here. Why? Because the cargo is supposed to be munitions for the rebels—that we didn't land at the Cap when we learned how the cause had been basely betrayed."

"Very pretty," said Carteret again. "Steller seems to have thought of everything. Of course Bobo doesn't know you're supposed to be hoarding munitions here, for the simple reason that he doesn't know of the landing. That story's merely for the consumption of the consular agents, any one here who's curious about the landing?"

"Exactly. And at home we deny the story; I was merely removing some household goods when Steller's yacht providentially afforded us the means of escape."

"What part does Petit Beau play in this? Does he know of the treasure?"

"No. He thinks it's to be a real revolution. There was no necessity for him to know the truth."

Carteret, it is known, had some reason to doubt this. "And when was it agreed for this admirable plan to take effect?" he asked.

"Never," said Sefton. "That's practically the plan in its entirety, as worked out by Steller, but I never agreed to its execution. You see, we couldn't come to terms. I must explain that."

"Well, you've got about half an hour," said Carteret, glancing at his watch, "if you expect Steller back by nine."

CHAPTER XX.

PREPARATIONS.

IT was the old story. Steller had tacitly agreed to an equal share but, once in possession of all the facts and embarked on the enterprise, had held out for more. He pointed out that the undertaking involved more work and risk than he had anticipated, that Tarling and he were doing all the labor, that he alone was assuming the risk. Sefton had merely discovered the treasure, which any fool could have done. He thought that, say, one million dollars was a fair share and that it was unreasonable for Sefton to expect more.

"I thought it merely a sharp piece of business," explained Sefton, "something that maybe most anybody would try on. I'd heard something of Braunheim & Steller and their capacity for a bargain, but I didn't believe half the tales. I do now, though I'll acquit Braunheim of any murderous intentions. Understand, there was no show of animosity on either side; and in a way I didn't blame Steller for trying to hog all he could. That's like the world. But I'd watched my share dwindle from a whole to a half, and from a half to a third, and I'd no intention of seeing it become a fifth. Tarling seemed to think that Steller had justice on his side, or that at least we couldn't afford to reject his proposal. Of course I know now, even if I've no proof, that they'd dealings together long before this, weren't the virtual strangers they pretended. I dare say Tarling has some connection with the firm; he's just the sort that such a firm would have snooping round in countries like this, supposedly engaged in legitimate trade but waiting for something to pounce on.

"So we came to a deadlock, see? I threatened, more or less diplomatically, to go elsewhere for capital, take the whole thing out of Steller's hands. And Steller knew, just as well as I, that I couldn't; he shared the secret and I had to make some sort of dicker with him. I want to stress the point that it was entirely amicable so far; I thought it no more than business bluff, and I didn't mean to yield a penny. I thought him a hard business man, but neither a crook nor scoundrel. I thought it merely a matter of time until he agreed to the original proposition; and, as I had the gold safe, I could afford to wait. And he had agreed meanwhile, gave me his word on it, to let everything stand until we came to terms. I thought he couldn't do anything else."

"But he didn't wait?" It was more a statement than question.

"No, he didn't," said Sefton, "though, like a blind fool, it's taken me long enough

to realize that. But not too long; no, not too long. And better late than never. You see, he met my daughter the last time I was up. I think you're perfectly familiar with the situation. It seems you knew Steller; I didn't. I'd no idea he was that sort. Now, you see, he had two of the strongest motives in the world—*the* two strongest for a person of his type. I was in the way and the simplest thing, the only thing to do, was to remove me."

"Quite so. An elementary proposition, to his mind."

"Well, Carteret, that's the whole situation to date. I'm glad to get it off my mind, every bit of it. All this time Steller and Tarling have been going ahead with that plan I've explained, though they swore to me they weren't. It was easy to fool me; I trusted them, I never went about much, never took part in the life of the island. I stayed here to guard the treasure. So I didn't catch even a whisper of what was going on. Yes, I've been a fool and my eyes weren't opened until Vernit told me the truth about my poisoning. Those dogs have been working all the time behind my back. And when Steller returned from the capital to-day I guessed the rest. Instead of putting the clock back, he's been putting it forward. I saw it in his false eyes, read it in his false words, though I didn't let him see I knew. I wasn't blind any longer; I saw and understood many things that, only for Vernit, I'd never have noticed. It's been my misfortune through life to trust people blindly; but once I begin to suspect them, it's enough. I'm not the fool they think.

"They mean to carry through the original plan without me, Carteret. Do you understand? Steller's going into the last details with Tarling now. I know he is. I hear the old curfew order's been enforced, and, if that's true, it's the writing on the wall. To-morrow or the day after, that's when they plan to start. And they'll try to kill me as they killed poor Vernit. And you too, Carteret. And perhaps your friend Mackenzie, even though he's consular agent. They'll kill everybody who they think suspects the truth; they can't afford not to. For home consumption the tale will be that we were all wiped out in the local rising. And we've got only a day, a day at most! Do you understand? A day, only a day."

"A day is a long time, even if Rome wasn't built in it," said Carteret quite calmly.

Sefton made an effort at composure. "You're a cool hand. I used to be like that, but now my nerves—but we'll come to business. You understand that it's you and I—and whoever you can trust—against Steller and Tarling. It's you and I, share and share alike. Fifty-fifty, Carteret. I trust you and you can trust me. I'm not haggling, you see; share and share alike. The first thing is to nab those two dogs; we'll take Steller as he comes in, Tarling wherever you find him. No killing, of course, though it's what they deserve. When we've got them safe and sound we can work out our next step. We can either make use of their plan, all of it or part of it, or think up another. But Steller and Tarling first, mind you; the head and tail of the snake must be scotched before we can do anything else. Fifty-fifty, Carteret; you help me to get that money to safety and half of it's yours. Yes, half. It's a go, eh?"

"No," said Carteret, "it isn't."

"Eh? What's that?" Sefton's jaw dropped and he stared as though seeing Carteret for the first time. Then bitter disappointment, cynical amusement, dawned in his eyes. "So that's it, eh? Yes, I understand. You're just like the rest. Two and a half millions isn't enough, though you mayn't have two and a half dollars in the world! I'm in a bad hole and you mean to make the most of it. A fair half isn't enough. Well, let's hear your idea of a square deal. How much *do* you want out of it?"

"Nothing," said Carteret.

"What the devil do you mean? Look here, what's the game? What are you trying on? Out with it!"

"I mean I can't help you to get away with this money because, of course, it isn't yours."

Sefton's bloated hand, creeping stealthily under the pillow, suddenly blundered out. Leaning heavily on an elbow he leveled the heavy automatic at the man sitting by the bed. "Isn't mine, eh?" he said huskily, his pale face twitching. "I'll show you if it isn't. I'll show the blasted lot of you! Just try to take it away from me. Don't move a hand or I'll drill you! Thought I couldn't protect myself, eh? Now what's the game? Have you double-crossed me too? Are you in with Steller or trying to

hog a lone hand? Open up with the truth before I shoot!"

"There's no need for anything like this between us," said Carteret quietly. "Of course I'll help you all I can against Steller and Tarling, but I can't help you to steal."

"What's that—*steal?*"

"Steal, yes. That money belongs to the Republic of Haiti. You didn't even own the land it was found on; you leased it from the government. That it happens to be five million dollars instead of five cents doesn't make it any the less a theft. If it isn't theft, why are you so anxious for your daughter not to know? No, I'm not trying to work any game on you; please believe that. I'm merely stating the facts of the case. As I look at it, even five million dollars isn't worth becoming a thief and criminal for."

Sefton seemed petrified with amazement; then came suspicion, rage. It was some time before he could even grasp the remote possibility of Carteret being sincerely in earnest. A needy adventurer to strain at a gnat and refuse such a fortune! His words came in torrents. Stealing? A thief, a criminal? If it wasn't his money, whose was it? Hadn't he found it? Hadn't Christophe robbed the buccaneers, and they the world? Nobody knew who owned it. That it happened to be on Haitian soil didn't make it Haitian. It was treasure-trove, spoil of the first finder. Would any man in his senses think twice about keeping it? And so on.

Carteret listened to it all patiently, pipe in mouth and steady understanding eyes on Sefton. "I know how you feel about it," he said at length. "It's very hard, after all you've been through for the stuff; but, of course, you know as well as I that it can't be done. You'd have balked yourself, sooner or later. Oh, yes, you would. I hope you don't think I'm trying to preach, set myself up as a monument of virtue or anything like that. Five million's enough to turn any one's head, and you've been living with it, thinking of it, about a year too long. It gets into the blood like poison. I know how it is; I've seen it up on the Yukon, out in the Transvaal; in Washington and New York—high finance. A man goes crazy and pawns his soul. And the filthy stuff isn't worth it, sir. No, it isn't worth it and never will be."

"God's truth," spat Sefton at him, "it's no wonder they call you the Big Fool!"

"You're the same sort of fool, sir. Oh, yes, you are; you only think you're not. Your real self couldn't do this thing; it takes a hide like Steller's or Tarling's. You've got to be born with it, cultivate it. You couldn't have sent old Bobo to a shameful death. You know Delannes would have shot him, or he'd have shot himself. He couldn't have lived with the truth. I know you've been thinking a lot about that, the plotted tragedy of Bobo. A tremendous tragedy, sir, even if played by an obscure character on an obscurer stage. An incorruptible man, a man who loves his country and has served it honestly and faithfully. You couldn't have had him and his men butchered for the sake of this filthy stuff. No, you couldn't."

Sefton was listening now with half-closed eyes.

"A man gets in with characters like Steller and Tarling and begins to think like them," said Carteret. "They don't want anything more from life than the sort of things this stuff can buy for them. They believe there's nothing more in life, or beyond it. They've been thieving, and worse all their days, so that it's come to mean nothing to them. But you aren't like that. What has this stuff brought you so far? Nothing but the society of men like those two, trouble and misery and nearly death. And it would bring you worse in the future. Oh, yes, it would; it's bound to. That's not superstition but the logic of cause and effect. Is it worth your daughter's respect? And even if she never found out, *you'd* know. A man's got to live with his conscience; and it stays when everything else has gone. It really doesn't present any problem; it's simply a question of common decency, common sense, common honesty."

"And so," said Sefton with a smothered snarl, "you suggest that I hand it over to these corrupt dogs at the capital for them to squander as they please? That's the noble philanthropic idea, eh?"

"Not to them, but to General Bobo," replied Carteret. "He's entitled to that consideration, for it was found in his commune. You can rely on him."

"I can, eh? And he's the one to profit by it all, make political capital out of it? Maybe he'll mount the presidential chair on these steps of gold that I'm to supply?"

"Maybe, indirectly. At least they

couldn't have an honester president. But that isn't our concern. You'd get the credit——"

"I'd get the jail, you fool, or maybe the arsenal wall for not turning it over sooner!"

"No," said Carteret confidently. "That part needn't be told; at least it would be condoned. We could arrange that. You'd get the standing government reward—honestly earned."

Sefton cackled. "Not a fifth but maybe *one fiftieth* of what I found! Thanks. Five million in hand and I'm to part with it for a possible hundred thousand! A present for a good boy. Thanks again. Damn it, you're incredible, Carteret, you and your Sunday-school chatter! If that's all the help you can offer, get out! I'll deal with those dogs myself. I can't understand you at all, but if I thought you knave instead of driveling fool, I'd shoot you where you sit! Get out, do you hear me, and take all this mealy mouthed moonshine with you! I need a *man*, and I thought you were one. But you're not; you're nothing but one of these damned idealists who shut their eyes to the real facts of life!"

"Perhaps," agreed Carteret equably as he stepped to the window and pulled down the blind. "Or perhaps I'm merely making a virtue of necessity. Say it's a case of the fox and the grapes. I could do very well with a couple of million, but—well, what's the use when you can't have it? We haven't a chance of getting away with it, Sefton; not a dog's chance. You see, it's too late; one of the real facts of life is that we haven't a day, very likely not even an hour."

"Too late? What the devil do you mean?" demanded Sefton hoarsely as he raised himself with difficulty on a trembling elbow.

"I mean that I believe you're right about Steller putting forward the clock—only, I guess, it's set for to-night, not to-morrow or the day after."

"Eh?" Sefton fell back on the pillow. He spoke with difficulty. "How do you know that?"

"I don't; it's merely another guess. But the curfew order's a fact and I'd the utmost difficulty getting through. If Bobo's men were better shots I'd never have got here. The whole town's seething on the quiet, troops sneaking in from all quarters and massing on the Champ de Mars. It certainly looks as if the historic march to the sea was set for to-night; for all I know it may have even started."

Sefton was laughing, discordantly, hysterically. "And you—you knew all this, yet you've been sitting there. In God's name why didn't you tell me this before?"

"What good would it have done?" shrugged Carteret. "You aren't able to move, we can't hide the treasure, we can't leave the island. We're stuck."

Sefton was glaring at him, breathing heavily.

"There was nothing to do," added Carteret, "but come over here and help you hold the fort till Bobo arrives."

"What's that? What are you saying? *Bobo?*"

"Yes. You see Mackenzie's gone to him with the truth. We decided on that after we saw the signal. Of course it was a leap in the dark, for we could only make a guess at things."

"You've told Bobo about the gold?" screamed Sefton. "Damn you, you Judas——"

Carteret leaped and his hand fastened on Sefton's wrist. For a few moments he was fighting with a madman. A wrench, and the pistol dropped among the bedclothes. Then Sefton fell back with a strangled oath and lay twitching.

"Have some sense, man!" said Carteret. "Don't you see, if my guess was right, it was the only thing to do? It was our only chance to put Bobo wise while I came here. Look at it in the right light, Sefton, and try to think of something besides that rotten gold. It's a question of life and death—more than that, for there's your daughter too."

Sefton stirred and opened his eyes.

"It wasn't a case of selling you out but of helping you the only way we knew how," continued Carteret. "It's *you* who tells Bobo of the treasure, understand? Mackenzie and I have nothing to do with it. It's you who saves him from falling into this trap. Remember that we weren't sure of anything and yet we were forced to act on the jump. If our sizing up of the situation was right, it was the only way to counter Steller and Tarling."

Sefton was listening quietly now. His eyes looked saner than at any time during the past few hours, perhaps days. "Maybe you're right," he said slowly at length. "Maybe I'll see it all some day as you do.

Just at present it's damned hard. Yes, maybe I've been thinking too much of the gold and not enough of my girl. But I tell you it was for her, all for her. Yes, I dare say you did the only thing, and a mighty good guess you made of it. No, we couldn't save the gold now. And those two dogs, yes, they'd come back and hamstring me. I guess I've been crazy, Carteret. And you to come here like this—I can't say——"

"No, you needn't. That's all right too."

"Well, and this chance—supposing Bobo doesn't believe the truth? Have you thought of that, eh? Supposing he doesn't believe it?"

"Believe it or not, he'll investigate," said Carteret confidently. "If he wouldn't believe a mere tale of treachery, Christophe's treasure will fetch him. It'll make all the difference. Bobo has always dreamed of finding it for the benefit of the state. It has been one of his life ambitions, as I happen to know; the life ambition of many a man here. That's why, aside from all else, he'd have killed himself if he'd fallen into this trap. He has only to come here to prove the truth of what he's told. Do you think he'd pass up the chance? Not on your life!"

Sefton was framing an anxious question about Mackenzie when the door opened and Beryl entered. She was very pale but quite composed. "They are coming!" she said. "I saw one moving among the trees."

Carteret acted with amazing speed and entire absence of flurry. It was as though he had everything thought out long ago. He removed the little table and lamp from beside the bed and placed it in a corner by the solitary window. "In case they happen to shin up the piazza," he said. "You can take care of the window, Sefton?"

"Leave it to me." Sefton, now in semi-darkness, had propped himself on a pillow; the heavy automatic, resting on hunched knees, was trained obliquely on the lowered blind illuminated brilliantly by the lamp. He looked better than Carteret had ever seen him.

"I'll take the hall," said Carteret, and slipped the Colt's from its shoulder holster. "That corner over there, Miss Sefton, is the safest place. Of course it may be a friend, not an enemy."

He stepped to the door and Sefton suddenly flung out a hand, speaking only with his eyes. The fingers of the two men interlocked in silence. Then said Sefton with a meaning look: "There's a panel in the front hall, back of Washington. It's the only entrance. They know about it, of course."

CHAPTER XXI.

DEFEAT.

LEAVING the door of Sefton's room open, Carteret turned out the lamp in the passage. This left two burning, that by the window in Sefton's room, and the swinging lamp in the lower hall. In the same quick silent manner he next opened the door of Miss Sefton's room, Steller's across the hall, the bathroom, and finally the room which he himself had occupied. Near this latter was the head of the stairs; there was a turn of two steps, then a single flight sloping gradually to the lower hall.

He nodded his satisfaction as he crouched at the head of the stairs; with Sefton holding the front room they commanded the situation. The only other really vulnerable point was his old room, whose window gave on the kitchen extension, and he had merely to turn his head to command that also. Without the aid of a ladder, an unknown article on the premises, the window of Steller's room, the bathroom, and Miss Sefton's, couldn't be reached. But he had opened the doors the better to hear any one trying the forlorn hope.

The lower hall and swinging screen door were at his mercy, and, most important of all, the large stereotyped picture of Washington crossing the Delaware. How many had looked on that old bromide, never suspecting its secret? Yes, evidently Sefton had utilized the old foundation cleverly. Five million dollars' worth of gold behind that secret panel that led underground; part, if not all, of the Black Napoleon's treasure, lying where it had lain amid earth and stone and creeper for over a hundred years. Well, let them come and take it—if they could.

Beryl came down the hall quickly, entered the back bedroom and placed a lighted lamp so that it illuminated the solitary window without entering Carteret's line of vision.

He nodded his appreciation, an eye on the lower hall. "The visitors haven't shown up yet," he said casually, "so I guess they can't be friends. And now go back to your father's room, please."

"No," she said. "I'm of no use there

but I may be here. At least I can help you watch. I must tell you that I know about this horrible 'concession'—everything! I couldn't help guessing, and what I didn't guess I overheard. I—I have been utterly blind, a complete fool."

For answer he pushed her back almost roughly. "As you are, Mr. Steller!" he called. "Not another step!"

Steller had suddenly materialized in the lower hall, passing through the door like a wraith. "Hello!" he exclaimed in apparent astonishment, pausing dead in his tracks and peering up into the eye of the Colt's which, amid the deep shadows, he must have sensed rather than seen. "What's the meaning of this foolery—more burglars, Mr. Carteret?"

"No, the same one."

"I don't understand you," said Steller, though he obviously did. "This is a peculiar reception, to say the least. What exactly is the idea, may I ask?"

"It's a long story," said Carteret, "which you know by heart. Most of it, anyway. But the main idea is that you're not wanted here. No visitors to-night."

"I'm not a visitor, hang your infernal impudence! I'm a guest here."

"Were, not are, Steller. You'll never be again. The door's behind you; make use of it while you've the chance."

"You're drunk or crazy, Carteret. Now look here, this isn't New York, but all the same if you think for a minute you can get away with any of your old Texas play, outrageous and incomprehensible conduct like this——"

"Hop it!" cut in Carteret viciously. "Step lively, you dog! Get out and stay out! And that goes for the rest of your pack. I'm giving you what you don't deserve—a fair warning. Next time I catch sight of you it'll be a bullet. Now go, if you know what's good for you. I'm done talking."

"All right, I'll go, you damned fool! I can't do anything else—just at present. But, mind you, if there's any law at all in this island you'll sweat for this unheard-of outrage. By George, you will! Crazy or drunk, you'll pay for it. Who do you think I am? How dare you—— All right, I'm going. But, mind you, Carteret, you'll answer to me personally for the safety of Miss Sefton. Yes, I'm going, damn you!"

"Behind you!" cried Beryl. "The window!"

Carteret whirled, threw down and pulled trigger all in the one movement. In the confined space the forty-five roared like a six-pounder. Petit Beau, framed in the lamp-lit window of the back bedroom, was suddenly blotted out as though his face were drawn on the glass and a sponge had passed over it. The heavy thud of him on the roof of the kitchen, his next stop, was lost in an explosion—two that sounded as one—as Steller whipped an automatic from his pocket and let drive up the stairs, then turned and skillfully shot out the hall lamp.

Another stab of flame in the darkness as another shot slammed out, the bullet whining past Carteret and blowing paint and plaster from the wall. Carteret fired twice in quick succession, aiming low. Steller had ducked into the living room and was loosing off at random round the door. Firing at such a mark as he presented, the mere flash of his weapon in the dark, demanded a high degree of skill, shooting instinct and intuition. These were at length rewarded, for Carteret's sixth shot was answered by a bitter oath and a thud and the clatter of falling metal on the hard floor.

"Got him or his gun that trip," thought Carteret with lively satisfaction. Matters were going very well indeed, thanks to Beryl. She was proving a real help, a cool hand. That little trick of Steller's had been frosted nicely. The scurvy dog! to keep him talking while Petit Beau sneaked in and struck from behind. How like Steller, the personification of treachery, and always with somebody else to do the dangerous dirt. Well, Petit Beau was very likely dead, Steller wounded perhaps. That whittled the odds, if Tarling and Kadry happened to be lurking outside. With Sefton guarding the front room he could keep up this show till all was lovely. And it was only a question of time until Bobo arrived. Yes, he would come even if the historic march were scheduled for to-night.

Carteret, swinging out the cylinder of his six-gun and ejecting the empty shells, suddenly paused in the mechanical movement as a muffled shout came from the front bedroom. Something had gone decidedly wrong, and just when he was congratulating himself. It was generally the way. If those dogs had thought to climb up the porch

why in glory didn't Sefton shoot instead of shout? What could have happened?

Trying to load the gun as he ran, he swung past Beryl and down the hall to the bedroom. Tarling was there waiting for him with ready revolver, while Sefton was snapping furiously the trigger of an obviously empty weapon.

Without hesitation or pause Carteret ducked and leaped as Tarling fired twice, then clubbed his gun. They crashed together, came to grips. The sound of conflict, snarls, like small fighting dogs, broke out in the corridor. Sefton, impotent, was bouncing up and down in the bed, unable to set foot on the floor, shouting curses, frenzied encouragement to Carteret at the top of his lungs. He was a ludicrous figure, yet tragic. The room was crammed with acrid powder fumes, mad sound and movement.

Carteret, his drill coat in ribbons, was functioning like a cyclone; a natural force, insensible to feeling or opposition. In spite of his old wound, and new ones, he tore into Tarling and handled him like a thing of straw. He doubled him over his knee as though to break him in half. Tarling began to scream thinly as his robust torso assumed inexorably the unnatural curve demanded of it. Then something smashed on Carteret's bent head and, seemingly miles away, he heard Steller snarling shrilly "Again, you fool! Again! Again!"

"She bit me, the hell-cat! There and there. God pity me, I'll get the hydrophobia." And Kadry exhibited pudgy hairy wrists. "You see? Name of a pipe, she fought me like a she-devil! By God's mercy my eyes are left. Only a woman, you say, but such a one! No, a she-devil, a hell-cat, I say. And so I couldn't help you sooner. And why didn't you blow his dam' head off?"

"A pungent piece, Miss Sefton," said Steller, and smiled at her mirthlessly. "But I'll guarantee to take the bite out of her."

"Ach, my God!" groaned Tarling again as he straightened up. "I have been murdered yet. Dot big ape——" He shambled over and kicked Carteret methodically and soundly. "Pig dog! It is you we have to thank for all dis; you from der first. Take dot, and dot!"

Carteret stirred under the blandishments, opened his eyes, rolled over, struggled to a sitting posture—not an easy undertaking with hands and feet tied. He was on the floor of Sefton's room, and his wrists were bound securely behind his back with a piece of rawhide. Yes, it was that and nothing else. He knew the touch of it; it recalled memories, far horizons and the waste places of the earth. Also it suggested possibilities. Amid the wreckage of the room was a tin basin that had stood beside the bed, ready for Sefton's nightly ablutions. It had been kicked against the wall but, by some freak of chance, had preserved its contents. He could glimpse it out the corner of a puffed and fast discoloring eye; it was partly behind him, a yard or so distant.

Sefton lay on his pillows, a glaring lump of exhaustion, unable longer even to spit venom. A kindly hand had spared the time to give him something to go on with, for a lump like a pink mushroom was sprouting on his forehead and there was a fan of drying blood under his swollen nose. His eyes were pits of fury and he made futile noises.

The hell-cat occupied a chair across the room; her claws had been drawn, for her slim but able wrists were crossed and bound. The veneer was off everybody, even her; Beryl looked like a trapped wild cat, and she had fought like one.

Carteret edged back along the floor toward the wall, as though seeking support for weary bones, and smiled contentedly as he eyed the invaders. They had suffered; the gold had cost them something already. He had got Steller after a fashion with his last shot, pulped a couple of fingers of his pistol hand. Tarling looked as though hit by a steam roller, Kadry as if he had met an active buzz saw. Evidently he had taken the route essayed unsuccessfully by Petit Beau and the girl had grappled him.

Yes, they were stripped of veneer, every one of them. Downstairs was five million dollars in gold, upstairs six humans who had reverted to the primordial type. With three of them, perhaps four, there was an unlovely affinity between that gold and their actions; cause and effect. He felt himself the ape, had acted it and perhaps looked it, that Tarling named him. He did not want the gold, had never coveted it, but these dogs shouldn't have it either.

He wondered what those who knew the Florian Steller of clubs, cocktails and cities, would think of this fine fellow. To him, however, it was no incredible metamor-

phosis; this Steller of the tropics was the Steller of parka and dog sledge. This was the true Steller which the frock coat and dinner jacket, private yacht and valet, had camouflaged in New York. A money-and-woman hound now in the raw. Five million dollars, and this other quarry he had stalked so patiently. He had made no effort to preserve a shred of his old pose in the eyes of Beryl, no attempt at apology or excuse, no attempt to conceal or gloze over his ultimate intentions with regard to her. He looked at her as a predatory beast looks at its kill. And she, undismayed and unafraid, gave back look for look, raking stabs of concentrated hatred and contempt and defiance that would have mutilated a normal hide. Strangest of all was this sloughing of veneer in her, the lamb becoming wolf. And yet far from strange; for what woman, worthy the name, however gentle her upbringing, will not become wolf in defense of her own? Not for the gold, but for her father, had she fought Kadry and then Steller in that fashion.

Ere now Carteret had guessed it all, the full extent of Steller's cunning. From the first the front bedroom had been the real point of attack because Steller knew it was unguarded, knew that Sefton's weapon was useless. He had seen to that. And as though there should be no doubt of this, Steller now began to parade the fact.

"The drawback to an automatic is that you can't always tell when it's loaded," he jeered at Sefton. "They're dangerous toys to have around, my friend, so I took the precaution of removing the clip from the handle. Yes, long ago. One must protect oneself from betrayal by one's supposed friends."

It was obvious then that they had come to the Villa Verd with their plan of attack all cut and dried. A disturbing thought, for it followed logically that they knew of the possible reception awaiting them. How had they known? Or had they merely suspected his, Carteret's, visit and deduced the rest?

CHAPTER XXII.

CARTERET BREAKS THE BONDS.

HE was not to be long left in doubt. Steller came over to where he lay against the wall. Success had come in such abundant measure that, even had it not been his weakness—the theatrical streak was strong in his nature—Steller might have been pardoned for strutting.

He prodded Carteret with an indolent ironic foot. "Well, my friend, this is the second time you've been silly enough to make trouble for me, you with your business of meddling. You thought I didn't know you because we'd never met personally and half a dozen years had passed. But I made it my business to know you by sight in those days, and I've a long memory for enemies. Thanks to you, and your infernal rag, I missed a fortune in Alaska. You remember that, eh? So do I. You're the man who started the talk that crabbed my copper deal."

"Steal," corrected Carteret. "Yes, I had that pleasure."

"You buy your pleasures too dear, Mr. Carteret. You're going to find that out tonight."

Beryl was listening; she had straightened up and was looking at Carteret queerly. He avoided her eyes, hoping Steller wouldn't go into his biography further. It was rather awkward for a supposedly besotted wastrel to sit and listen to it while the person who had attempted his "reformation" did so also. He could have explained it all so much better himself.

"One of these brilliant newspaper men who have built their reputations on the murdered characters of the general public," sneered Steller. "You and your tribe are the pest of society. You think you're immune, that you can get away with anything because you are, or were, the star muck raker of the Chicago *Standard*. I intend to show you otherwise. I'm going to show you that the man who thinks he can put anything over on Florian Steller, and get away with it, isn't born. Your brilliant career is over; it finishes right here tonight."

Carteret's hidden wrists were resting comfortably in the equally hidden basin of water. They were knowledgeable men, Steller, Tarling and Kadry, but no man can be expected to know everything. Even had they seen what he was doing, it was possible they were ignorant of the action of water on rawhide. He hoped Steller would continue to indulge his weakness for strutting; he must encourage him. Every passing minute stretched the thongs while it brought Bobo nearer.

"Cut out the fake frightfulness, Steller,"

he said with calculated contempt. "You can't scare me. You've called the turn on the gold gamble; well, take the stake, and may the devil go with it. You've won, we've lost. Let it go at that. But this veiled threat of murder is childish."

"Ach, child's talk, dot is all," said Tarling, nodding contentedly. "Dot's right, don't let him scare you, Mr. Carteret. Of course we let you to go to tell everybody about der gold. Yes, we do that, right away quick."

"Oh, without doubt," nodded Kadry, his little black eyes crinkling. "You lose in the gamble and so you pay nothing. We let m'sieu go with all his so beautiful information, including his unrivaled knowledge of Port-au-Prince. Oh, of a surety."

"Don't let the dogs bait you, Carteret," said Sefton. He roused up, glaring wildly at the three. "Go on, you scum, and do your worst! Get it over with. You'll get no cry of mercy from me. Better make a good job when you're at it for, if I live, I'll see you paid in full for this night's work! And if you harm my girl, Florian Steller, I'll tear your black heart out if I have to come from the grave to do it!"

"Hear, hear!" said Steller. "That's the way to talk. There you are, Carteret; old Virginius, if stagy and a trifle illogical, has a proper grasp of the situation. You see that we simply can't afford to let you go, much as we'd love to. That's the penalty of possessing too much knowledge, of being a really clever fellow. As you say, you've lost the game, and the stakes are life and death. You should have thought of that before inviting yourself in. You've lost, and now you've got to pay. I hope you've no serious objections?"

"I certainly have," said Carteret, "and so have you. You daren't do it and you know it. You daren't court the sort of investigation that would follow."

"You're such a celebrity, eh?"

"Put it that way if you like," said Carteret with seeming indifference. "At least I'm well enough known to make my disappearance or death a matter of some importance to more than me. There isn't a port in the world where you'd be safe; I think you know that. I don't see how you propose to keep the matter secret from the consul in Port-au-Prince, to say nothing of Bobo and Mackenzie here. My death may be highly desirable, from your point of view, but what's the use when it means your own? As you say, some pleasures are bought too dearly."

"All that you say is very true as applied to conditions as they were," replied Steller pleasantly. "But, my dear friend, those conditions have changed in the past few hours. Perhaps this message, which I'm going to send by wireless from my yacht, will help you to understand the new situation. I take it for granted that with your unrivaled knowledge, aided by what Sefton has undoubtedly told you, you're aware of the audible ambition of that admirable patriot, General Napoleon Bobo. Ah, yes, the Liberator. Vive Bobo!"

It was evident that at last Steller had reached his big trump, the ultimate playing of which, with theatrical flourish, both he and his confederates had contemplated with the liveliest expectation and pleasure. They looked as if ready to enjoy themselves. The proposed radiogram, the draft of which Steller now read out slowly and with unction, was to his partner Braunheim and ran as follows:

"On board *Corsair*, off Jamaica. Revolution in Haiti, army under General Bobo marching on capital from Picolet. Heard the firing, put into Picolet and picked up some refugees. Understand that three Americans were killed in street fighting. Names follow. John Sefton, resident; Mackenzie, consular agent; Lawrence Carteret, the journalist. Expect me New York Monday.
"STELLER."

"Refugees, dot is right," nodded Tarling, licking a cigar carefully before lighting it. "Ach, yes, poor Kadry and I was burned out by these dam' natives with der slogan of 'Kill der *blanc*!' We only escaped with our lives. Such a pity you didn't, Mr. Carteret; you and Sefton and Mackenzie. Vell, dot is war. Yes."

"So if you should happen to be expecting a visit from the Liberator, you needn't wait," said Steller, a satiric eye on Carteret. "He started on his historic march some time ago. We saw him safely off, wished him Godspeed. A glorious and moving sight, he and his heroic warriors. You should have seen him, heard his address to the troops on the glorious Champ de Mars. He's wearing a new gorgeous pink uniform, festooned with gold lace, prepared specially for the occasion. He has a new sword too. Why, even some of the grand army have shoes and quite modern rifles. No expense was spared; it cost me some-

thing, and even Bobo went down into his pocket. A stupendous array which he likened to the immortal Tenth Legion and the German army. He thinks the Tenth Legion fought in the French Revolution."

Tarling and Kadry were laughing immoderately. "Ach, my God!" said Tarling, wiping his eyes. "Him and his white horse! Napoleon the Great. Can't you see him with folded arms looking down at dawn on der capital?"

"Moses on Mount Pisgah," cackled Kadry.

Carteret could visualize that last scene on the Champ de Mars, grandiloquent name for a barren tract on the outskirts of the town. The capital copied Paris, Picolet the capital. Here there was held, as at Port-au-Prince, a grand review on the last Sunday of every month. He had seen those reviews, with Bobo proudly sitting the spavined white mare—a treasured relic and one of the few in Picolet—surrounded by his rainbow-hued staff that almost outnumbered the rank and file. Carteret had never laughed, no more than he would have laughed at the intensely serious make-believe of children. It was too pathetic, even to the stereotyped bombastic harangue with which Bobo always ended the proceedings that consisted merely of a march past of the grotesque army, gaudy colors flying and band playing. One had to see such things in order to believe them. He could imagine all that Bobo had said in that last address, how he had stood in the stirrups and waved his new sword, these three scoundrels applauding, tongue in cheek, at his elbow, before leading his "braves" over the mountains to certain and inglorious destruction. Nowhere in any other country in the world, nowhere among any other peoples, could such a scene have been enacted; nowhere but in Picolet. And so it would seem that the tragedy he, Carteret, had sought to avert was on the way to completion. The revolution, in so far as it concerned Picolet, was an accomplished fact. What had happened to Mackenzie?

Steller proceeded to tell him. "Le Gros Sot, a very appropriate name, Carteret," he said. "There's no fool like your really clever man. You guessed brilliantly but a trifle too late. Unfortunately you didn't know, when you and Mackenzie left, that our coup was ready to fall. From your talk with Kadry it wasn't hard to guess what Mackenzie wanted with Bobo and so he never saw him. We jailed him under the curfew regulations and he's waiting to be shot with you and Sefton. I'd prefer to hang you, but we must conform to the official report. We guessed also that you'd gone to the Villa Verd and that Sefton intended betraying us; but as we wished first to see old Bobo safely off, there was no opportunity nor necessity to come here sooner."

"You're almost as good a guesser as I am," said Carteret. "Why not say you listened at the keyhole while Vernit and Sefton were discussing you?"

"And that you murdered Vernit, you dog!" said Sefton, coming to life again.

"What! Is he dead?" asked Steller in apparent astonishment. "You wrong me, my dear Sefton. It's true I happened to overhear something of your interesting conversation, but you were still at it when I left the house."

"And laid in wait for him, killed him to prevent him reaching Carteret," said Sefton. "Or you got that Jamaica negro to do it; that would be more like you."

"Tut, tut," said Steller. "If Vernit was so foolish as to go into town, then he was killed by a sentry or stray bullet. Of course there was a little burning and shooting; it's unavoidable; nothing to amount to anything. And so Vernit's another casualty!"

"Ach, what a calamity!" exclaimed Tarling. "Such a nice man too. I think, Steller, we make that signal pretty soon, yes?"

Steller nodded. "So this is the situation, gentlemen," he said, looking from Sefton to Carteret. "We're only waiting for the tail of the grand army to pass beyond sight of the harbor before signaling the *Corsair* to put in. No use taking any chances and so we'll give the Liberator plenty of time to whip up the stragglers. We're all ready to transfer the gold; and, Carteret, we shall not deny you the pleasure of remaining with it to the last possible minute; indeed you may even accompany the last load to town. Of course you see that it wouldn't do for you to end your brilliant career here, though Sefton, as a concession to his invalidism, may and shall. We must consider the verities and the prying eye of officialdom. Obviously Sefton has been the victim of his negro servant, who took advantage of local conditions to pay off old scores. But you, Carteret, must be found in the town gutter

with Mackenzie. Rather a fitting place, don't you think, considering the garbage you write?"

"I certainly tried to do justice to the subject when writing about you," said Carteret equably.

"We should have preferred to shoot Mackenzie out of hand," continued Steller, as though Carteret's reply hadn't stung, "but it was impossible, because Bobo would have heard of it. His arrest was quite regular, for even a consular agent has no right to break the military law. The British agent knew better and is very comfortably interned in his own quarters.

"And now as for you, my dear young lady," he continued, turning to Beryl, "it will depend on yourself whether, when the *Corsair* sails in the early morning, you are also one of the refugees. I think perhaps that in the interval I can persuade you that there's nothing to be gained and everything to lose by repeating anything you've seen or heard here to-night. It is much better to be a refugee under my devoted protection than—— But I leave the alternative to your common sense and imagination. After all, you must consider the truth that I'm no worse than your father, and perhaps a good deal better. And at least I shall not neglect you like him. Your father stole this treasure in the first place and then, with the help of Carteret, planned to cheat us out of our just share. If he'd dealt fairly with us, we'd have dealt fairly with him. As it is, we've merely won a game that he started, and we're acting precisely as he would if he had won. The victors are entitled to the spoils. Your common sense tells you that."

Her common sense told her that, whatever she might promise, her chance of life in the long run was precisely that of Carteret and her father. To Steller she represented no more than a pawn in the game, a fugitive plaything, a prize that, once grasped, would be quickly discarded. He might take her for a cruise on the *Corsair* but he would never run the permanent risk of her story becoming known. Or if he would, then Tarling and Kadry wouldn't. Why should they? She knew as much as her father and Carteret, represented an equal menace. Apart from their unlovely lifelong attitude toward women, they simply couldn't afford to indulge, in this instance, any sentimentalism commonly accorded her sex. The gold had dehumanized them and they were utterly ruthless. She was simply another obstacle and she would be swept aside, blotted out almost without conscious thought. Nor, for that matter, could they exact a promise of silence from her; she would fight them to the last, and, all else failing, would take her own life before crowning Steller's triumph.

These were subconscious thoughts; curiously enough her conscious mind wasn't concerned with her fate, with anything that was now happening. She hardly heard Steller's verbal strutting. She was absorbed wholly with the thought that the man she had hoped to reform was Lawrence Carteret the journalist, traveler, explorer. The name was entirely familiar; she had seen it for years in newspapers and magazines over informative and entertaining articles that she had read with avidity and admiration. She even knew something of his hard-working and adventurous life, of his early days in the Texas Rangers, his small beginnings on a San Francisco paper. In fact Lawrence Carteret, in his own line, was, like Louise Lavender, one of her literary idols. And this was the man to whom she had spoken as having wasted his life, sown weeds instead of flowers; the man to whom she had read Louise Lavender! He had been making fun of her all the time, deliberately permitting her to think him a confirmed tippler, ne'er-do-well, vagabond. Oh, but it was odious of him, intolerable! Why hadn't he told her who he was? There might have been some excuse in Bermuda, but here after all these days——

"And so, gentlemen," Steller was concluding with a flourish, "I hope you fully understand the situation. We'll leave you now to digest it, for we've other matters to attend to. Come, Beryl."

"Hold on, Steller," said Carteret quietly. "It's you who doesn't understand the situation, and you'd better try to before it's too late. If you take my advice you'll leave us alone, and this island while you've time. I may be the fool you say, but I wasn't fool enough to send only one message to Bobo. You'd need to jail more than Mackenzie."

They looked startled for a moment, then all three laughed. Without condescending to reply, Steller forced Beryl to her feet and from the room, the other two following.

Kadry returned and put his head round the door, his black eyes crinkling. "In case

I don't happen to see you again, M'sieu Sefton, it may satisfy you to know that you caught that 'beriberi' at the club."

Sefton cursed the mongrel Syrian but Carteret was silent; he had no time to waste bandying epithets. He wanted Kadry to go, and at length the other did so.

The moment Kadry had gone Carteret fell to work in earnest on his hands. He hadn't dared count on this opportunity, yet he might safely have done so, for it was inevitable. As Steller said, they had other matters to see to. He worked patiently, intelligently, if savagely. The rawhide had stretched, yet it remained a formidable obstacle. They made a thoroughly good job of it.

Sefton gave him no attention; he lay on his back, bloodshot eyes staring at the ceiling, bound hands crossed on his breast. He was physically incapable of much movement and, moreover, after his last outburst he seemed to have abandoned all hope, resigned himself to the inevitable.

"We're done," he muttered at length. "Those dogs aren't human and they'll do all they say. I wouldn't care what happened if I could save my girl. The innocent have to suffer—and you're one of them, Carteret. I'm sorry for the opinion I had of you, sorry for a lot of things—now that it's too late. Of—of course you were only trying to bluff Steller, eh? A last throw. There wasn't any other message sent to Bobo? No, of course not."

Receiving no reply but heavy breathing, he turned with difficulty and peered at Carteret. The latter was bent double, his shadow a huge grotesque blot on wall and floor. The sleeves of the drill coat seemed stuffed to bursting and his face was the color of rosewood. Suddenly he exhaled a great breath and straightened up, and simultaneously his hands shot into view, the wrists swollen and bleeding.

He glanced up and winked at the face peering over the edge of the bed. "Quiet!" he whispered, and nodded at the half-open door. A jackknife from his pocket quickly freed his feet and then slashed through Sefton's bonds.

He glanced warily into the empty corridor, then returned to the bed. "Don't try to move," he said, "for they'll hear you. Leave everything to me. I wasn't trying to bluff Steller and we aren't done yet. But whatever happens I'll put Steller beyond harming anybody. You may be sure of that."

CHAPTER XXIII.

PETIT BEAU.

HE had no time to explain to Sefton that the second messenger was Bijou Kadry, whom he had met on his way to the Villa Verd. When Mackenzie and he had seen what they supposed was Vernit's signal it put the cap on all their fears and conjectures. At first Mackenzie wouldn't hear of Carteret going to the Villa Verd alone; it was only after a spirited if brief argument that he saw the futility of their both going. "One can dodge the pickets better than two," said Carteret, "and, if I know anything, we'll be needing all the help we can get. The best thing to do is to tell Bobo; he'll believe it from you, Mac, where he mightn't from me. And don't say you suspect, but that you *know*. Say Sefton told you, and make the best dicker you can for him, understand?" And so strongly had Mackenzie come to believe the truth of Carteret's deductions that he agreed without further argument.

Naturally neither of them considered at that time the possibility of Mackenzie's being prevented from seeing Bobo; at the worst, if arrested by a zealous officer under the new curfew law, he would demand and be accorded an interview. He was entitled to such consideration. It was only when Carteret had won clear of the town, been fired on and given his pursuers the slip, thanks to his old ranger experience, and had fallen in with Bijou, that he realized what might happen to Mackenzie. For the girl told him enough to confirm what he had sensed, more even than seen, as to the unusual state of tension in Picolet.

Bijou herself didn't know what it all portended; her father had given her a beating —thus evidently working off some of his evil humor after Carteret left the club—and then sent for Steller and Tarling, who were with Bobo. They had shut themselves up in the private room. They were excited, looked as though full of rhum yet obviously weren't drunk. She was curious and had listened at the door. She heard Carteret's name mentioned, General Bobo's; heard some reference to the old Emperor Christophe, a great treasure, a vessel called *Corsair*, and something that was to happen at Port-au-Prince. It was all very fragmen-

tary, bewildering, inexplicable; her alarmed heart could gather nothing but the supposition that Tarling was going to leave her. Evidently they were all planning to leave the island.

They surprised her at the door, opened it suddenly and quietly. They dragged her into the room, threatened to kill her, asked how long she had been there, what she had heard. They looked like wild beasts and she was afraid. She said she had heard nothing, had only come to see Tarling, to wait until he appeared. He would take her with him wherever he went? Tarling cursed her, called her terrible names, while Steller and her father laughed. Then Kadry flung her into her room and locked the door. She had risked her neck and escaped through the window, fled to the hills, dodging the sentries and squads of soldiers who were gathering as if it were the Sunday morning of a grand review. She didn't know what it all meant, nor did she care. Her world was in ashes; Tarling had cursed her to her face, shown unmistakably that in truth he had never loved her. She had wanted to die. M'sieu Carteret was right; Tarling was a dog. They were all dogs, her father included. She would never go back to him.

Carteret wondered if ever man had been placed in such a position; Vernit's signal was still flaring off among the trees, urging the utmost hurry, yet he must wait and listen to this girl. It seemed a providential meeting. If the coup were actually planned for to-night, and Steller down there in the town, then Mackenzie might find it impossible to see Bobo. Steller, knowing or suspecting what Mackenzie knew, would prevent that at all costs. That the other was American consular agent would mean nothing to him; he would take any desperate measure. But was it planned for to-night? The lack of exact knowledge, indeed any definite information, was maddening. From the first it had handicapped him, been impossible to secure. These men knew how to plan and carry out in secret.

He couldn't return to Picolet; he must go on to the Villa Verd. But this girl? Here was an instrument ready to his hand. True, like Bobo, she could neither read nor write, yet for all her ignorance she was intelligent and keen witted. The complete fool she had made of herself over Tarling was no gauge of her intelligence; we have all our blind side, and the cleverest among us can be equally stupid in matters of the heart. Moreover she would be actuated by three of the strongest motives known to humanity; a genuine love of country, common to those of the soil; gratitude toward him, Carteret; hatred for Tarling. Yes, her eyes were open at last and she now hated with the same intensity as she had loved. He could see that. She had fought her despair, wandering blindly among the hills like a stricken animal, and, to employ another figure, the quenched fire of her love had left the cold bitter ashes of hatred and contempt.

Carteret, an eye on the naked window of the Villa Verd, staring like an appealing eye through the night, forced himself to speak lucidly and calmly. In clear-cut phrases he sketched the situation as he surmised it, omitting all superfluous detail. The essentials were that she must contrive to see Bobo alone, at least without the knowledge of Steller, Tarling and Kadry. She must tell him of the perfidy of that triumvirate, the elaborate trap prepared for him and his men; tell him about the treasure of the Black Napoleon. If he wouldn't believe her, let him seek out Mackenzie or come to the Villa Verd. She must convince him of the truth. "It means, Bijou, the life of all those men, which is infinitely more even than the saving of this great treasure for your country, the rightful owner. You will say that John Sefton sent you, that he repents of his part in this vile business and wants to make amends before it's too late. You fully understand it all, the difficulties and dangers which I only wish I could face instead of you?"

He made no point of trading on her newfound enmity for Tarling, appealed rather to her higher nature; and it is possible that her thoughts of revenge were outweighed by loftier ones. Perhaps she saw herself, the despised and derided one, suddenly looming as a tremendously important figure, the destined savior of her country. At all events she impressed Carteret profoundly; the inconsequential girl he had known was gone and he confronted a calm-eyed woman of purpose. "Bijou understands, m'sieu," she said gravely. "She will not fail you. Danger?—pouf! The army, everybody, know Bijou and for a smile or kiss I go anywhere." A handclasp and she was gone. He watched her swallowed by the night.

then turned and started running for the Villa Verd.

And now, despite the great confidence with which she had inspired him, it would appear that Bijou had failed like Mackenzie. There could be no doubt that Bobo had actually started on his fatal march. So many things might have happened to the girl; she might be lying out in the bush with a twisted ankle, might have been killed by a stray bullet. Yet Carteret, as he crept from Sefton's room, refused to abandon hope. If the scoundrelly triumvirate had remained with Bobo to the last, made a point of so doing, then Bijou had had no opportunity of delivering the message. She would have the wit to wait, follow Bobo unseen until he was well clear of the town. At all events he, Carteret, was now free, no longer a helpless carcass waiting to be slaughtered. He was free to fight.

The upper hall was still in darkness but they had evidently substituted something for the broken lamp below; no doubt it was a candle that sprayed its feeble light on the wall at the head of the stairs. They must be down there for he heard a noise, a faint dull thud as of some one hammering. He had been conscious of it for some time; that he realized now. Perhaps they were breaking out the gold, unable to resist the temptation of gloating over it as they had gloated over him. But by this time one of them at least must have gone to signal the *Corsair;* that would leave two, not such great odds even though he was unarmed but for the jackknife. He must deal with them before the shore party from the yacht arrived.

He was stealing down the hall toward the stairs when arrested by a sound close at hand. There was some one in Miss Sefton's room; he could hear a movement.

The door was ajar and he pushed it open without sound. A lamp burned dimly on the white bureau. He expected to see Steller but found Petit Beau, whom he thought dead. There could be no mistake even by that light; the huge negro, a dark-stained bandage round his head, was bending over the bed on which lay Beryl. She seemed too frightened to cry out or move, like a bird in the presence of a snake. The lamp struck a whitish flame from the negro's hand.

Carteret leaped, swung his right and all his weight as Petit Beau turned. The negro ducked cleverly and a knuckle snapped on his iron skull. But the instantly following left uppercut him wickedly. They clinched. They were strong men both, apparently evenly matched, but the advantage lay with the white and, from the first, there could be no doubt of the ultimate outcome. Petit Beau seemed to have little heart for it all. Carteret wrenched the knife from him, set both thumbs in his throat, bent him over the bed and planted an invincible knee in his heaving ribs. The negro's solitary eye loomed large to bursting. By a supreme effort he partly broke the terrible grip, gurgled and wheezed out, "Me friend, sah boss!"

Carteret found Beryl tearing frantically at his hands. "Let go!" she implored. "You're killing him! He's a friend. Don't you understand? Stop it!"

Her action, if not the meaning of her words, penetrated the crimson haze which seemed to envelop him. His grip relaxed, and he straightened up, and stared stupidly at Beryl.

"See!" exclaimed the girl, and displayed the severed cords that had bound her. "He set me free. He came to help us, tried to from the first. He's a friend."

Carteret suddenly remembered Kadry's boast about poisoning Sefton. There was also the fact that the triumvirate had said nothing to support the belief that Petit Beau was one of their number.

"Don't you understand?" repeated Beryl, ready to laugh or cry. "He tried to get through that window to help us. Your bullet stunned him."

"Dat's right, sah boss," gasped Petit Beau as he felt his windpipe with spatulate thumb. "You go foh to kill this chile near twice. Bah Jove! yes, sah, boss!"

"If you're lying, the third time will be successful," said Carteret, standing over him with hungry hands and looking really terrifying. "And I'm not sure you aren't. That's all very well," as Beryl sought to interpose, "but I'm taking no chances. He could have his own reasons for setting you free. I'll tie him up and hear his story later."

"I'se tellin' you the truf, sah, boss," protested Petit Beau, rolling his solitary eye. "If yo' don't believe me, jes' listen to dat." He raised a mammoth pale-palmed hand to impose silence, and the hammering from below became more audible. It had in-

creased in violence, become a frantic sort of drumming, an orgy of staccato sound.

"Well?" demanded Carteret sharply.

"Well, dat's dem," said Petit Beau, a grin spreading like oil over his unhandsome countenance. "Dey's down in the cellar and can't get out. I'se done blocked the do'."

CHAPTER XXIV.

CHRISTOPHE'S TREASURE.

TRAPPED, the whole three of them, if ever rats were. After all the months of patient cunning and duplicity, their high display of cleverness, to be caught like fools when the game was as good as won, the great prize actually within their grasp! If even one of their number was free to summon help! But Kadry, who had been delegated to signal the *Corsair*, had followed them into the treasure chamber. The complete disaster was of their own making, the natural and even inevitable outcome of their essential falsity.

Kadry didn't trust his partners any more than he could help; he feared that in some manner they would contrive to cheat him, perhaps remove and secrete part of the hoard during his absence. He suspected that its value was larger than they had declared—because he himself, in a similar position, would have lied as a matter of course—and he meant to see it for himself before they had time to tamper with it.

This was the very thing his partners didn't wish, hence his assignment to the water front. Their plans for concealing the real value of the treasure from him had long since matured; he should have no opportunity of learning the real amount. It had been arranged that he was to go down to the dock and bring up the shore party for the "munitions," while Tarling saw to the mule transport and Steller stood guard at the Villa Verd. That would give the latter couple ample time to break out the loads that would pass down in the darkness, by another route, as Kadry came up. They preferred to have no trouble with him; considering the relatively trifling sum involved it was the easiest way. A hundred thousand wouldn't be missed, but they had no intention of entertaining a claim based on his knowledge of the treasure's actual value. If he became too observant and suspicious—well, he mightn't get even the amount agreed on. Although the exact truth will never be known, it's reasonable to assume that, realizing all the obstacles in the way of keeping Kadry misinformed, they had come to a tacit agreement regarding his disposal. Unquestionably they intended that at the first sign of trouble he should become another casualty in the convenient street fighting. Steller and Tarling were old allies in crime, master and man, but Emanuel Kadry was a rank outsider, no more than a glorified tool. He had served his turn, helped Tarling toward the information that enabled him to blackmail Sefton into revealing the treasure.

Tarling, who should have left the Villa Verd with Kadry, simulated an argument with Steller as an excuse for remaining. This may have put an edge on Kadry's suspicions, perhaps also sight of the pack mules, tethered near the house, which they had brought from Tarling's place on their way from the Champ de Mars. It had seemed a natural procedure, a saving of time to assemble this first relay, but now Kadry may have considered it in a different light. At all events he stole back to the house and saw the guttering candle in the hall, the displaced picture and gaping panel. Steller and Tarling, thinking it might possibly have a spring lock, some new and cunning device installed by Sefton since Tarling's last visit to the treasure, had taken the precaution to wedge the panel open. They had watched Kadry set out for the highroad, given him an extra few minutes, and had no fear of intrusion. It was this urgent matter of cheating their partner that had proved Beryl's salvation. Steller had first to attend to business.

Sefton had indeed utilized cleverly part of the old stone foundation of the contemplated original building, and in a manner to obviate suspicion. What Petit Beau termed a cellar was an inclosure, the greater part of which was under the living room. Like most outdoor men, Sefton, whatever his intellectual shortcomings, was a skilled manual worker and had found it no great problem to make the secret entrance after the builders had gone. Like all houses in the island the Villa Verd was constructed of wood, and none too well constructed; Sefton's apparently careless or parsimonious method of laying the living-room floor boards on part of the old foundation, without troubling to fill in the cavity, was not only consistent with his assumed character

but the lazy and slipshod methods of the workmen involved. It had provoked no comment, least of all suspicion.

Steller and Tarling, by the light of a lamp they had brought from the living room, were so engrossed in their task as to be unaware of an alien presence until Kadry had descended the trio of steps and was almost peering over their shoulders. He probably realized at this point the risk he might be running for a hand was on the revolver in his coat pocket. While the two were confronting the one in silence, uncertain what to say or how to act, each awaiting a lead from the other, the panel suddenly slid shut. If General Bobo had walked in on them they couldn't have been more startled; nor could they believe that this phenomenon was caused by any sinister human agency. No, the thing was impossible; as they had suspected, Sefton had installed a new gadget to protect the treasure, Kadry had carelessly displaced the wedge, the spring had acted, the panel closed. That was it; bad enough but not too bad. It simply meant loss of time. If they couldn't open the panel they could contrive to break it down. It was only when they ascended the steps and heard distinctly some one moving in the hall that they began to realize their position; and panic gripped at them when a heavy piece of furniture thumped solidly against the wall. Snarling, Steller suddenly turned and dealt Kadry a blow that tumbled him from the steps.

On learning at a later period all the details of Petit Beau's story, Carteret had opportunity to moralize on the proverbial deceptiveness of appearances. If ever man looked a villain, and had seemed to act it, that man was the Jamaican negro, yet he had not only proved himself the hero of the piece—Carteret would have it so—but possessed of some solid virtues. Ignorant he might be, a child of darkness and sin, but a primitive and unswerving loyalty toward his salt was a salient characteristic; and perhaps it was proof of the predominant good in Sefton's nature that he had also won this man's affection.

If Petit Beau had reason to suspect the genuineness of the "munitions" story or what that secret chamber really held, he never bothered his head about it, no more than he cared who ruled the island at Port-au-Prince. This wasn't his country, and his happy-go-lucky nature asked little beyond the enjoyment of his simple pleasures and vices. All the rest was Sefton's business and no concern of his. The coin given by him to Bijou had been lost by Sefton, and to Petit Beau it represented no more than it seemed. It was entirely characteristic that he should pocket it without question, never take the trouble to clean it—no more than had Bijou herself—or consider that it might be gold instead of copper. To him it meant simply something that unfortunately couldn't be exchanged for rhum or tobacco—therefore something he was at liberty to retain without question—not a good French coin of commerce but a luck piece which one could endow with mysterious virtues and present as a priceless gift to a favored one.

Next to his affection for Sefton came his dislike for Tarling for whom he had worked on first coming to Picolet. At that period, and for some time later, their relations were of the best, and there would seem to be little doubt that in having Petit Beau employed by Sefton, Tarling was providing against a possible occasion when the other should prove a useful ally. But whatever confidence Tarling intended making never came about, for at this juncture there began his intimacy with Bijou, much to Petit Beau's secret indignation. Again it was entirely characteristic that though nominally a benedict, and minus any encouragement from Bijou, Petit Beau considered Tarling to be poaching on his preserve. When he saw at length how Bijou fared, he began to hate Tarling.

Tarling, well aware of this change in their relations, and Petit Beau's attachment for Sefton, had seen an obstacle in him and his family that must be dealt with on the night the treasure was removed. Thanks to Le Roi Rouge the matter could be easily arranged. Kadry was an intimate of the old Papaloi, had known him when both of them were impecunious charlatans and worse, living off the countryside as best they could. And so Petit Beau received a message, tantamount to a royal command, to attend on the night in question a special gathering of the Sacred Serpent's votaries. Of course he was to say nothing of the matter to Sefton who, like all *blancs,* strongly disapproved of such meetings.

Mrs. Petit Beau, a confirmed backslider from the old religion, and with no interest

in such orgies—perhaps she feared that some day her succulent offspring might figure as the sacrificial goat—had to be dealt with otherwise. Accordingly when her husband had gone she received a message to the effect that her mother, who lived on the other side of Picolet, had met with a serious accident. Failing in a perfunctory attempt to communicate this sad news to Beryl and Sefton, the one being asleep, as she thought, and the other engrossed with Doctor Vernit, she had set off with her child, planning to return in a few hours. Tarling, however, meant to see that she didn't return until the following morning.

Chance alone broke the web spun for Petit Beau and set his uninquiring and none-too-active mind to working. He was contemplating the pleasures of the coming ceremony, thus cheering his lonely jog trot up the mountain, when he fell in with an acquaintance, resident near Le Roi Rouge, who was also a votary of the Sacred Serpent, a regular attendant at the little building hidden deep in the bush, far from the prying eye of authority or the *blanc*. In fact this gentleman was none other than the brother of the officiating Mamaloi, and when he assured Petit Beau that some one had been making a fool of him, his words carried weight. If there was to be a meeting wouldn't the drum have signaled the fact? Not, said Petit Beau, if it was to be a select gathering of special votaries, such as he had been given to understand. Oho, the other had retorted, and who could be more select than himself, I ask you? Yet he had heard nothing about it, he who should be among the first to know. How had this lying message been conveyed, delivered by whom? By M'sieu Kadry, said Petit Beau, who, as every true believer knew, was as a secret brother to Papa the King. N'importe, said the other; the fact remained that Kadry was a *blanc,* and a *blanc* has his own ideas of a joke that are past understanding. He had gone to the trouble of forging Papa the King's message for the purpose of making a fool of Petit Beau.

Petit Beau was constrained to believe this, the more so as ocular proof demanded so much physical exertion with the promise of an empty reward—stomach—at the end of it. Why complete the weary miles? He turned at length, and the homeward miles seemed equally weary and tortuous. Moreover his head was heavy with unwonted thought, dull suspicion; thought of Kadry, Tarling and Steller. Were these supposed friends of Sefton in reality his enemies? What lay behind the latter's illness, the strange request to share his meals? It might behoove him, Petit Beau, to try and answer these questions, open his eyes to things he had considered no concern of his, to which he had been considerately blind.

He returned in time to see the triumvirate with the pack mules arrive, and he watched them curiously, suspiciously from the darkness. He saw Steller enter the house in furtive manner, saw Tarling, with the help of Kadry, attempt to climb the piazza. Then a shot slammed out. He crept round to the back but found the door locked; then he climbed the kitchen extension. Carteret's lightning shot had furrowed his temple, tumbled him headlong to the kitchen roof and thence to the ground where he lay unconscious. When at length he recovered Kadry had left the house and was creeping back to it. Petit Beau followed with equal stealth, watched the other disappear through the hole in the wall. Satisfied that the trio had obligingly entered a trap of their own making, he shut the panel and wedged the hall stand and heavy table against it. Then running upstairs, his bare feet noiseless, he had heard Beryl as she fought vainly to free herself against the return of Steller.

"Halte la!"

Carteret, descending the stairs with Petit Beau, paused and pondered the tableau revealed by light of the candle in the lower hall. General Bobo had just entered with a file of men who were pointing their rifles in all directions, crouching and peering into the shadows as though expecting a bullet from any quarter. The wandering bayonet of one had even knocked their commander's impressive cocked hat askew. General Bobo was excited and warm, very excited and very warm. And his new uniform, festooned with thick gold lace, was very pink and gorgeous, all that Steller had declared it. He breathed audibly and flourished a magnificent sword. This was serious business, yet Carteret had to smile behind his hand.

Bobo had made a forced march with picked men, leaving the main body of the army at the spot where it had been over-

taken by Bijou. Their colloquy had been long and obstinate but he had yielded at length to her superior passion, if not logic; in a sense he had been compelled to. This daughter of the soil, when roused, knew how to impose her will even on him. After all, the Villa Verd wasn't so far away and, should it prove that the girl had lied, then she should lie in her grave. Oho, yes; she should be shot, and quickly. That was understood, and she returned under careful guard.

Could any one concoct such a tale as she had told? And for what reason, toward what end? It was impossible to ignore the stamp of truth, and yet Bobo had doubted until the last. And now this scene revealed by light of the guttering candle and bathed in the faint acrid fumes of powder that still hung in the heavy air! The smashed lamp, bullet-scarred walls, the piled furniture, that inexplicable subterranean sound as of caged beasts fighting. The truly incredible tale of treachery, no less than of the Black Napoleon's treasure, had suddenly become convincing as no words had been able to make it. Then footsteps aloft, some one descending the darkened stairs, and——

"Halte la!" thundered General Bobo, flourishing his sword to the imminent detriment of Lieutenant Petion's right eye. "Another step and *mes braves* fire! Surrender in the name of the mighty Republic of Haiti! I, General Napoleon Bobo, command it!"

"It's I, Gros Sot." And Carteret stepped down into the light. "Welcome back, your majesty. You'll find your three best friends, and old Christophe's money, below on your right. Me? Oh, I've had nothing to do with it; I was just mooching round. The credit goes to John Sefton, this gentleman and hero, Petit Beau, and that lady I see in the background. Whatever is over is undoubtedly yours, mon général."

CHAPTER XXV.

CARTERET'S CONFESSION.

CARTERET expected that last scene, fitting climax to all that had gone before, and when it came he made no attempt to change it as he might so easily have done.

Why should he entertain this sudden weakness toward those three trapped scoundrels who surely merited their impending fate? What quality of mercy had they shown to poor Vernit, or would have shown to the Seftons and himself? Thieves and murderers, and yet—well, there it was; not the sickly sympathy of the sentimental and superficial for the ofttime totally unworthy underdog, but something perhaps that struck at the roots of racial pride. These three were white men, one at least a fellow American, and, if taken alive, would promptly become the target for a firing party. There was no question of that, and they themselves undoubtedly understood the issue. They were dealing with Bobo, the betrayed friend and outraged patriot, the dictator of Picolet, the man who, on occasion, had shown himself to be implacable as the Black Napoleon himself. He would have no mercy. Useless to try and shelter behind the American flag, wealth and social position, to point out that Bobo himself was an abortive revolutionist; they couldn't explain away Vernit's murder which, if all else were lacking, supplied Bobo with sufficient legal motive.

Bobo himself had shown unmistakably what course he intended taking, the summary justice he meant to mete out. "Enough, m'sieu," he said when Carteret, his brief story finished, sought to invoke the regular machinery of the law. *"I* am the law. You have played your part, a noble and magnificent one—oho, but I have learned it from the woman Kadry—for which you have the undying gratitude of myself and country. You have played your part, and now I shall play mine. The rest is for me, General Napoleon Bobo. Oho, *mes braves,* prepare to drag forth these rats from their hole! Clear away that barricade!"

"They're armed," said Carteret and, having done what he could for friend and foe alike, he fell back. So far as he was concerned he would give them their fighting chance if they cared to take it; the odds against them were heavy enough without the inclusion of himself. Even should they manage to win clear of the Villa Verd, could they escape from the island? The *Corsair* was still lying off the coast, awaiting the signal that would never come.

The panel was opened, and on the instant, before Bobo could utter a word or his men act, Steller and Tarling were among them like two wild cats. There was no sign of Kadry.

It was all precisely as Carteret had anticipated; Steller acted as he would have done under similar circumstances, taking full advantage of surprise, aware that the best defense is attack. Tarling and he had been waiting at the head of the steps, crouched for their spring. They could hear all that went on in the hall. Bobo hadn't contemplated such a move; he had overestimated his power, underestimated theirs. This was characteristic. Instead of posting men opposite the entrance with leveled weapons he had directed them to stand at either side. He, of whose courage there should be no question, opened the panel himself. He meant to carry out the surrender in person. He knew just what he intended saying to these three wretches, these wicked ones, cowering down there, too frightened now to make a move or sound. How they would quail before his powerful and withering invective! His speech would be reported in the Port-au-Prince papers, all the papers; and they would show a picture of him in his new uniform.

Steller bowled him over, sent him crashing among the flanking guard that sprang forward automatically. His great bulk created havoc and inextricable confusion followed; the candle was kicked out in a twinkling, bayonets were jabbed into innocent flesh, a rifle or two flashed harmlessly. Darkness, uproar, chaos.

In the end the total result was one casualty which, in reality, had been produced at the beginning, and not by the grand army of Picolet. They found Emanuel Kadry, amid the Black Napoleon's treasure, with a knife in his heart. This went to explain, apart from Vernit's death, the desperate attempt at escape of Steller and Tarling. And escape from the Villa Verd they did. Aided by the darkness, and conditions in the town, they even succeeded in reaching the water front and a boat. On the morrow the craft was found bottom up and adrift. But Picolet hunted them all that night while, across the mountains in distant Port-au-Prince, Admiral Armstrong awaited vainly the opportunity of fulfilling the dual and usually profitable rôle of traitor and patriot.

"And me moored in that stinking jail all the time! That's what I'll never get over," said Mackenzie, not for the first time. "Me anchored hand and foot, while you—— But *I'd* never have let those two dogs escape. I guess it's time you were having your head examined."

"Maybe," agreed Carteret. "And yet, Mac——" He shrugged, and his gaze wandered to where a sentry was pacing importantly back and forth. It was the following day and Mackenzie and he were on the veranda of the Villa Verd. Pending the removal of the treasure, General Bobo had placed a guard over it, night and day, within and without. "Anyway," added Carteret, "we don't know that they *have* escaped."

"Aw!" said Mackenzie. "Of course they have. The *Corsair*, wondering why she hadn't been signaled, and hearing the firing, would have been standing in. There was no storm, nothing to capsize that boat. It was a fake; they want us to think 'em dead. What's Bobo been doing about it?"

"Nothing, nor will he. He can't. If they've escaped—well, there isn't anything here that could overhaul them. And then there'd be the publicity. For that reason he can't complain to Uncle Sam. It would mean all this about the abortive revolution coming out, passing from the realm of rumor to fact. Official notice would have to be taken of it. It's much better to believe that couple at the bottom of the bay. If they're alive, they can't say anything; and Armstrong can't either. Bobo will give his own version of what happened here last night, lay it all on Steller and Tarling and their attempted theft. And any government suspicions—or more than that—will be smothered by Christophe's money. They'd forgive him anything for half that sum."

Mackenzie grinned cynically. "And you won't say anything, of course. And I—well, I guess it isn't up to me to pursue inquiries if Bobo won't. The crimes were committed here. What about Sefton?"

"He'll get his whack and no questions asked. Bobo pledged his word on that. And Petit Beau and Miss Kadry will be suitably rewarded."

"And what do you get out of it?"

"The same as you—the fun of the game."

"Huh, a lot of fun I got, moored in that stinking jail. I haven't even got a princess out of it. I'm thinking, Larry, you'll really be getting more out of it than anybody, if it comes to that."

"I'm hoping so," said Carteret soberly. "But, you see—well, she knows now, of course, that I'm neither an ale hound nor

a loafer—and I doubt if she can survive the shock, let alone forgive me."

Mackenzie cackled. "Does she know all your crimes?"

"No, that's the worst of it."

"Serves you darned well right, Larry. I warned you of the heinousness of deceiving maidens, obtaining friendship under false pretenses. It's a very serious thing." He jumped up and doffed his hat, Carteret following suit.

Beryl had appeared in the door.

"I've come to see your father on important business, Miss Sefton," said Mackenzie. "Yes, I'll go right up. Thanks, I know the way; don't bother." And he beat a hurried and masterly retreat, chuckling inwardly at thought of Carteret's heated countenance.

There was a long silence. It was the first time they had been absolutely alone since the previous morning. Was it only yesterday she had read to him from Louise Lavender? How much had happened since then!

Carteret cleared his throat, fumbled with his pipe. "It is a nice day," he said.

"Is it?" said Beryl.

"It is," said Carteret.

There was so much that each wished to say, tried to voice, yet this illuminating discourse continued for some time. She had met the "atrocious colored woman" the previous night and discovered, among other truths, the venerable one about their being sisters under the skin. She was going to do a lot for Bijou Kadry, see to her neglected education. She had emerged from their conversation feeling small and mean while Carteret had emerged in a new triumphant light, entirely too triumphant for her peace of mind. Where it had been surprisingly easy to forgive this man his supposed vices, it was surprisingly difficult to forgive him his new virtues. And she could never forgive him his colossal and studied deceit. Never! Of course she must thank him, try to remove by mere words something of the crushing burden of obligation and humiliation. Not only had this man saved their lives, but he had actually brought her father out of the whole sordid and terrible business rich in pocket and credit. His cleverness had only been equaled by his courage, this man who liked to call himself "Gros Sot." Yes, the burden of obligation was crushing, she must try to relieve it by words, but nothing should induce her to speak of the odious deception, the fool he had made of her. She would ignore that, treat it with deserved contemptuous silence.

And suddenly, with flaming cheeks and blazing eyes, she found herself plunged right into the heart of it, speaking of it and nothing else.

"But I never said I was that," protested Carteret mildly.

"You didn't have to! That—that's the odious part! You acted it—and that's infinitely worse!"

"I acted it that night in Bermuda, and the day you landed here—though it wasn't acting, but the real thing. I've taken more than was good for me on occasion; most men have, though that's no excuse. Even Mackenzie thought I was taking too much down here and he advised me to go home. And perhaps I was. As you seemed to enjoy the impression that a lot of people here had about me——"

"Enjoy! As if it mattered to me one way or the other! I suppose you'll next try to explain away or deny what you said about it being your vice? You told me that only for it you'd have been a doctor. Do you forget that?"

"Most emphatically," nodded Carteret. "I said *a* vice, and by that vice I meant the scribbling itch. I left two years' medical to become a reporter. Surely it wasn't my fault if you thought I meant the bottle instead of pen?"

"Oh, no, of course not! It's all *my* fault. I knew it would come to that. I should have known you were Lawrence Carteret, the writer."

"No, you shouldn't, any more than others down here. Mackenzie and poor Vernit were the only ones who did. You see, you can't get the truth about people if they think you may be going to write them up; they begin to pose, pretend to be what they're not. Indeed I suppose it's high time I admitted humbly the truth and justice of your charge, threw myself on your mercy. I didn't want Steller to know who I was, for I didn't know that he knew me by sight. I didn't come down here on any special assignment, for I'm connected with the press very loosely nowadays, and I didn't know Steller was coming here until I saw him land. I'd some reason to believe there was going to be an attempted revolu-

tion, I was curious about it and this alleged concession, and naturally I stood more chance of finding out things if I was thought to be the sort of character I pretended. I hope you'll look at it all in that light and find it in your heart to forgive me."

"Well," said Beryl, "of course if you *admit* the deception—yes, I understand it all now. And to understand is to forgive, isn't it?"

"Wait a moment," said Carteret. "You don't understand all yet. I've a ghastly confession still to make. Steller doesn't know or he might have mentioned it. You see—I—er—I'm Louise Lavender."

There was silence. She stared at him. "You—you're—*what?*"

"It's the terrible truth," he said gloomily. "A horrible secret known only to my publishers, Mackenzie, and a select circle. If my army of fair readers knew Louise Lavender to be a man who occasionally got intoxicated—— I suppose that's why I can write so beautifully about prohibition. I perpetrated my first crime under that pen name, a mere irresponsible experiment, and, contrary to all expectations, the thing went so big I had to keep it up."

She was still staring in silence.

"I had to buy photos of a dear defunct maiden lady by the bushel," continued Carteret somberly. "I had to hire a female secretary to sign autographs—she's in New York doing it now. She'll probably die doing it. She attends to my mammoth correspondence; God forbid that I should have to read any of it. I foresee the day when I may have to buy brunette wigs and send locks of hair in order to satisfy my admirers. Yes, a gigantic 'literary' swindle, far more common than the layman would think. The writing game's no different from any other—perhaps there's more cant and humbug in it. It's a humiliating truth that that sentimental tripe brings me in more in a month than a year's output of really good stuff. I'm properly ashamed of it but—well, vive the almighty dollar."

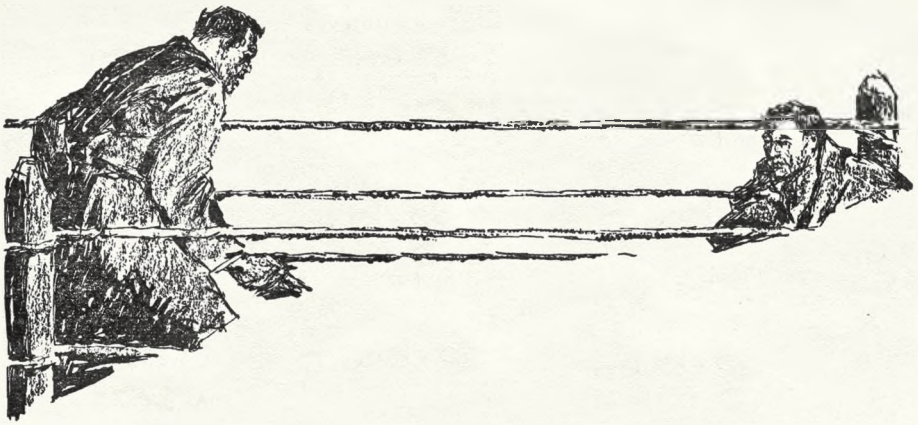
And she had read to him, this prince of deceivers, out of one of his own books, quoted whole passages from others which she tried to pass as original coin! And he had never even smiled! She had even written to him—how thankful she now was that at least he had never read that fulsome screed!—and received one of the monstrous fake photos and autographs! Beryl's face was crimson, her eyes flashing, her lips trembling—and then her keen sense of humor came to the rescue. The mere thought of dear dainty Louise Lavender and this man as she had seen him shooting at Steller, fighting with Tarling and Petit Beau—she burst out laughing, hearty joyous laughter in which Carteret's relieved bass presently joined.

"It's sporting of you to take it like that," he said. "You've been a brick all through. Yes, fancy me having to sit and listen to my own stuff. It was bad enough to write it. That was poetic justice, fitting punishment."

"But it's not sentimental tripe, no matter what you say, and you've no right to be ashamed of it! If you don't look like Louise Lavender you—your real self is in those books, the best of you. You've no right to make fun——"

"No," said Carteret, suddenly sober. "Louise Lavender has set me on the high-road to plutocracy, allowed me to live where and how I please. She has brought me hosts of friends which I really appreciate and most certainly don't deserve. Above all, if she has helped you to find the real me—or what you are kind enough to believe is the real me—and if you really think that 'me' at all worthy—Beryl——" His hand edging along the veranda rail, suddenly closed on her own. "I could say all this most eloquently as Louise Lavender, but as plain Lawrence Carteret—— You know, of course, that I—that I always have from out first meeting—that to me the real treasure, the only one worth winning—— What I mean to say is—er—I say, look here, tell me when you are going to marry me?"

"Whenever you ask me—if you ever do," said Beryl.



Old Father Hubbard

By C. S. Montanye

Author of "Tips that Pass in the Night," "Face Value," Etc.

Ottie Scandrel stages a comeback that no boomerang could have bettered.

THE instigator of that immortal remark, "They never come back!" coyly conceals his identity but the chances are this famous quotation was first delivered by either a landlady, a pawnbroker or the wife of a traveling salesman. In any case the jovial quip is open to suspicion because they *do* come back—sometimes, as I hope to prove to my own, your and everybody else's satisfaction.

The records have it that it's a long, long journey movie actors, pugilists and other celebrities in the public optic have to travel to reach the land of fame and fortune after they have once slipped. In fact the going is so tough there's plenty alibi for those who totter and fall by the wayside. This spicy narrative has to do with a certain party who made the grade and came all the way back from nowhere at all.

If you haven't met him before allow me to introduce you to Ottie Scandrel.

Scandrel, a choice sample of idiocy, had built himself up a healthy bank roll, and a reputation of sorts through the years. Mistress Luck had wooed and won him consistently with the result that his own general opinion of his genius and cleverness was extremely ludicrous. Ottie really imagined he could get away with anything from selling the bottling rights to the Pacific to managing the League of Nations and for two years or twenty-four months he clowned successfully and pushed his nonsense over without mishap.

Then when everything was as rosy as could be he dipped into Wall Street, the market promptly dropped for the count and a month after that had stripped him as clean as a bone between the paws of a ravenous setter.

It was a cruel break!

Being broke, however, failed in any way to stunt Scandrel's egotism or to make him lose an inch of confidence in the most important subject he had anything to do with —himself. He promptly fired the chauffeur, butler and valet who lived with and on him. A gentleman with a beard who was in the secondhand clothing business obtained most of the famous Scandrel wardrobe after Ottie had cuffed him into a fair price, a plumber gave him twelve dollars even for the tin that had four wheels but no brakes and the management took his rooms back at the hotel.

All this accomplished, Ottie came up to the Bronx and took a room at my gym large enough to hold himself, his photographs and his library—five volumes entitled "Press Clippings."

The two weeks following his financial disaster found the champion of conceit thinking up new stunts to get back to his

former money-making status. The first of his bright ideas was to endeavor to interest a firm of hat manufacturers in a dicer he had invented and patented. This was a folding derby guaranteed to foil coat-room boys and theater habitués with heavy feet. The thing failed to click because of the condition of the hardware market and the excessive cost of hinges. Ottie was baffled but not discouraged.

A couple of days later he wandered into the gym one morning, the typical image of wealthy prosperity. The smirk he wore was matches and kerosene so far as Looie Pitz, a little fight manager who loitered around the gym, was concerned. Looie was as fond of Scandrel as a wrong telephone number.

"What did you do—find a quarter in an old pair of pants?" Pitz sneered, getting the smile three ways.

So far as Ottie was concerned the other might have been in any part of Asia.

"I got an idea, Joe," he said directly to me. "Not an idea—*the* idea!"

"Treat it well—it's in a strange place!" Pitz butted in cheerfully. "You and them ridiculous notions of yours—I'm laughing for you! Why don't you find a job and get acquainted with work? There was a position advertised in the paper this morning for a job that you could fill to perfection."

"The bottle business?" Scandrel asked with some interest.

"No, down at the gas company!" Pitz snickered, stepping behind me.

"Come, come!" I horned in. "You boys quarrel like next-door neighbors every time you are close together. Cut it out now and shake hands."

"And take the chance of getting a finger or two crooked?" Ottie yelped. "Be yourself, boy. I didn't come in here to jab—I come in to gab. Listen. In the middle of the night or about six o'clock this morning when I was asleep I woke up with this here idea I'm telling you about. The stock market might have given me a twist but you know the old saying—you can't keep a good man in glass houses. Right now I know where there's a package of money all wrapped up and waiting for me to call around and collect it. What amazes me is that I never thought of it before."

Pitz laughed.

"A package of money, eh? They're giving guys gifts of twenty years every day for safe blowing. I always felt that sooner or later your old pals would be running up the river and asking the warden if they could go up and visit with you in your cell!"

"My fist will visit with you on that curiosity you call a chin if you get rosy with me!" Ottie bawled. "If you ever went to the pen to see any of your own relatives it's an even-money bet that you'd never get out. That map you're wearing is enough to convict you for life. You're my personal idea of a hundred dollars' worth of nothing. If you don't pipe down I'll slap you so hard that it will affect your nieces and nephews. Tell me, do I get order or don't I get order?"

"Do!" Pitz told him, over my shoulder. "What's the matter? Don't you know when I'm joking? It's all fun!"

We paused to watch one of Looie's underfed brown hopes climb into the ring for his morning punishment!

"What is this brilliant idea?" I queried.

Giving Ottie a chance to talk was the same as turning a show girl loose in a jewelry store.

"I'm going back to the ring!" he hollered. "I stepped out of it just when I had the welterweight champeenship being brought to me on a gold platter. Before you say anything—listen. Two years, as a street-car conductor says, can make a change, but that's with some ordinary bim who don't know what it's all about. To me it's nothing at all. I'm not as good as I formerly was—I'm better. Smacking the half-wits who bother me has kept me right at the top of my form and I'm so tough that I'm thinking of buying a leopard instead of a police pussy. There's plenty plums in the shape of purses ready and waiting for me and with a few grand in my kick I'll be standing pretty again. I'll be my own manager, I'll find a cheap sparring partner—some boy who ain't afraid of being beaten up for three dollars a week—I'll train in the country where there's lots of climate and——"

"You big clown!" Pitz interrupted with a touch of hysteria. "If you were worse at your best, imagine what you'll be now. You were the biggest flush that ever climbed between the ropes. The only thing you ever did was to take punishment!"

"And the only thing Napoleon ever did was to burn Russia! I ain't got a thing but two arms and a couple of hands, hey?

And I can't punch hardly anything! Well, I'm sure of knocking one party cold any day, any week, any month!"

"Indeed, who is that?" Pitz chuckled.

"You!" Scandrel screamed, catching him before he could escape and hooking over a short right that slammed Pitz across the room, knocked down four innocent bystanders and put him to sleep under a camp chair.

So endeth the first lesson!

Back in the brogans of "Battling" Scandrel, Ottie's first venture was to hunt up a bout and sign for it before beginning any kind of active training. The majority of the beak-bending brigade would have been content to annex a prelim mill first and gradually fight their way back to their former prestige. But not so with my boy friend. Putting reverse English on the bull, he promptly challenged the welterweight champ and only failed to connect because he couldn't post sufficient forfeit. This failing, Ottie went after the next best bet in the weight division—the contender for the crown. As luck would have it *that* young man's manager was ready and willing to draw up the papers and ring in a matchmaker who arranged to put the combat on the late September calendar for a purse that won a nod from Ottie.

The name of the party Scandrel was set to duel with was Rex Hubbard, familiarly known to fistic fans as "Old Father" Hubbard. This sobriquet had nothing at all to do with age but had been wished upon the young socker merely because Hubbard was a ring veteran mixed up in weekly scuffles. Hailing from the tamaracks, Hubbard had never been a draw in the port of New York and consequently had staged the majority of his Gettysburgs in the golden West, the effeminate East, the nonsensical North and the funny South. In fact, Rex Hubbard had only fought twice in the big town and wouldn't have been recognized if he had hired a truck to go down Broadway with a brass band ahead.

Neither Scandrel, myself nor any of the gym prima donnas had ever glimpsed the hustling welterweight.

When articles were signed Hubbard was trekking through upper New Jersey and lower New York with a circus and obtaining frequent leaves of absence to grab off a fight on the side. I had reason to know that he had spent years and a fortune in postage trying to get a bout with Mr. Champ and being laughed off for his pains. The king of the welterweights had told Hubbard to fight some one who meant something and Hubbard's manager had openly confessed to Ottie that the principal reason they were willing and anxious to meet him was because once Battling Scandrel was knocked for fish, the persistent challenger would then be in a stronger position to pester the champ anew.

Whether it was a grin, a laugh, a sneer or a tear, Ottie's name had some importance attached to it.

The business of the bout handled through Hubbard's manager, an Italian whose birth certificate read Izzie Noonan, Scandrel reserved training quarters at a trap known as Dooley's Lodge located in Perfidious, New Jersey—an address selected because he happened to hear Looie Pitz say it was terrible.

This accomplished he sought my advice on the question of a reasonable sparring partner, allowing me to look at the penciled copy of an advertisement he had made up out of his own head.

It read:

HELP WANTED MALE. Sparring partner for the world's coming Welterweight Champion. Ambitious young man not too proud to be knocked out occasionally. Salary no object and good future assured. Apply Tuesday morning at ten o'clock. Ask for SCANDREL, O'Grady's Gymnasium, Bronx.

"If that don't get 'em," he said when I had handed his literary chef-d'œuvre a stare, "they run gondolas in the subway. These fashion plates who win their bread money by loafing around here think I'm trying to show off when I tell them I'm financially impoverished. The cheapest any of the clique will work for me is for fifteen dollars a day with lunch money. Pardon me now while I slip down to the newspaper factory and have this masterpiece set up in type. Er—I certainly do miss my motor. Street cars are expensive when you use them like I do. So long and look for me to-morrow morning, Joe."

The next a. m. proved without question the circulation of the great daily that carried Ottie's advertisement. The street-cleaning department and the milkmen on duty had just finished watering the neighborhood when the crowd began to appear from every direction. Overgrown boys of

fifteen and boys who would never see sixty-five again mingled freely with short ones, tall ones, thin ones, fat ones, smart ones, dumb ones and dumber ones. They blocked the block, they tore down the front door of the gym and had any number of the curious flat dwellers near by ringing up to find out what kind of an accident it was before the police reserves were summoned to maintain order.

"There you are—help yourself!" I said to Scandrel when we surveyed the crowd from the window. "How are you going to make a selection and live to talk about it?"

He curled a lip.

"You do ask questions, don't you? I'm from New Haven—clock me. Hey, you gorillas!" he roared at the seething crowd below. "A little attention. I'm hurling a marked half dollar out the window at you. The one who brings it up to me gets the job! Come on, a little service now!"

With that he flipped a coin out into the center of the mob and the amusement began.

It's not trifling with the truth to say that no similar and insignificant amount ever purchased the same quantity of action and thrills. Picture a race riot, a lynching, three parades, the public appearance of a renowned photo-drama star and a gang feud and you'll get some slight idea of the free for all that immediately took place, aided and abetted by the local gendarmes and their nightsticks.

Really, it was enough to have made an Irishman turn Polish!

All we could see from the window was a merry-go-round of arms, legs and fists. Total strangers tied into one another with the greatest of enthusiasm. Strange young men went to the cobbles in death grips, elderly gentlemen got back their second youth and the noise of the battle sounded like a boiler factory running wild.

"Snapping turtles!" Ottie guffawed, rubbing his hands. "The bozo who comes out of this altogether and with no parts missing will be able to stand *anything!* Why did I forget to remember to have a crank camera present to wind this up in? Any of them fillum companies would have paid a fortune for this!"

Twenty minutes elapsed before six patrol wagons and three ambulances took care of the overflow and the street was cleared.

Then there came a tap on the door, I opened it and a disheveled stranger marched in, smiling with what face was left to him. He was built like a safe—too tall for a monkey and too short for a man, had as few teeth as possible and couldn't have been more scratched up if he had spent the night sleeping on sandpaper. He looked us over with his one good glim, dropped a tooth in the trash basket and pulled down his cuffs.

"I win," the victim of the twenty-minute Château Thierry mumbled, feeling his ears to see if they were still present. "A big tomato kicks me in the nose when I catch the four bits on the bounce. I had to paste him with my left so I wouldn't lose the money. So this is where I work? What are the hours?"

Ottie snatched the fatal fifty cents away, pocketed it quickly and laughed.

"Well, you look like a shipwreck and a nervous wreck all in one. And you've got a nerve reporting for work without a collar. What's your name or haven't you got one?"

"It's Barney Sapp," was the answer.

"Mr. O'Grady here will show you where you can wash up so we can recognize you. Before we talk business you'd better run down and see the medico who quacks around the corner. Get him to do a little embroidery on your mug and then come back."

Sapp made a careless gesture.

"What do you mean—get overhauled? I was brung up in Hell's Half Acre where they wear brass knuckles instead of diamond rings. And never mind my face—it ain't yours. I'm here ready to work. When do we begin to commence?"

Intermission.

A week later discovered Scandrel, Sapp and myself in Perfidious, New Jersey. This delightful retreat was just far enough from gay Gotham to be remote and near enough to be convenient. It was a typical rural jump-off where there were hills, dales and scenery. The chauffeur who conveyed us to Dooley's Lodge met all trains—both of them each week—and had little to say until he had put the engine back in his gocart and kicked the starter.

Then he looked at Ottie.

"So you be the prize fighter Mother Dooley is to take care of, be you?"

Scandrel yawned.

"That's I'm. Er—I suppose pugs are as rare as champagne out here in the sticks?"

The driver untangled his whiskers from

the steering wheel and shifted both the gears and his tobacco cud.

"Waal, not prexactly. Rex Hubbard wuz born around these here parts."

Ottie nudged me.

"For a fact? Do your bragging now because after the middle of September Rex will be spelling his name with a W in front of the R. And he comes from right around here. I'm glad you told me, I know it now."

Barney Sapp who had been staring about with excessive interest made himself heard.

"I ain't seen a tenement house with a fire escape yet. Where do these hometown folks hang out the wash?"

"Impersonate silence or I'll clout you for a fandango!" Ottie hissed. "Remember what I told you before we sailed. I don't want you disgracing me with that senseless language you speak. You talk and act like a half-wit so get back in your chair and don't let me hear from you again."

"I'm listening," Sapp mumbled, closing up like a Forty-second Street café.

Dooley's Lodge was a bad two miles from the village—on a cool day. The building, a larger edition of a match box, would never have given the management of the Ritz-Carlton any pangs of envy, but the real comedy came from the interior rather than the exterior. Once our baggage was thrown in and we piled after it we were introduced to Mother Dooley, a lumbago addict who was more suspicious than a Federal flat foot in a prosperous saloon. She had more complaints than the telephone company, was the widow of a seaman—a former deck hand on a Jersey City ferryboat—had an ache for every day in the week and a daughter known to the neighbors as "Cinderella."

This young lady, while not in the slightest danger of compelling Ziegfeld to mail her offers to appear at his playhouse, was healthy, overflowing with personality, had a sense of humor, looks that weren't so terrible at twilight and like most of the plain janes was as attractive as a magnet.

It developed that Cinderella had often read about Ottie in the *Patrolman's Gazette*, knew prize fighting from Z to A and owned up to one blazing ambition. That was to kiss Dooley's Lodge good-by forever, take a train for merry Manhattan and become a real New Yorker.

We learned that Mother Dooley kept the eye of an eagle trained on her, discouraged all possible and propable suitors and never allowed the girl any more riotous excitement than a movie once a month and a straw ride with some of the town's Beau Brummels who were as much afraid of matrimony as they were of the sheriff.

From what we learned there was ample reason for the old lady's surveillance.

Cinderella did the washing, she did the cooking, the cleaning, and she did the housework. As handling a stove and waiting on the table was an impossible feat at the same time, the resort boasted a waitress. This plate breaker was a dusky damsel who wore a No. 9 shoe on one foot and a 12½ on the other. Her name was Rosalind but that didn't mean a thing because the day after we blew in and Barney Sapp let his appetite get the better of him Rosalind blew out.

There was material for a dozen musical comedy wows up at Dooley's Lodge!

In spite of all of the laughs, however, the lair was an ideal place to ready up for a fistic introduction to anybody and Scandrel wasn't backward about making the most of it. Zeb, the hired man around the place, who was old enough to have boasted acquaintance with Columbus, erected a ring out in the orchard and in his spare time made a gym of the stable for Ottie to step his stuff. The highways were delicious for road work. The air was as bracing as suspenders and dry as a gin mill that had been looked into with a search warrant. The citizens claimed that Perfidious was eleven thousand feet above the sea level. Inasmuch as they failed to mention what sea, nobody saw fit to pick a quarrel on the subject.

We hadn't been at Dooley's Lodge more than a week when I noticed that the egotistical Scandrel was walking directly into one of his usual romances. The clever Cinderella was the only youthful member of her sex in the vicinity, Ottie liked the way she talked fight, kidded himself into imagining she was a looker and began praising her eyes, telling her lies and building himself up. The energetic Miss Dooley only had a giggle for this nonsense and stalled him like an automobile with a cracked cylinder. She took all he had to say—which was more than enough, but gave him no more encouragement than the inventor of the telephone got when he first tried to convince the public that the voice with the smile wins.

Scandrel wasn't alone in his open admiration for the busy girl.

If Cinderella had been on display in a dime museum, Barney Sapp could not possibly have displayed more interest. The toothless sparring partner gaped at her as if she was the last woman left on earth and lost all sense of direction whenever she chanced to glance his way. He colored up like tomato bouillon when she gave him a look, he fell down a flight of stairs once when she said good evening to him on the top landing and he ruined his finger nails whenever Ottie clowned around her.

"Listen, Mr. O'Grady," the little freak whined, when we were alone on the porch one dark night. "What does a gil usually do when he's in love—besides jumping off docks? I don't know how to swim, so *that's* out. I read in a book 'How To Win A Wife Ten Cents A Copy' that you should get her interested in you first off and ask her questions about art and the like. I asked her if she painted and, honest, I thought for a minute she was going to stab me. This is terrible. I'm losing my appetite every day."

"You're speaking of Miss Cinderella?"

He sighed like a furnace flue.

"Who else? I seen particular dames in my day but none of them approached this little nightingale. Every time I look at her I think about rings—not the kind with the ropes but them made out of diamonds. And look. The boss is selling himself sweet. I can see where I'll have to save money. The gals like to be took places! If I don't get her in the end there's Japanese cops on the force!"

For all of Ottie's mistakes, faults and braggadocio, when it came to his first love —the glove trade—the silly buffoon knew his business and minded it. The system of training he mapped out for himself was drawn up carefully as a set of divorce papers and followed out to the letter. He allowed himself to become acclimated before he started to ready himself, got an accurate line on his wind, his punch and his footwork.

As unhurried as a messenger boy with a rush telegram, Scandrel began to increase the work he had cut out for himself and made Barney Sapp earn his board and lodging. Ottie's first appearance in the orchard ring was not what might be termed impressive. He was painfully slow, short on almost all of his punches and frequently as wide open as the Moulin Rouge. I obliged as clocker and saw that while Sapp was never able to solve him, a dangerous free swinger like Old Father Hubbard, in a regulation ring, could have stretched him in the first round of any quarrel.

Telling him this was the same as arguing with an usher about a front-row seat.

"I'm slow, you say? I telegraph the raps, do I? Well, Roumania wasn't built in a day and I've got a couple of them ahead of me. Lamp me four weeks from to-morrow and you'll see a horse from a different garage!"

As the morning bouts continued I wondered why Cinderella Dooley never displayed any interest. She never slipped down to see what it was all about and when Ottie gave her a dash of the progress he was making, at the kitchen door, she merely shrugged.

"I know quite a lot about boxing but I'm not a bit interested," she confessed. "It's all right for some one to make it a business if he isn't good looking and don't mind having his features changed. Otherwise it's extremely foolish—particularly when there are so many other ways of making a living."

"In other words," Ottie smirked, "you're advising *me* to quit the business. Well, possibly I will after I knock this Old Father Hubbard for a Bulgarian velocipede. To change the subject, where are we going this evening?"

Cinderella winked at me.

"I don't know where you're going this evening but I do know where you're going now. That's away from here. If my mother catches you chinning with me you'll be looking for a new apartment to-morrow. She's fierce that way. Young men to her are the same as snakes."

"Ha, ha!" Ottie guffawed. "Absolutely, I never seen nothing like this before. Get wise to yourself, Attractive. They pay day laborers six dollars an hour for less work than you do and they can have all the company they want when the whistle blows. You might as well know now that like Hercules I'm strong for you. And when I'm strong for a gal nothing stands in my way. Get me?"

"You'll have to excuse me," Cinderella replied. "I think I hear the kettle beginning to boil."

If the ambitious daughter of the house didn't come down to watch Ottie's daily dozen, Mother Dooley did. The old lady brought her cane down to the ringside and watched every move being made. Scandrel was as pleased as a flapper with a new cigarette holder until he learned that Mother Dooley's interest in the proceedings was of another nature. The old lady admitted that she came down merely to see that he didn't steal any of the peaches or apples hanging around on the orchard fruit trees.

Wham!

While these preliminaries were being staged and Ottie, baffled but not discouraged, tried to put himself across with Cinderella, the subtle Izzie Noonan built up public interest in the scuffle. Hubbard's manager refused any information as to where his charge was training and gave the sport scribes a line they weren't reluctant about snapping at. With no other important fracas on Manhattan's September fight card, they got rid of hot days with some torrid accounts of the welterweight fuss well calculated to send the customers through the turnstiles on the big night.

Reporters began jumping out to Dooley's Lodge, tramping out to the orchard, with the lady of the house hobbling after them, and hanging around the barn like a lot of livery-stable men. Cameras clicked constantly taking Battling Scandrel in action, out of action and in a dozen other poses. To the brainless Barney Sapp the photo jazz was the same as a saucer of the pasteurized fluid to a hungry kitten. Once he learned that he was to have his picture in the papers trading wallops with Ottie, this nut for the decades had his hair cut, his ring shoes shined and would have hired a Tuxedo if Scandrel hadn't immediately slapped the idea away.

"This ought to set me in right with that Cinderella pip, Mr. O'Grady," Sapp confided to me in an idle minute. "It ain't every one who can have his pitcher in a newspaper—only big bootleggers, high-class crooks and them kind can do it. And that reminds me. I'm getting along swell these days with the gal. Yesterday she give me leave to clean out the kitchen stove, polish it up and get four pails of water for her from the well."

The day after that rheumatism put Mother Dooley to bed and Cinderella, dispatched to the village pharmacy for some patent remedy, accepted Ottie's offer to drive her down to the village in one of the Lodge's cars. I was given a lift for ballast and Ottie, always a terror with a wheel in his lap, kept his heel on the gas until the shopping center of Perfidious was distinguishable through the dust.

"I think," Miss Dooley murmured, "I'll go over to Slocum's drug store. Hen isn't cut rate but he's awfully absent-minded and nearly always he gives you too much change. Just turn at the next corner."

"Right here?" Ottie grinned, when we pulled up in front of a pill factory that was as dusty as a vacuum cleaner. "You ought to see the sickness shops in New York, honey. Nobody ever went in for a nickel's worth of quinine and come out without buying a bathing suit, a set of Shakespeare, an electric fan or one of these here thermometer bottles that keep coffee hot until drunk. We'll stop off in the big burg when we go on our honeymoon."

"Will we?" Cinderella Dooley said brightly. "That will be the day before yesterday, won't it?"

"You don't seem to be taking as well as usual?" I murmured when we were alone.

"What do you mean—taking? You talk like vaccination!" he growled. "Fair heart never won a fainting lady and a little opposition always suits me fine. Just keep your remarks to yourself. This is my affair."

With that he helped himself to a snipe, settled back in his seat and began to get comedy out of the village types that passed. Three or four minutes of this went by and then a cream-colored roadster that was almost a city block long and had more brass than a five-and-ten-cent-store jewelry counter pulled into the curb and docked. From it alighted a tall, well-built, handsome youth who did his marketing at a convenient tobacco stand and caused Ottie to lift a brow.

"A classy job, what, Joe? And look at that petrol surry—tasty, hey? Honest, looking at him is like looking in a mirror—once I drop Hubbard and get the winner's end of the purse. Ah, here comes Cinderella now. We'll check out of here with rapidity. Main Street is funny but it gives me the blues."

Cinderella Dooley emerged from the drug store and came toward us. As she did so the good-looking stranger sighted her,

pulled off his English golf cap and stopped her midway across what masqueraded as a sidewalk.

"Well, well, Cinderella herself or they play tennis on billiard tables. I was hoping to encounter you. We——"

Our landlady's only child gave him a happy smile and then, as if suddenly remembering something, darted a startled look in our direction before continuing the conversation in whispers.

"So he's one of them pastry pioneers!" Ottie mumbled. "Good clothes or shabby clothes, he better have a care how familiar he gets with Cutey. I'll give him a bust in the eye and say, 'This is for nothing at all' with the greatest of pleasure, I guarantee that I will!"

A few more words and then Miss Dooley came down to the curb.

"Meet one of my boy friends, Harry Nichols. We haven't seen each other in quite a while so I know you won't be angry if he takes me for a little ride in his new car. Oh, yes. And you can tell ma that Hen Slocum is getting her dope bottled up and that I'll bring it home as soon as it's ready. Goo'-by."

With that she stepped into the lemon-meringue roadster, shook a day-day and moved, leaving Ottie to breathe fast.

"That's a hot one, Joe. First she makes a fall guy and then a liar out of me! I'll bet when she was a kid and they asked her what kind of a doll she wanted she said 'twins.' And that mockie's name is Harry Nichols—give me a loan of your pencil while I write this down on my cuff. The next time I meet Nichols I'll change his name to pennies! Hand him a ladder and I suppose he'll think he's Romeo!"

With the Scandrel-Hubbard bout only some nine days distant, any one witnessing Ottie in action was destined to immediately get down, hook, line and sinker, on Hubbard. Scandrel had made a valiant attempt to come all the way back but the total results were anything but satisfying. He was well whittled down, he was tightened up, but those two years away from the roped inclosure had gotten in their deadly work. The truth of the matter was that Ottie was painfully slow, his punches lacked the old steam, snap and judgment, his footwork was similar to that of a clog dancer with a sprained ankle and while he was able to show a flash with Barney Sapp at the receiving end of it in a two-or-three-round-exhibition mill, any of the smite clan had only to watch it and know that with a fast, aggressive battler like Hubbard, he didn't appear to have a chance in the world.

A reflection of these sentiments was to be found in sporting circles and among the betting fraternity who made the sockers a specialty. With them the welterweight contender was an overwhelming favorite, while Ottie was held so cheaply in their esteem that any price was offered against his chances of winning, with few takers. You had only to write your own ticket and the handbook men let it go at that; but this, of course, was all under the blankets so far as the public was concerned.

If the papers were to be believed both Hubbard and Scandrel had attained the highest peak of physical perfection and were ready to tear into each other and supply the battle of the century!

Realizing what the wise opinion was pleased Ottie the same as a knock for Constantinople would a Turk. Looie Pitz ran out for a week-end, gave the comeback marvel a taste of inside gossip and fried him to a turn. For two days after Pitz had left for the Bronx with some Perfidious money to plant on Old Father Hubbard, conversation with Ottie was as scarce as oratory in a deaf-and-dumb academy. He said little, he ate little and he worked off his ill humor when the hapless Barney Sapp tottered out to take it in the orchard.

Really, the punishment the little stiff received should have been brought to the direct attention of the S. P. C. A. Ottie took the greatest delight in tearing him to tatters for the benefit of the newspaper gallery before he rocked him to sleep with a two-fisted lullaby. Each morning I half expected Sapp to pass out as cold as chopped ice and each morning he fooled me by coming back and standing up to another battle that would have commanded attention from the marines.

It was brutal though comical until sympathy overpowered me and I drew Sapp around one corner of the barn to give him the benefit of some kindly advice.

"Listen, Brainless," I said seriously. "Ottie Scandrel is a friend of mine but there are other limits besides the twelve-mile one which even friendship oversteps. In case you don't know it I feel it's my duty to tell you that you're not being treated right.

You're not getting a square deal. You don't have to be a chopping block as long as you have a mouth and know how to use it. Tell him to raise your wages or tone down the knuckle music. You'll soon be treated as gentle as Mary's lamb if you give him the idea you're all washed up. Understand?"

The emigrant from Hell's Half Acre snickered.

" 'At's all right with me, Mr. O'Grady. I don't mind a little pushing around. I was born tough and I was brung up tough. I should get forward with the boss when I haven't drew down ten cents of my salary and I got over thirty dollars coming to me right now. How do I know he wouldn't gate me without paying a dime?"

"That wouldn't be a calamity," I stated. "That would be a stroke of luck."

Sapp fingered an ear—the better one.

"Mebbe, but I ain't taking no chances on losing this job and getting tripped back to Twelfth Avenoo. I stick around where Cinderella is and as long as I got her to look at what's a K. O. at ten bells every morning, or even a pair of broken ribs?"

"You're apparently on the verge of complete imbecility," I snapped. "The girl doesn't even know you exist."

He nodded carelessly.

"But there ain't no law against advertising, is there? Cinderella wants to get away from here and strike the island straight in the electric lights. Right here I want to tell you that I've got plans like anything——"

"What good are plans with thirty dollars to back them up?" I interrupted.

Sapp lowered his voice to a confidential pitch.

"Listen and I'll tell you something, pal. The day of the big fight I'm drawing every jit that I got coming to me. I got plans how to use it. I run that much into a few grand, wait until Mother Dooley is took down with another attack and do a slip-out with Fascinating. Before the big strike last winter I held the license of first-class plumber and if I do say so myself I stop a cruel leak. The job's a pipe and I certainly solder a mean joint. Well, that's that. I'm going out in the cornfield now."

"What for—to get yourself a couple of regular ears?"

The most abused sparring partner in existence had a sneer for my question.

"No, it's this way. I stand behind the stacks down near the fence and, without being seen, I can look straight into the kitchen window where Cinderella does a potato-peeling matinée every afternoon. Tomorrow she promised me that I can hoe the garden and paint the chicken houses out yonder. 'By."

What could you do with a tin-head like that?

The same evening at dinner the fifth dark-town waitress in charge of the plate department since Rosalind and shoes had checked out, handed in her resignation because of overwork and underpay. Spurning the tearful offers of both Ottie and Sapp to buttle, Miss Dooley did the tray act herself in between sessions at the stove and if the samples on the bill of fare were somewhat chilly nobody protested.

"Ma's going to get a new girl next week," Cinderella told us. "The employment agency has promised to send out some one who will stay this time."

"Paste her if you want her to stick!" Sapp mumbled.

"Who asked *you* to solve the servant problem?" Ottie cut in with a growl. "You're a Barney by name, by looks and nature. Take the choice of a beating here and now or shut your mouth shut. Make me?"

"I'm listening," Sapp muttered.

The pride of the kitchen brought in the celery and Ottie gave her a paralyzing smile.

"I hear them tell how your ma's confirmed to her room again, baby. That means you're programmed for a walk down to the drug store, yes? You'd better have company to protect you—me. I'll help you with the dishes and then we'll do the walk together."

"That's really awfully kind of you," Cinderella replied sweetly, "but I have already arranged for an escort."

"The big tramp who stopped you on the sidewalk the other day?" Ottie jeered.

Miss Dooley put something on her tray and showed her teeth in a dazzling smile.

"My, aren't you the good guesser! If you ever give up being a prize fighter you can hang out a sign and solve riddles for a living."

"Ha, ha!" Barney Sapp giggled when the girl made a smiling exit. "You don't get her—I don't get her——"

"You don't get her but you get *this!*" Ottie hollered, taking his elbow out of the spinach in order to push a fast left across

that ended Sapp's hilarity abruptly and put him under the table. "So it's Nichols again, Joe," he went on, licking his lips. "We'll see about that a little later to-night. The gamblers can get comedy out of me but this mockie with his clothes and his car couldn't ride me with a saddle. I'll give him something to think about besides the gal to-night. That's a positive vow!"

It was!

When Ottie showed up for breakfast and walked down to the shade of the old apple trees with me the next morning, his horn was an inch or so out of true, his left glim was as black as the back of a street kid's neck and at least a dollar's worth of plaster was artistically scattered around the face that would have dismayed a young ladies' boarding school.

I looked him over with some curiosity.

"So the worm has accomplished his proverbial turning? What did Barney hit you with—the bureau?"

Ottie glanced in the direction of the barn and curled a lip.

"Er—what did Sapp hit me with? This wasn't *him*. Don't be getting nosey now because information with me is as tight as money with you."

A week later we returned to Gotham, pulling into the Only Town around noon and proceeding directly to the Seventh Avenue fight club where the Scandrel bout was carded for the same night. There Ottie weighed in, gave a nod to the reporters, looked vainly for the appearance of Rex Hubbard and finally went back to the Bronx where he passed the balance of the afternoon arguing with Sapp about what salary was due the sparring partner. They decided to split the fifteen cents under discussion, Ottie paid in full and the other rushed away, all smiles.

"That's the last of that bolognie," Scandrel yawned, when I observed Sapp disappearing around the corner. "You'll notice I don't fit a handkerchief to my eyes. Before I forget it, listen to this: I just found out the little dumb-bell had tumbled for Cinderella. Ain't that hilarious?"

"You furnished some hilarity yourself," I reminded him.

"Did I? After to-night you'll see a big change in that direction too. Remember we didn't give up our rooms yet at Mother Dooley's. There's a reason for that. To-night's scuffle is going to change a lot of things besides the outline of this Hubbard baby's mug. You'll be surprised."

Every one was.

Seven o'clock the same evening found us within the portals of the smoke house where a two-man Bunker Hill in the form of a preliminary was going along nicely. There was a crowd in the street and a larger one inside.

Ottie was the first to enter the ring and was given a generous ovation from a crowd that evidently believed in the truth of all the news that was fit to print—on the sporting page. He tested the ropes, rubbed his ring shoes in the resin box and went to his corner where I officiated as chief second and the other pail carriers from the gym were ready.

The next minute a few faint cheers sounded for one who was known only by reputation to the majority of those in the hall and Old Father Hubbard in a hemstitched bath robe appeared. He was tall, well built and sun tanned. One look was enough to open Ottie's mouth so far his tonsils were displayed. His own amazement, however, was no greater than mine for it needed only a brief glance to recognize the contender.

Fightdom knew him as Old Father Hubbard but to us he was only Harry Nichols from that dear Perfidious, New Jersey!

Hubbard, in an opposite corner, was gaping in open stupefaction. His expression was curious to say the least but there was no time to try and get an inkling of what was going on in *his* mind, for the referee began his usual patter, the crowd impatiently requested action and the usual regulations of bandage examining, introductions and announcements were hurried through.

The gong!

Old Father Hubbard shot out of his corner as if touched off by dynamite. Battling Scandrel was equally as rapid and they clashed in the center of the ring, breaking out with an assortment of punches that put the crowd on its feet and kept it there until the mill was over.

Standing toe to toe they slugged away like a couple of steam drillers busy working on a tough piece of rock. Scandrel was short with a hook to the head but registered with a left to the mouth and Hubbard clicked with three in a row to the ribs that must have hurt but didn't stop the Scandrel offensive. Two lightning jabs on Ottie's part

earned him a hook on the jaw that laid him for the count of four.

He was on his feet without waiting to get the full benefit of the toll, rushed in swinging and by sheer strength hurled Hubbard back against the ropes. The welter contender came through with a flurry of left jabs and right hooks that had the ringside seats screaming for a clean K. O. but he didn't chalk up another knockdown and a right to the heart threw him into a clinch.

The referee tore them apart, Ottie left-handed Hubbard across the ropes, spilled him and then missing a left lead received a right cross to the jaw that rocked him down to his heels. It looked like the pallbearers sure for Scandrel but his handsome young opponent was too eager and Ottie was too cute to be tucked away by trickery.

Veteran though he was, Rex Hubbard desperately tried for a knock-out and hammered away while Ottie covered up, retreated and—waited. His chance came when he had backed almost into his corner and the round was in its last minute.

A wild jab and a wilder hook left Hubbard wide. Like a streak of lightning Ottie ripped through a straight right to the stomach that brought the other's guard all the way down and left Hubbard's jaw as exposed as Gibraltar but not half so rugged. A wicked left that made a flush connection with the peak of it and which had back of it every ounce of energy the hard-breathing, mumbling, sneering Ottie possessed, was the anæsthetic that sent his opponent into the hazy realms of dreamland.

Old Father Hubbard collapsed like a broken umbrella and thousands of knowing citizens who only laid wagers on inside information failed to eat regularly for a number of weeks!

It took fifteen minutes to get Ottie through the raving mob who wanted a piece of him as a souvenir and at least five more in the dressing room to wring an explanation from him.

"Why shouldn't I win easy?" he grunted. "The minute I seen that baby step into the ring wearing that ridiculous kimono of his I knew he was a blank cartridge. Why? Because I waited for him on the porch up at the Lodge the night he come back from the drug store with Cinderella. When Hubbard gave his straw skimmer a tip and left her I met him down by the old mill stream. Yes, he gave me the murky lamp and a steel ring he wore made the scratches but I knocked him as cold as the water in the brook. Do it once, do it again—why not? I knew I had him tied when I seen him and *he* knew it when he seen *me*. That's why he gambled everything to beat me to the mattress punch. Well, that's past history now, as Napoleon used to say to his favorite stenographer, and I've got enough fish in my share of the purse to last a lot of Fridays. Er—now—we'll run out to Perfidious tomorrow and get our baggage. I'll meet you there. Right?"

It was toward six o'clock the following evening when the gay young blade with the beard and the tobacco cud rolled me up to Dooley's Lodge and some three minutes later when I discovered Ottie surrounded by honeysuckle, whistling like a humming bird.

"So," I began, mentally measuring his smile, "congratulations are in order. Tell me, where is Cinderella?"

Ottie let the melody escape and moved his shoulders.

"That's what her mother is offering a two-dollar reward to find out. It seems that Cinderella turned down our friend Rex and beat it to New York to get married to some plumber who has been paying her close attention. She had the old lady on long distance and I understand this unknown party who is doing a bridegroom bet thirty-six dollars on me at about five hundred to one to win by a clean knock-out in the first frame. He must have known about the way I punch, hey?"

I stared.

"But that doesn't explain your carefree indifference. What legal right have you to be happy about this?"

Scandrel glanced in the direction of the dining room down the porch and gave me a nudge.

"You'll see the reason when we go in to feed, Joe. She's as blond as a gold watch chain, has a voice like a victrola and eyes that kill you dead. I hear she's straight out of a burlesque show that got stranded in Patterson and is playing waitress here just to pick up enough car fare to get back to Columbus Circle. Er—I don't know her name yet but come on inside and I'll introduce you."

Another Montanye story in the next issue.

"Bud" Lorgan's Choice

By William Slavens McNutt

Author of "In the Manner of a Winner," "The Girl in Tears," Etc.

Lorgan wanted to do something big. But when the chance came he had the courage to do something bigger.

AGNES MACKENZIE was late and the only short cut to her home lay through the heart of one of the toughest neighborhoods in Brooklyn. She knew perfectly well that any pretty eighteen-year-old girl attempting that short cut after dark ran the risk of annoyance, but Agnes was Scotch, courageous, and calmly certain of her ability to put any presumptuous male in his place with a word and a look.

But the word and the look of even as lovely a young creature as Agnes MacKenzie had no effect on the drug-crazed brain of Benny Felder, who accosted her in the very worst of the tough neighborhood through which she had to pass. When she ordered him away he laughed and grasped her arms tight. Agnes looked squarely, commandingly into his wide, hollow eyes, made wild by drugs, went pale in answer to the hideousness of spirit she saw reflected there and immediately decided to call for help.

As she opened her mouth to scream, the clawlike hands holding her arms relaxed their grip and the grinning, demoniacal face disappeared from before her eyes. She heard the sound of flesh and bone striking flesh and bone, the surprised grunt of a suddenly hurt man and the soft plop of a limp body striking the sidewalk. Then a new face was before her, the face of a good-looking boy who wore a snappy cap at an aggressive angle and who was clad in the style of form-fitting suit much admired by the sort of people whose idea of an educational evening is a solemn session with a book of etiquette. It was a well-featured face, but one which expressed a hard, belligerent quality of character so plainly that it suggested a trained fighter's tightly knuckled fist.

"All right, lady," he said in a harsh, firm voice that harmonized with his appearance. "Come along wit' me and I'll get you out o' this."

He took her by the arm and they moved briskly down the street. Out of the corner of her eye she noted, writhing on the sidewalk, the form of the man who had accosted her. She also saw other forms emerging hurriedly from doorways along the street. As they neared the corner she heard the pound of running feet. Her escort stopped suddenly, put her behind him and into the semishelter of a doorway and

turned to face a number of men who were coming on the run.

The pursuers halted slightly beyond arm's reach.

"Oh, hello!" said the foremost of them, a slim young fellow in a green cap, speaking to Agnes' escort. "We didn't know it was you."

"Well, it is me!" said Agnes' protector belligerently. "What about it?"

"What's come off here?" the man in the green cap demanded. "Benny's layin' back here on the sidewalk with his nose smashed in. Somebody biffed him."

"Somebody did!" the young fellow who had done the job confessed curtly. "That somebody was me!"

"You're goin' pretty strong," said the spokesman of the pursuers in a tone heavy with menace. "You lookin' for something?"

"I'm not lookin' for anything but a fair break," the young man guarding Agnes protested earnestly. "It ain't my fault that Benny's shot so full of hop he goes around scarin' people to death in the dark. This is my girl. Do you get me? I stopped to light a cigarette and she walked on a piece. When I turned around Benny had hold of her and she was scared awry-eyed. I turned one loose on Benny's beezer for luck, and that's that. What are you goin' to do about it?"

"Well—you know we could do somethin' about it if we wanted to," said the man in the green cap insinuatingly.

"Sure," said Agnes' protector frankly. "I'm not dumb."

There was a moment of silence, then: "You get away with this. We know Benny's gettin' pretty bad, but don't go too strong with your stuff, kid! A little easy!" The figures that had menaced Agnes and her protector turned, moved back and melted into the darkness. The young fellow turned and took her by the arm again.

"All right," he said in his firm harsh voice. "We're clear now. Let's go!"

She moved along beside him on legs that trembled violently. She did not fully understand all that had happened, but her feeling was that of one, who, standing in the zoo watching the wild beasts, sees the bars suddenly removed from the cages, and for a space stands unprotected among savage creatures, in whose claws and teeth are death.

For a little she paid no attention to the route they were taking. Then she became aware that they were nearing her street.

"I turn to the left at the next corner," she said in a weak voice.

"I know where you live," her escort said curtly.

"You do?" she exclaimed. "I don't know you, do I?"

"No," said the boy. "You don't know me, but I know you. You're Agnes MacKenzie. Your old man is my foreman over at the metal works. I seen you was walkin' alone back there, so I tagged along, just in case anything happened."

"It was silly of me to get scared," Agnes said.

"It was not!" said the boy. "You'd been silly if you hadn't had sense enough to get scared. We were in a tight spot for a minute. We only got out 'cause they all know me."

"They may know you, but I don't," said Agnes provocatively, as they stopped before her house. "After you've been so nice to me to-night I think I ought to, don't you?"

"Me name is Lorgan," said the young fellow shortly. "'Bud' Lorgan. Your old man knows me. I'd like to call on you if you'll let me."

"Why sure," said Agnes. "I'd love to have you."

"Fine," said Bud. "You ain't got a steady, have you?"

"A what?" said Agnes.

"A steady," said Lorgan. "One fellow that you go around wit' most of the time."

Agnes shook her head.

"That saves some guy a beatin'," said Lorgan. "Send word to me by your old man when I can come and see you, will you? Good night."

He turned and walked rapidly away.

Agnes stood looking after him. "Well!" she said. "Well, of all things! Well, I declare!"

The first night Bud Lorgan called on Agnes he took her for a walk to Prospect Park, sat with her on a bench and said bluntly: "I want to have this thing straight between us from the beginning. I want to marry you."

"Why, Mr. Lorgan!" Agnes exclaimed. "You've only known me——"

"Can that stuff," Bud interrupted. "I ain't known you to talk to very long, but I been watching you ever since I first seen

you at the factory with your old man, a couple of years ago, watchin' and waitin' for a chance to get the right kind of a knockdown to you. There wasn't any luck about my bein' right behind you the other night when 'Benny the Dope' grabbed you. I've followed you home many's the time. Just waitin' for a chance to take a smash at any guy that tried to get fresh."

"You have?" said Agnes, her eyes shining. "And yet you never got any one to introduce you to me?"

"There ain't any rush about things," Bud said shortly. "I ain't quite twenty yet and you ain't more than eighteen. We got time. I want to show some stuff before I come right out an' ask you will you marry me."

"I think you showed some stuff when those gangsters were going to attack you because you defended me," Agnes said spiritedly.

"Aw, that was just fightin' stuff," Lorgan said scornfully. "I always could fight good. That ain't nothin'. When I say stuff, I mean the kind o' stuff that puts guys wit' the big dough."

"Dad says you're one of his best men," Agnes said encouragingly.

Lorgan was silent for a little time. Then he took a quick, deep, fortifying breath as one making ready for the shock of a cold plunge.

"I'm goin' to give you the low-down on meself now," he said, his words coming from his lips in a tumbling torrent of confession.

"I think I got the stuff in me to put over somp'n big! I dunno why I think it, but I do. I was brought up bad on a tough block over in Manhattan, but as far back as I can remember I usta always think I had some stuff the other kids I run around wit' didn't have."

"I expect you came from better people," Agnes said helpfully.

Lorgan's face twisted into a sneer.

"Me father was a drunken bum of a truck driver," he said bitterly. "Me mother was a poor little woman that never had a chance to do more than just stay alive. She even quit doin' that when I was nine years old, an' left me alone wit' this drunken old man of mine. He got a snootful one night, about a month after me mother died, an' tried to knock a Tenth Avenue trolley car off the track. When they pulled him out from under the wheels I was an orphan. It ain't any fun bein' an orphan, but I'm tellin' you now, I didn't cry when they told me the old man was bumped off. Not a tear out of me! Too many nights I'd had to dodge under the bed when he come home stewed an' watch him beat up the old lady just for the fun of hearin' her yell and beg. I should cry when he got what was comin' to him—even if he was me father!

"Then one o' them societies got me! How do you do! Listen! Don't you ever have nothin' to do with any kind of a society. They're terrible! They sent me to an orphans' home away out in the country an' I near went nutty. No houses, no streets, no people, no movies, no stores, no nothin'! All the kids there was just a lot o' little bums that was goin' to grow up into nothin' but a lot o' big bums an' I got scared for fear if I stuck around there I'd get to be so much like all the rest of 'em I wouldn't even want to be any different, so I beat it."

"You ran away?"

"I'll say! An' when I got back to New York I felt like layin' down on the first sidewalk I come to an' huggin' it. Ooh! Was I glad to be back again where there was somp'n doin'! I got by sellin' papers an' workin' for the Western Union an' one way an' another till I was fourteen. Then I threw in wit' a gang on the West Side that was makin' a good thing stealin' stuff from freight cars."

"Oh!" Agnes exclaimed. "Stealing! You?"

"I was goin' nutty by then," Lorgan said defensively. "All them years I'd been rootin' around town, just makin' a livin' an' all the time wit' that bug in me head that I had the stuff to put over somep'n big. Sometimes I'd get to thinkin' maybe I didn't have any stuff an' then I'd get the blues somep'n fierce! I had 'em when I got the chance to throw in wit' this gang an' I says to meself: 'What the hell! It's a chance. Better be a good crook than never amount to nothin'!' Oh, I was all set to go through wit' it, but a funny thing happened before I had time to turn a trick. The gang was fixin' to knock off a plain-clothes man by the name of O'Grady, who'd been makin' trouble for 'em, an' they let me in on the frame. That's where they went wrong wit' me. This O'Grady had been a harness bull on my block when I was a little dirty-faced kid in short pants an' many's the time he turned me loose wit' a slap alongside the

jaw when he caught me pinchin' apples off a fruit stand, or somep'n like that, an' could 'a' had me up in court if he'd 'a' wanted to. He hadn't been a bad guy wit' me, so I wouldn't stand for him bein' framed. I had a battle about it wit' one o' the head guys o' the gang and when I went away from there, puttin' one foot in front of another in a big hurry, I left me knife in him."

"You killed him?" said Agnes in a horrified voice.

Lorgan shook his head. "I missed the old spot by three or four ribs, but I give him somep'n to take to the hospital and get sewed up. Then I went straight to this plain-clothes bull, O'Grady, and squealed. I didn't give any names, of course, but I put him wise to what the gang had framed on him. He was a good guy, O'Grady. He gimme a long spiel about what a dumb-bell I'd 'a' been to turn crook, an' I seen where he was right. 'If you want to amount to somep'n, get yourself a steady-workin' job some place an' stay wit' it,' he told me. 'Keep away from the gang an' the hooch an' have a little patience. You'll get what's comin' to you in time.'

"That listened good to me. 'Course I didn't dast stick around New York after I'd had the run-in wit' the gang, so I beat it over the bridge an' started huntin' around Brooklyn for a job. I caught on at the metal works with your dad an' I been there ever since. Workin'! That's me! Workin' every day. Your dad'll tell you. He knows. For a long time it seemed like a lot o' bunk to me, but I stuck to it, an' then one day I seen you up to the factory with your old man an' for the first time in me life I knew just what I wanted to do. The minute I seen you I knew I wanted to marry you!"

"How could you know the first time?" Agnes asked.

"I don't know how could I, but God knows I did!" said Lorgan earnestly. "And then, oh gee! I thought I'd been wantin' to put over something big all my life, wantin' hard! But after I seen you, then I begun to find out what really wantin' to make good was! I used to want to make good just for meself, but since I seen you I been wantin' to make good for both of us, wantin' so hard that it hurts inside o' me all the time like a toothache. Now you know!"

"I know?" said Agnes.

"Sure," said Lorgan. "You know what I am and how I come to be what I am. I'm startin' straight wit' you without any little things that I'll have to tell you when we get better acquainted. Listen! Do you like me pretty well?"

"Why, Mr. Lorgan!" said Agnes.

"I'm a little soon wit' that," said Bud apologetically. "But listen! You hope I'll come around to see you pretty soon again, don't you?"

"Why, of course," said Agnes. "I'd love to have you."

"Fine," said Lorgan rising. "That's enough for now. Let's go get a soda."

Bud Lorgan was as completely an expression of New York City as Wall Street or Broadway, Fifth Avenue or the Bowery. Nothing in his appearance suggested sunlight or open fields or faith. He seemed a harsh creature with a character reflecting only the elements of steel and stone and suspicion, and yet, at the core of his being he was as naïve and instinctively tender, as credulously hopeful and as responsive to fine dreams and feelings as any innocent country boy with the heart of a poet. These latter qualities in him made a powerful appeal to Agnes MacKenzie's heart, while the hard shell of manner and appearance, in which his true being was encased, frightened and repelled her, so that even with the flying start he had made her pledge cost Bud two long years of earnest courtship.

The boy's first audible words following the kiss that sealed their troth were characteristic.

"Oh, God!" He exclaimed in a humble agony of prayer. "I wish I amounted to somep'n. It ain't right for a girl like you to marry a guy that's just a workin' plug!"

She stopped his mouth with a generous kiss, but she did not stop the ache that was in his heart. He had won a bride and he had no significant trophies to lay at her feet. This thought in his mind radiated a heat of shame throughout his being.

He dreamed avidly of a dramatic and sudden rise to wealth, of a million made on the stock market in a few weeks, of sudden accidental recognition of himself as unique star material for motion pictures, resulting in an immediate fat advance and a fabulous long-term contract, the possibility of all unwittingly attracting the favorable attention of a wealthy eccentric and waking some morning to find himself willed a fortune,

of discovering a gold mine, perfecting an invention that would startle the world—all the grandiose, pathetic dreams that are a common plague to the imagination of ambitious and impecunious lovers.

Then accident opened the stubborn door of opportunity a tiny crack, permitting him a dazzling glimpse of golden reality.

People turned curiously to stare after him as he tore through the streets afoot, running at top speed to tell Agnes of his luck. He burst in on her, hot and panting, grasped her in a bear hug and swung her about in a crazy dance of joy.

"I've got it!" he shouted. "I've got it, kid!"

"Whatever is the matter with you?" she demanded, disengaging herself from his embrace and smoothing her rumpled dress.

"You ain't goin' to marry just a working plug, kid," Lorgan declared, excitedly. "I'm goin' to be somebody! I'm goin' to have a lot of money and a big name an' everything! I knew it was comin' to me, kid! An' I got it!"

"Oh, Bud!" Agnes cried excitedly, catching from him the fever of excitement. "What is it? Tell me!"

"I was in Counihan's gym this afternoon foolin' around wit' the gloves," Lorgan said rapidly, "when who do you think come in?"

"I don't know," said Agnes, round eyed. "Who?"

"'Speed' Gannon," said Lorgan in an awed voice. "What do you think o' that?"

"Speed Gannon?" Agnes repeated after him. "Who's he?"

A spasm of disappointment overspread Bud's eager face.

"Holy mackerel!" he exclaimed. "Don't you know who Speed Gannon is?"

"No," said Agnes without shame. "Who is he?"

"Don't you ever read the papers?" said Bud disgustedly. "Why, Speed Gannon was lightweight champion of the world for six years and now he's managing this big heavyweight from down in South America that's been knockin' 'em all dead for the last year and just got himself a match with the champ. That's who Speed Gannon is!"

"Oh," said Agnes, trying to appear as though she understood what it was all about and not in the least succeeding. "Oh, I see."

Bud made a grimace and a gesture, both expressive of disgust.

"I don't believe you get it at all," he said with a little pang of disappointment in his tone. "Listen! This Speed Gannon might not come into Counihan's for ten years. He might never come in. He used to know Counihan years ago when they was both prelim fighters out on the Pacific coast and he just happened to be over here in Brooklyn to-day and seen Counihan's sign, so he dropped in to say hello to him. Can you beat that for luck! And there was me foolin' around wit' the gloves and he seen me. You could 'a' knocked me dead when he come over and started askin' me questions. He asked me how old was I and did I ever have any fights in the ring and a lot of stuff like that. Then he got me to work out for four rounds wit' 'Battery' Joe Riley, the old light-heavyweight, and after that, you know what he done? You wouldn't believe it! He went in the dressin' room and took off his clothes and got into a pair of tights and come into the gym and went four rounds wit' me himself! Then you know what? He put his hand on my shoulder and he says: 'Listen, kid, you've got somep'n. You got a flash o' the real stuff and you ain't been spoiled by bein' taught wrong by a lot of pork-and-bean bums. Come wit' me,' he says, 'an' I'll make you the light-heavyweight champ of the world in two years. An' that ain't all, kid,' he says. 'You're young and you'll grow. You ought to be one eighty-five in another four or five years and a man at one eighty-five is heavy enough to lick anybody. Do you get me?' he says.

"Did I get him! I'll say! And you know what? Aw, kid, you could 'a' knocked me dead when he told me this! He'll take me right now, down to the challenger's training camp at Atlantic City as a sparring partner at twenty-five dollars a day and then start me fightin' in some good shows just as soon as the big scrap's over. What do you think o' that? Ain't that wonderful? Why, what's the matter wit' you? What are you lookin' at me like that for? What's wrong?"

"You mean you're going to be a prize fighter?" Agnes said slowly.

"Sure," said Lorgan. "It's my chance. My big chance. Big money, big name, everything!"

"A prize fighter!" Agnes exclaimed bitterly. "You're going to be that! Just a hired thug. A man paid to beat other men.

You come and tell me that you're going to be that!"

"Why, what's the matter?" Bud asked, amazed. "You don't understand, Agnes! You don't understand what good prize fighters get these days. You don't know!"

"I know that you're not going to be both a prize fighter and my husband," Agnes MacKenzie exclaimed firmly. "You can be one or the other, but not both. You can make your own choice."

"But, Agnes, you don't understand," Lorgan declared desperately. "Why, nowadays a good fighter gets——"

"You're the one who don't understand," Agnes said coldly. "Marry a prize fighter! Me? I'd die first. I'm ashamed that you could even think such a thing!"

The last of the joy glow faded from Bud's face, leaving it gray, granitic. All of the elements of steel and stone that were in his nature became forbiddingly apparent in his expression.

"I got you," he said harshly. "Ashamed of me, hunh? Ashamed of the only good chance I ever had to really make something out of myself. I wanted to do it for you, but if you're ashamed of me, I'll do it for myself. What do you know about that? And some day I'll come to you with diamonds all over me and money enough in the bank to buy the old metal works and shut it up without ever knowing I'd spent anything. I'll come in my own car and it'll be the finest car that money can buy and the people in the block will all cheer me when I get out, and for the rest of your life the neighbors'll all look up to you and talk about you because you knew the champ and he come to see you!"

"That may be true," Agnes said slowly. "But when you come I'll bar the door to you, for if you're a prize fighter I'll be ashamed of you with diamonds and money and a car of your own, just as I'm ashamed of you now!"

"Oh," said Bud very softly. "So you are ashamed of me, hunh?"

"If you're a prize fighter I am," said Agnes evenly.

"I'm a prize fighter," said Bud grimly. "Good-by!"

From the day the challenger started training the news from the camp carried favorable bits of reference to the youngest of his sparring partners.

"Young Lorgan is a newcomer to the world of professional fisticuffs," Emmet Claghorne, the dean of the metropolitan sport reporters wrote of him. "He doesn't know much about the fine points of the game yet, but he has the fighting instinct coupled with power and speed and the ability to take punishment and stay right side up. To-day I watched the green youngster take a beating from the big challenger that would have sent ninety per cent of our present crop of heavyweight fighters thankfully to sleep on the canvas, and at the finish of the two-round row the grim-faced, unskilled kid was ripping in for more with all the fury of a mad wild cat in action. There's a flash of the real stuff in this boy and if properly handled he'll go far."

Bud Lorgan read and listened and said nothing aloud, but in his heart was the constant savage, exultant chant: "I can do it! I will! I am! I've got the stuff. I'm going to be the champ! The champion of the world! I'll show her whether she ought to be ashamed of me!"

And Bud learned down there in the training camp how much being the champ really did mean, what it meant to be even the challenger; learned that it meant sums of money that presidents of railroads or factories or big business organizations could not despise. And it meant fame, too. Agnes MacKenzie could say what she pleased, but the fact remained that men and women, prominent in politics, business, art and literature came even to the quarters of the challenger, deferentially asking an introduction to the man who was preparing to fight for the heavyweight championship of the world.

Young and unknown to the game as Lorgan was, the favorable publicity he received for the speed and fury of his work as a sparring partner with the challenger bore quick fruit. A week before the date set for the championship affair at the Polo Grounds, Gannon came to Lorgan, beaming.

"I got a chance for you on the big card, kid," he said enthusiastically. 'Second bout of the prelims, six rounds against Leo Carter."

For a little time, so keen was his eagerness to answer that the affirmative word would not come to Lorgan's lips. Gannon frowned.

"What's the matter?" he said sharply. "Don't you want it?"

"Yes," Bud managed huskily at last. "Yes. Sure! I do! You bet!"

"All right," said Gannon, mollified. "There ain't many green youngsters get a chance this quick, I'll tell you that! I know it's rushing you a little. This fellow Carter's heavier than you are and he knows more than you do. You're probably in for a beating from him for a few rounds, but I figure you can take it and lick him with a punch when he begins to get tired. If you can lick him in front of that crowd, with all them sport writers there, it'll save you a whole year of beating pork and beaners at little two-bit fight clubs out in the sticks."

Lorgan nodded and walked away, afraid that the crazy exultation that was in him might show shamefully in his face. Gannon looked after him puzzled.

"He's a funny one," he said to a friend standing near. "You'd think he'd get a little excited over a chance like this, wouldn't you? I don't know whether he's too confident to be worried about it or too scared to talk."

"He sure takes it cool," said the friend.

"I'll say!" said Gannon.

Which goes to show how little either Gannon or his friend understood the working of Bud Lorgan's mind. He was so shaken by excitement that, day and night, right up to the afternoon of the fight, he had to struggle constantly with himself to relax, to still the exhaustingly clamorous nerves that demanded action, and secure the regular rest that he needed.

It was an immense relief to him when he went to the ball park late in the day of the fight and was forced to shoulder his way through the struggling thousands who were, even that early, milling against the police lines in an effort to purchase the cheaper admission tickets and gain entrance.

Once in the familiar atmosphere of the bare dressing room under the grand stand, smelling of liniment and trained flesh, he felt at last secure, easily confident. He hummed a gay little tune as he undressed and got into his ring togs. It was good to be young and strong and have the opportunity to fight, to make full use of youth and strength in a sudden struggle for wealth and fame.

Feeling thus he wrapped his bath robe about him, and accompanied by two of Gannon's assistants who were to second him made his way through the darkness under the grand stand to the nearest runway and stepped confidently out in the aisle on his way to the ring.

His first feeling was one of shock at the immensity of the arena. The sense of the enormity of the place shook him. He felt suddenly as insignificant as a small ant crawling helplessly about among the thundering feet of acres upon acres of moving elephants, as tiny and overwhelmed as a small child overboard in mid-Atlantic in a hurricane. On every side of him were thousands of thousands upon yet other tens and scores of thousands of people, all waiting for him to reach that tiny, brilliantly illuminated white square in the very middle of the rolling prairie of humanity, climb through the ropes and become the object of their attention.

Faces popped up out of the moving, noisy mass of humanity on either side of him to stare curiously. He heard laughs and jeers and mocking shouts of encouragement. Outwardly he was erect, calm, defiant. Inwardly he shrank from contact with this great, squirmy, murmurous, coagulated monster that was the crowd. He wanted to run, to hide, to scurry away and bury himself safe in some close dark corner. All thought of triumph, conquest, was gone from his mind. He was just an infinitely small, horribly scared atom of easily perishable humanity on unwilling parade in front of an infinitely enormous and horrible beast, a curiously cruel, blood-hungry monster having multiple scores of thousands of probing eyes and no heart.

His legs were turning to jelly under him as he climbed through the ropes and sat trembling on the small, round, swinging stool. From his high perch in the brilliantly lit ring he glanced fearfully about and saw the massed faces of the vast throng receding and rising away into the distant half dark, looking like a smooth hill slope of stippled pink.

Then the walk to the center of the ring, instructions from the referee, and he was out there, circling slowly to the left, mechanically going through the familiar motions of boxing, but so stricken with stage fright that he was practically helpless against the swift attack of the seasoned professional. For the first two minutes of the round he stayed on his feet by instinctively covering and backing away. During the

last minute he was dropped twice. Dimly he heard the jeers and mocking laughter of the crowd as he rested on one knee, pain-racked and dizzy, taking the full count of nine. At the end of the round he went to his corner, dazed, sick from a sense of utter helplessness. He felt so small and pathetically futile against the background of that enormous cruel crowd! He scarcely heard and did not at all heed the advice given by his handlers as they rubbed and kneaded him. Their words carried no message to him. Their voices were mere bits of meaningless noise mingling as one with the murmur of the vast throng, that poisoning buzz of mocking comment that rose from the mob like a miasmic mist of sound infolding and oppressing him.

Then, away on the far rim of that hill of human faces there was a commotion that for a moment registered on his numbed mind, a heaving upwards, and then the sound of splintering wood, a short thunder of tramping feet and a confusion of groans, screams and curses as a section of the mob in the farthest seats swarmed forward in a concerted rush for better places farther down. There was something terrifying, suggestive of a seismic horror in the sudden movement that overwhelmed the police and left those who unluckily fell in the moving crush trampled candidates for hospital treatment. It was the first of a number of like rushes that made the far sections of the arena more dangerous to life and limb than the ring itself.

Lorgan had the panicky feeling that all those people out there in the crowd, shoving, staring, stampeding, were his opponents; that he must stave off and whip, not only the man in the ring with him, but also all the terrifying, close-packed, fight-mad thousands that walled him about.

It seemed to him he had not been resting on his stool for more than fifteen or twenty seconds when the bell clanged the end of the minute interval and he shuffled forward to offer his quivering flesh again to those jarring, bruising fists, that he found himself so astoundingly unable to avoid.

The second round was a repetition of the first, the third of the second, the fourth of the third and the fifth of the fourth. In each of the first four three-minute sessions Lorgan took a terrific lacing from his tough and seasoned opponent, barely managing to last through the age-long rounds.

After the first knockdown in the second round he ceased to think. His actions from then on were as instinctive as the movements of a somnambulist. Neither did his imagination function. Minute by minute, round by round he was being battered back from the door of pugilistic opportunity. Every blow that sent him reeling across the ring thrust him also just that much farther out of the golden light of the fame for which he was so desperately greedy, into the dull shadow of nameless mediocrity from which he had so recently come forth, but there was no thought of the future in his mind as he cowered, clinched, dropped stricken to the canvas and rose tottering on trembling legs before the terminating count of ten, no sense of realization that the punches from which his flesh and frame suffered were wrecking his reputation, bringing down to ruin the splendid castle of his hope. After the middle of that disastrous second round he was conscious only of a sense of dazed wonder. As the hard-driven gloves smashed into his face and body he wondered vaguely, persistently what it was all about. For some reason he was up there under a dazing blaze of light, being fearfully beaten about by some one for some purpose. He wished petulantly that whoever was punching him would let up for a moment and give him a chance to think. There was some good reason why he had to stay there and take that punishment. What was it? He couldn't remember. Some reason! Some reason why he must not attempt to escape nor drop to the floor and save himself by lying huddled there, face down with his arms wrapped about his head.

Once in the fifth round he fell to the canvas in that position and almost decided not to rise. He felt as though he were resting on a soft black-velvet cloud and that if he could just relax he would immediately sink into the inviting black depths beneath and sleep there for days in healing comfort. But some vague, persistent, irritating delusion would not let him relax. He was cursed by the obsession that he must rise and struggle. And rise he did to a fusillade of blows, still wondering as he rose and suffered, why he did it! There was some reason! What was it?

He was sitting huddled in his corner during the minute of rest before the sixth and last round when the murk cleared from his

brain suddenly and completely. It was as though a window in his consciousness had been thrown open and a gale had swept through, driving before it all the vaporous mess of bewilderment. The causative agents of this sudden recuperation were the words: "Last round!"

Last round! The sense of finality expressed by those words spoken in his ear by one of his seconds shocked him into complete consciousness. He was suddenly able to see and hear and feel clearly. He saw Leo Carter sitting in the opposite corner, unmarked, laughing while his seconds worked over him. He heard one of his own handlers saying beseechingly: "Cover up and hang on, kid! Never mind trying to fight back. Just stay the limit with him. He's got you licked so bad he'll get the decision no matter what you do now, but you don't want a knock-out marked up against you in your first fight. Just cover and clinch and run and take the count whenever you get a good chance. Anything to stay with him for this last round!"

The last round! His last chance to make good! The final opportunity to put a foundation of reality under the sky mansions of his dreams. The realization of this struck into young Lorgan's recovered consciousness like a swift-driven, twisting knife. Forgotten on the instant were the pain of his hurts, the dread of further punishment and the numbing awareness of the crowd which had so weakened him in the beginning. For the first time since he had stepped out from under the grand stand in view of the huge throng he conquered the sense of insignificance, ceased to feel tiny and helpless. In the moment of his emergency he discovered within himself a reservoir of power from which to draw to the full limit of his need. He felt a wealth of hot joyous strength flooding through him.

Then the bell rang and a roar of excitement went up as the crowd rose yelling to watch young Lorgan, a completely beaten man, come from his corner in a devastating explosion of fury and within a whirlwind minute of unbelievably ferocious fighting, slash and stab and smash his opponent to the canvas for the count of ten.

Lorgan was buoyed up by a lifting sense of triumph as he strode down the dim-lit aisle toward his dressing room. He had done more than lick Leo Carter. He had licked the crowd! They rose to cheer him as he passed and in the cheering there was no note of the mockery that in the beginning had terrified him almost to destruction. Bud Lorgan, the promising newcomer! He was out of the ruck at last and on his way to big things!

Bathed and rubbed and dressed, Bud was just leaving the dressing room for his return to the arena to watch the main bout when a messenger handed him a note. It was a short note of no more than an address and a brief line of explanation, but it drove all thought of even the championship battle from young Lorgan's mind. Even as he finished reading he started on a plunging run for the distant street exit. Men cursed and struck at him as he ran them down in his mad flight in the near dark under the grand stand, but he ran on unheeding. Arrived outside the gate he was forced to wriggle and buck and claw his way through several blocks of a tight-packed crowd that jammed the streets from building front to building front. Then a cab, a swift, brief ride, a dash up a short flight of steps and he stood panting and disheveled before a desk in a large lobby, sputtering an explanation of himself to an embarrassingly cool, unhurried woman in the uniform of a trained nurse.

"Ah, yes!" she said after a few moments of listening. "You're Mr. Lorgan. The young lady was asking for you so insistently the doctor thought it best to send for you."

"What's the matter with her?" Bud asked desperately. "The note just said she was hurt. It ain't bad, is it?"

"You'll have to ask the doctor," the woman replied.

"How'd she get hurt?" Bud persisted.

"She was trampled by the fight crowd at the Polo Grounds."

"At the fight?" Bud whispered. "Oh, my God!"

Another nurse appeared in answer to a bell and took Bud up two flights and down a long corridor. Agnes' father stood outside the door before which Bud's guide stopped. An expression of rage twisted the old man's face as he saw the youngster. He shook his gnarled fists at him in impotent fury.

Bud entered fearfully. In a white-enameled bed before him lay Agnes MacKenzie. Her head was wound about with bandages. Lines of pain marked her white face.

"Careful!" the nurse said sharply as Bud made an impulsive move forward. "You mustn't touch her. She's been badly trampled."

Then Agnes smiled and held out one arm. The movement threw back the covers somewhat and Bud saw that the other arm was bandaged.

He stepped forward, knelt by the bed and laid his head beside her. Her free arm went feebly about his neck.

"My boy!" she said. Her voice was weak but there was an infinite depth of content in the tone. "You won't blame me, will you?"

"Blame you?" said Bud. "For what?"

"I wanted to see for myself," she went on, running her fingers caressingly through his hair. "I made dad take me. Oh, Bud! I knew you weren't fit for that sort of thing! I knew it! At first when I saw that other man beating you I was glad. I was glad because I thought he would prove to you what I couldn't make you believe: that you are too nice and decent to be good at such butchers' work. And then I saw him knock you down again and again. I got so frightened Bud! I began to be afraid he'd kill you. And I was so far away from you up there! I called to you and started to run. I guess I was just clean crazy for fear you'd be badly hurt. I started to run down the aisle toward you. I don't know what I thought I was going to do when I got there, but I was going to help you some way. And then, all of a sudden, everybody began to run in the aisle and shove and push and I stumbled and fell."

"Oh, God!" said Bud. "My God!"

Horribly clear in his mind was the memory of the sound of splintering wood, the thunder of trampling feet, the screams and groans and curses as sections of the crowd swarmed forward in a rush for better seats.

"I tried to get up and go on," the girl continued. "Oh, I tried so hard, Bud! I wanted to get down where you were and help you. But I couldn't. They kept crushing me down and hurting me. They hurt me terribly for a little bit and then pretty soon they were still trampling on me, but it didn't hurt me any more and I knew I was going to faint. I knew then that I never could get down to help you, Bud, so just before I fainted away I prayed a little. I prayed hard for you to come through safe and not be hurt too bad."

"Oh, Agnes!" Bud groaned in an agony of spirit. "Honey! My little girl!"

"Don't feel sorry for me, sweetheart," Agnes said. "I'm pretty bad hurt, but the doctor says I'm going to be all right. Oh, honey, I don't mind being hurt a little because I know that you'll come back to me now. I know you've found out for yourself that you're not fit for that terrible business."

She knew nothing of the triumph he had achieved in the last round! He had forgotten that. A constriction of nerve and muscle that felt like an electric shock flashed through him. For a momentous second of time he remained kneeling, rigid, his face mercifully hidden in the coverlet. In the first half of that second he saw two pictures clearly in his mind's eye. One was a picture of the heavyweight champion of the world, a man of might and money; a man with diamonds and automobiles; a man thronged about with admirers wherever he went; the king of his kind with a crown of gold. And that man was Bud Lorgan.

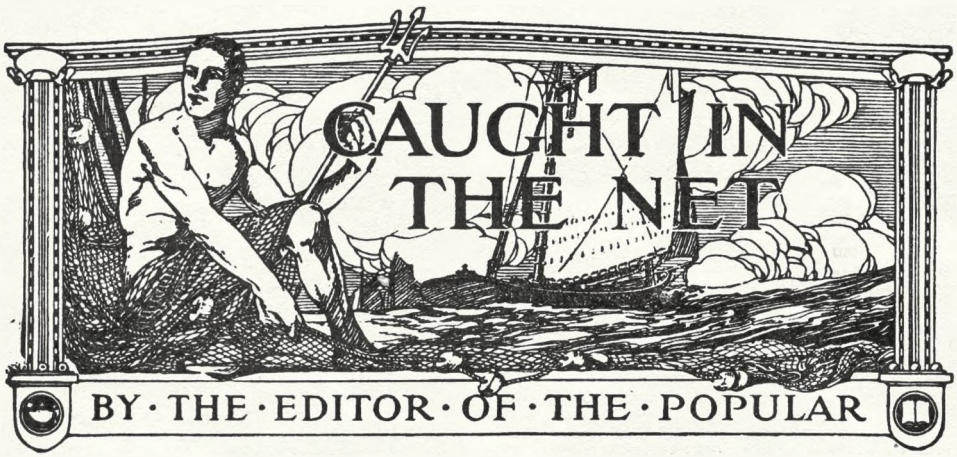
And the other picture he saw was that of a common, ordinary sort of fellow, working day after day as an assistant foreman in a metal works for just a living wage. When the day's work was done he saw him take a crowded street car from the factory to a three-room flat in the common, ordinary Brooklyn residence street. He saw him grow to middle age in the atmosphere of that routine and develop heavy care lines in his face from the responsibility of supporting a growing family. He saw him partially bald, a little stooped, with gnarled hands and clothing not quite up to date, the father of smart sons and daughters in high school who loved him, but who were at times a bit patronizing in their attitude toward the old man who certainly was nothing out of the ordinary. Just a good father.

And then in the latter half of that crowded second he weighed the evidence presented to his understanding by those two pictures and rendered his decision.

"I must 'a' been crazy to think I could make good in the fight game," he said sheepishly, lifting his head and looking into her eyes. "You're a good little square shooter to take me back."

"Oh, Bud!" the girl said tremulously. "I love you so much."

Bud nodded. "I figured that," he said solemnly.



AFTER THE BONUS-

CALL it what you will—bonus, adjusted compensation, war-service indemnity—the veterans have got it at last. That is, they have got it "in principle." It will still be many a hard-working year before they all will feel the comforting crackle of its tangible form in their fingers. But the long war is over, anyhow. The honors of battle are with the veterans.

The whole business has been humiliating. The self-respect of the nation and of the veterans has been torn and slashed, and salt rubbed on the wounds, during the disheartening process of haggle and barter. There is almost nothing to be said in extenuation of the nation's conduct in the original instance—excepting that the dismal travesty would never have been enacted had it been possible to consult the individuals of the national community when the issue was really ripe. But it wasn't possible. And so the affair was miserably bungled, and the men who had vindicated America's greatness and honor, arms in hand, with their lives as the stake, were set adrift thanklessly—pauperized by their sacrifice, for all the nation undertook to the contrary. It was then, when the doffing of the uniform and the quitting of the service left them, figuratively, naked and shelterless, that the bonus was needed. It was then that their country committed the graceless sin of omission that left them embittered and disillusioned.

Looking at the other side, the side of the veterans, there is a great deal that may be said in support of their case. There is also somewhat to be adduced against it. Everybody has heard the arguments both ways. Now that the issue is closed we should like to say that we wish the veterans had done the cavalier, the dignified thing, and accepted the ungrateful oversight of America's careless administrators more in sorrow than in anger. There would have been a gesture worthy of them, worthy of America—something for the historian to revel in!

As it is, what have they got? Scarcely more than the shadow for the substance. Far less than they needed, infinitely less than they deserved. And in its getting they have lost, in part at least, a thing of incalculable worth, the fine luster of chivalry that burned about the arms they bore so highly, the white glow of patriotism that illumined the memory of their achievements.

TO THE GOLFER

IS there anything nicer to see, touch, use than a well-turned, well-polished hickory-shafted club? Certainly not. Therefore this little word of caution.

Blight hit our chestnut trees, and no one needs to be told the incalculable loss it has been to builder and manufacturer. From indications on every side it appears to be the turn of the hickory to follow in the devastated wake of the chestnut. A six-legged borer has appeared, with a ravenous appetite, and unless his dining hours are checked there will be no more hickory nuts and no more hickory golf-club shafts.

Of course, the department of agriculture is on the job, but as is well known, this department has its hands full with pests of all description, and encourages and appreciates the coöperation of citizens who will take the trouble to help in the endless war it wages. Therefore, it might be an appropriate and grateful task if the golfers throughout the country would get together on the preservation and conservation of the American hickory.

It will be a patriotic as well as a sporting service. Of all the species of the hickory genus, not one is found outside of North America, so it may be said to be the most American of trees. Not long ago it was one of our most abundant trees, as well as the most characteristic. There is something admirable in the character of the hickory. It is rough and rugged, a true denizen of the forest, and a symbol of that independent sturdiness we all like to see in animate or inanimate nature.

If each member of a golf club would contribute a mere pittance toward the saving of the hickories, and the executives of these clubs would promote and use such funds, it would result in the proverbial casting of bread upon the waters; for if the golfers are indifferent to the threat of hickory extinction, they will pay more and more for hickory sticks, until the price becomes prohibitive.

THE DEATH PENALTY

LITTLE by little the world slips off the clinging shreds of the mantle of barbarism. Step by step mankind emerges from the shadow of the Dark Ages into the radiance of mental and spiritual enlightenment. To-day we laugh at superstitions that our grandfathers accepted as fundamentals of faith. It is not so very long ago, measured by spans of life, that witches were being persecuted in our own New England colonies.

One of the last remaining heritages of medieval ignorance is the death penalty. No man of culture will argue to-day that the "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" creed of his ancestors before the Christian era is compatible with modern philosophy. Yet on the statute books of the nation, and of all but seven of our forty-eight united States, death still remains the penalty for death.

There is no practical reason why illegal murder should be punished by legal homicide. Criminologists all over the world are united in declaring that the menace of death is no deterrent to the murderer. History exemplifies over and over again the truth that man loves freedom more than life. There is no considerable body of dissenting opinion to the proposition that the proper treatment and punishment for the murderer—as for every other brand of criminal—is detention and education.

Whether the fear of lifelong imprisonment operates to lower the homicide rate must of course remain an open question until years of experience have tested the theory. But that fear of death is a very inferior—practically ineffective—deterrent of any class of crime, no longer needs arguing. During the Middle Ages when petty thievery was punishable by death equally with high treason crime flourished as never before or since. As late as the year 1800, no less than two hundred kinds of crime were punishable by death in England. And crime then was as prevalent as now, when murder and treason alone receive the death penalty.

The death penalty serves no good purpose; it is an institution opposed to the high standards of a progressive, democratic people. It is one of the last remnants of ignorant brutality. Experts are agreed that its abolition will not at all weaken the community's defense against crime. And thoughtful men everywhere are unanimous in the conviction that its passing will, at least, strengthen our claim to the possession of a progressive, humanitarian civilization.

THE THIRD QUARTER

IN a mile foot race it is the third quarter that is hardest on the contestants. The scramble of the start and the early battle for positions are over; the fast second quarter has taken its toll of strength and eliminated some of the weaker runners; the exhilaration of the rush through the home stretch is still to come. The third quarter is something to be gotten through; and if the runner is to have a chance

of winning, or even of finishing creditably, it must be gotten through well enough to place him within striking distance of the pacemakers with enough reserve strength to make his bid for victory on the last lap.

Shift the scene from sport to business and you will find the same condition. The third quarter of a man's career is likely to be the hardest. This is especially true if he is a fairly successful man. He has fought for and won a position at the start of his business life; he has managed to keep up with his competitors through the early years of competition. While life is better measured by achievements than by years, thirty-five or forty is likely to find the average man entering upon the third quarter of his career. There is a strong temptation to slow down; to hold a place not too far back of the leaders without exerting too much energy. A strong temptation—and a fatal one.

Most of the big jobs in life are held by men of forty or over. They have gotten through the hard third quarter in a position to make a bid for the highest honors and with enough reserve strength to do big things. They are the successful men of the world.

In the third quarter of the average man's career he has gotten beyond the anxiety of how to make enough money to live. Usually he has the time and means to enjoy the little luxuries that make life pleasant. Very often he has grown just a little tired of his job; a little weary of pushing himself to the limit of his abilities. He slows up. That is why so many men of real talent are just fairly successful.

Mr. Rudyard Kipling, who has a knack of being right more often than most people, said not long ago that winning success involves the question of how far you can drive yourself without breaking down, and if you do break down, how soon you can recover and carry on again. It is in the hard, grinding third quarter that this driving is most necessary; and it is a cheerful fact that during the years of comparatively small successes that every man must get through, a great many more men rust out than burn out. Hard work isn't a very important factor in the mortality tables.

Even a thoroughbred race horse needs a touch of whip or spur now and then. Be your own jockey.

POPULAR TOPICS

A Parisian milliner is using the phonograph to provide appropriate accompaniments for the trying on and sale of hats. For example, when she has interested a prospective victim in a rich and costly jeweled toque she switches on the "Jewel Song" from "Faust." Of course, no normal woman ever buys the first hat she looks at—unless she looks at all the others in the shop and then goes back to the first one—and when the customer is attracted to a snappy dansant turban the milliner meets her changed mood and the "Jewel Song" gives way to something zippy in the way of jazz.

This is a bright idea that could be applied to almost any line of business. The banker who lends money on notes might do it to the accompaniment of "Oh, Promise Me." The boarding-house keeper might have her victrola play "Abide With Me" while she was showing her rooms. Beauty-parlor patrons would appreciate their torture being accompanied by "Believe Me, If All Those Endearing Young Charms." Fruit stores could keep their customers happy with "Yes, We Have No Bananas." Prize-fight promoters might supply phonographs in the boxers' dressing rooms and when the defeated gladiator is carried in soothe his rumpled feelings with the strains of "The End of a Perfect Day."

First Assistant Fire Marshal John McDonnell of Chicago is indignant because a lot of Broadway show girls who have played Chicago recently have in their possession Chicago's gold-and-jeweled fire marshal's badges that cost the city twenty dollars apiece.

Did the fire marshal ever see a company of fire fighters who displayed a slicker

line of hose than do these Broadway nifties? Or whose members got more out of their hose—or more into it?

BECAUSE Eve handed Adam an apple instead of a fig or a banana, Franz von Wendrin, a German archæologist, has come to the conclusion that Paradise was located in Mecklenburg, a hundred miles from Berlin, instead of between the Euphrates and the Tigris in Mesopotamia.

We think that this learned gentleman is all wrong. What Eve handed Adam was the Mesopotamian raspberry.

And her daughters have been handing it to his sons ever since.

THE newspaper-reading habit has a firm grip on the people of the United States. In 1880 the per capita consumption of news-print paper was three pounds. In 1893 it was nine pounds; in 1919, thirty-five pounds, and in 1923, fifty pounds.

Americans, by the way, are the world's greatest users of paper of all kinds. In 1920 the per capita consumption in the United States was one hundred and fifty pounds; in Russia, only six pounds. Between the two extremes came Japan with twelve pounds; Scandinavia with thirty-three pounds; Germany with forty-five pounds; and Great Britain with seventy-six pounds.

IF you have red hair you are eligible for membership in the Red Head Legion of America, an organization that is determined to demonstrate to the wide world that the brick top should be regarded as a mark of distinction instead of as a target for jokes. Another object of the legion is the political support of red-haired candidates for office. The secretary of the organization claims many distinguished men, present and past, as members of the red-headed fraternity. Among them are President Coolidge, Andrew Carnegie, George Washington, and Mayor Hylan of New York.

IN the last year the United States government reduced the national debt by eight hundred and ninety-nine million dollars. On June 1st last the national interest-bearing debt totaled a few odd millions over twenty-one and one quarter billion dollars. Last year interest charges cost us more than any other single item of government expense. Recently instituted economies are saving the taxpayers two and one half million dollars a day.

AMERICANS have a world-wide reputation as money spenders, but in our population there are plenty of money savers. Joseph S. McCoy, United States treasury actuary, says that in addition to our savings-bank accounts, there are four hundred million dollars of hoarded money in the nation. Many of the people who hoard money are foreigners who distrust banks; others are native-born Americans who do their own banking because they live in far-off places. Mr. McCoy estimates that we have eight thousand honest-to-goodness misers who keep forty-four million dollars out of circulation for the pleasure of gloating over it. Two and one half million children have toy banks, which contain an aggregate of a million and one half dollars.

THE eight-hour day having become almost universal, a lot of well-meaning people are beginning to worry about how other people spend their leisure time. The international labor conference held at Geneva last June had the utilization of leisure as its principal theme. Doctor John H. Finley took "Training for Leisure" as his subject for an address to the students of George Washington University.

Doctor Finley gave his hearers some true talk. Among other things he said that every one should have some spare time and should waste it on something that repaid him only in the good that it did him.

A German scientist recently announced that after years given to the study of the habits of the insect variety of bugs, he had found that an ant deprived of its work would live only a day or two.

That is where we have it all over the ant. Although we never have gone into training for leisure we have a native ability for doing nothing that amounts almost to genius.

Galahad of Lost Eden

By William West Winter

Author of "The Valley of Power," "Millions in Motors," Etc.

II.—THE TOSS OF A COIN.

"Blue John," Arizona's six-gun idealist, further applies the principles of the Round Table to the vicissitudes of modern life—holding up a stage with as pure a heart as ever knight carried to the slaying of dragons on the quest of the Grail.

IT engaged the teamster for about two weeks to make his round trip from Flagstaff to the Tonto Basin and return, so that it was a week before the ranger again heard his voice addressed to his stolid horses and the cheerful clanking of the trace chains as the beasts slid down the slope to Pivot Rock. He at once set to hacking a goodly piece from a quarter of young beef which a cow-puncher had donated to him a few days before, and by the time the teamster had fed and watered his team, he had a savory supper under way for him.

"You were telling me about 'Blue John' and his troubles last time we met," said he when the supper was disposed of, the dishes washed and they had settled back to smoke and gaze into the flames of the camp fire, while the cold and steely night settled down around them. "I was wondering how they all came out in the end."

Yes—said the teamster—things always do come out one way or another in the end—even such impractical objects as this here Blue John Adams. But he sure went through some vicissitudes, in a manner of speaking, before his end overtook him.

I was telling you how Blue John undertook to elope with a young lady of foreign antecedents who was being sealed to a Mormon bishop, and in his chivalrous notions, bred from reading poetry, how he surrenders his own ambitions regarding this lady's affections when he finds she is enamored of another. But when the other turns out to be a fellow who is hostile to him a whole lot, and this hombre undertakes to negotiate with him through the smoke, Blue John forgets his chivalry and naturally downs him.

I don't reckon there was any grief on the part of the inhabitants of Camp Verde when this "Rusty Mike" cashes in, however the young lady may have felt, since Rusty isn't overly popular in that region. Even with the golden-haired Miss Hilda Raffe, who is referred to by Blue John as his Holy Grail, poignant emotions are not of unmixed caliber when she comes to reflect upon events, which she does a-plenty after she settles down to shoot biscuits in the Monte-

zuma restaurant, which is run by George Rayfield among other and numerous activities. To begin with, this Rusty Mike presents no gala appearance as she sees him last, lying in the dust of Camp Verde's main and only thoroughfare. He contrasts strictly unfavorable with her recollections of him when she first meets up with him in Trinidad. On that occasion he is embellished right festive and spending his money free, with intimations that he is an exiled duke or something from foreign parts. Whereas, when he makes the mistake of clashing for the second time with Blue John, he stacks up in his rightful colors as hostler for Rayfield in a suit of blue jeans and a pair of boots which are badly run down at the heel. In fact, after she discovers that all the money Rusty Mike ever has is his stipend of thirty pesos a month and found, and that the nighest acquaintance he ever has with a Duke is smoking his Mixture wrapped in wheat-straw papers, she gets an inkling of the fact that maybe Blue John, in his haste, has actually improved her chances by beefing her Lothario out of hand.

First off, I reckon, in the indignation caused by Blue John's summary crushing of her romance, she hates that party a whole lot, but as she imbibes the atmosphere of the country and finds out her rights and obligations, of which she is plumb ignorant when she first alights, the edge of her pique gets dulled and in the course of time she might have come to regard him as a benefactor. Of course, as soon as her story gets known, she is informed that her stepfather, old Elder Marks, hasn't no manner of hold on her by which he can saw her off regardless on Bishop Swanson. And she being free, white and eighteen or more, even her mamma can't use no force to dispose of her against her will.

I must say the bishop acts right handsome in the matter when it transpires to his intellect that the young lady has been inveigled in the matter of these nuptials with him. Old Elder Marks, who is a mangy sort of prairie wolf, is inclined to act up about it and make threats, but Bishop Swanson calms him down a-plenty and he likewise douses the ebullience of several young Mormons who evince a disposition to go running on the trail of Blue John and the Verde sports who are harboring his bride. Taking it by and large, I reckon the Mormons shows up fairly well in this controversy, though it's only natural that sundry saints, especially young and fiery ones, resents Blue John's high-handed actions considerable. Still, they let it simmer down and don't even make no complaint to the officers of the law. As for old Bishop Swanson, he sends word over to Camp Verde that, seeing he is unaware that the lady is being coerced into wedlock with him, he regrets the matter exceedingly and he offers to make no defense if she aims to sue for a divorce.

There was two reasons why Hilda doesn't jump at this way out of her dilemma. One is the fact that she hasn't the price and the other, which develops later, is Blue John. If she'd known Swanson better, she'd have asked him for a loan, but she doesn't feel on terms of that much intimacy with him and she don't realize that Swanson is embarrassed by the situation the same as herself, him wanting a bride and not being able to acquire a useful one as long as he's wedded to Hilda.

Blue John she regards as having vanished from her existence as he came into it and for some time nothing happens to shake her notions in that respect. Blue John, when the grand jury meets, is duly indicted for manslaughter as a matter of form, though it is pretty well understood, in view of the fact that Rusty Mike starts to draw first, and isn't popular anyhow, that if he'd come back and stand trial he'd be acquitted. Blue John, however, is holing out in Lost Eden and he hasn't any intentions of standing trial anywhere.

The upshot of that is that Blue John rests under indictment in Navajo County for felonious assault, in Yavapai for manslaughter and some energetic sport in Gila County sashays before the grand jury there and secures a true bill against him for unlawful and forceful abduction. Consequently, he sticks pretty close to Lost Eden and Coconino, where the writs don't run no farther than a ranger's gun can carry one —and that isn't far.

However, it isn't to be supposed that these performances of Blue John's escapes the attention of the Territorial Rangers, even though the sheriffs of the surrounding counties aren't any too feverish in their activities against him. The rangers don't play any blue chips on chivalric motives and they don't go crediting other folks with any such notions neither. Still, seeing that

these offenses are strictly within the jurisdiction of the county officers concerned and aren't matters reflecting great discredit on the Territory, as you might say, the rangers take it rather lukewarm and don't more than note that Blue John is to be gathered in whenever they feel in the mood and can get around to it.

It's a periodic affair however, that the rangers start out to clean up Lost Eden and about this time they get ambitious along those lines and send a man into the Verde to get a line on matters preparatory to a raid. This man is a young fellow who goes by the name of "Whistling William" back where he comes from but calls himself for purposes of dignity, Corporal Bill Griffiths. He is a light-hearted and optimistic cuss, prone to look at tasks as already done before he gets well on his way to the doing of them. Likewise, he becomes his uniform right well and makes a picture which a maiden might regard as handsome, having a couple of gold teeth which show promiscuous when he smiles.

Whistling William arrives on the Verde some time after Hilda has assumed her duties as biscuit shooter and he sets out to inquire regarding the topography of Lost Eden and the inhabitants thereof. He don't get much lore concerning either one for the reason that the said inhabitants discourage exploring parties a whole lot, while they themselves conceals their identities under pretty copious aliases.

But as Whistling William eats at Rayfield's Montezuma restaurant, he naturally encounters Hilda and he falls a victim to her charms right away. It isn't long before he is sitting out on the gallery and holding hands with her in the moonlight, or trying to, though, Miss Raffe being a circumspect and proper young lady, he maybe doesn't actually corral them digits of hers; and he hears all about her marriage and Blue John's performance. Naturally he waxes indignant; not at Blue John, whose conduct he then regards as proper, but at Marks and Swanson. And when he understands that Hilda is legally hobbled to this professional widower he rears up and emits a roar.

"Why ever don't you canter into court and tear yourself off a divorce from this pirate?" he asks. "The law and the evidence being all on your side and Swanson intimating that he don't file no contest, the affair seems cut and dried and ready to tack down."

"Divorces cost money," said Hilda, rather sadlike, "and my wages are not exactly plutocratic."

"Shucks!" says Whistling William, cheerfully and optimistic. "Who ever says divorces costs money? I've got a friend in Jerome who's a lawyer and owes me obligations. You write out your story and send it to him and he'll tear you off a first-class and legal divorce before you can skin a rabbit. And the fees won't come to no more than seven dollars and a half, neither."

Hilda can raise that much, of course, since even old Rayfield pays wages that allow folks to live after a fashion, and the upshot of it is that while Whistling William hangs around the Verde and seeks misinformation regarding Lost Eden, making love to Hilda meantime, she negotiates with this law sharp in Jerome and in due time it is arranged that he shall come over to the Verde and take her affidavits and fix up the papers for her to sign.

Meanwhile Blue John has returned to the mesa and headed into Lost Eden again, where, in his camp up against a rocky outcrop where a spring flows and where the ferns grow fifty feet high along the crags, he has left "Rabbit Dick" to look after things in his absence. He hasn't been gone more than three days but when he gets back Rabbit Dick is suffering from the collywobbles a whole lot, what with sleeping alone at night and hearing squinch owls and loafers howling around him; and he even begins to harbor doubts that the life of a bold and bad outlaw is all that it is cracked up to be in the books. Besides which, he hasn't dared to go more than a hundred yards from the camp and the only food they have is a side of salt hog and a twenty-five-pound sack of flour.

Blue John's first duty when he gets back is to rustle up some chuck that's fit for human consumption, and being a practical enough sharp where chivalry isn't concerned, he loses little time. After a few days' rest he crawls into his hull and lopes out along the edge of the basin, seeking a ridge that gives him some outlook and presents favorable opportunities of corralling a mutton or two; or, barring that, he hopes to get a shot at a deer.

There aren't any deer looking for trouble and for some time he don't encounter any

sheep, but by and by he runs onto trails and, following them cautious, he soon catches the sound of sheep bleating off across the hills. It's open pine woods here and he has to ride careful, for he can be seen for a good distance. But he climbs the ridges and follows them along and pretty soon he is rewarded by hearing something off to one side blatting in the forlorn accents of a sheep that has wandered from the flock.

Blue John is ethical as long as circumstances allows him to be and he isn't stealing no sheep if he can avoid it. But strays are any man's meat, as every one knows, because if some one don't knock 'em over the coyotes will dine off of them come sundown or sooner. The only rule that's laid down is that they must be far enough from the flock so that the dogs aren't liable to range out to them, and it's any man's chance of an argument as to how far a sheep dog will range and the limit is pretty likely to be gauged by how bad the man wants sheep meat for supper. So Blue John isn't making any circles and calculating where the dogs are, but he draws his six-shooter and starts to pull down on this mutton that is emitting wails of loneliness near by.

But just as he's about to pull the trigger, he hears a voice and a man comes over the ridge, holding up his hand. He's a sheep-herder, as is easy to guess, the same having signs and indications which goes with the profession, besides being afoot. He hollers out to Blue John, who, being conscientious for an outlaw, utters a vexatious noise and lowers the gun. The sheep-herder babbles something anonymous in some language that Blue John never has heard before and runs to the mutton and gathers him in as though he'd just found his youngest baby.

Picking up the sheep, he turns to Blue John and utters sentiments. But the tongue he speaks in is plumb strange and barbarous and Blue John concludes from his complexion, which is moderately white, that he ain't no Mexican, and from his talk, which is incomprehensible, that he ain't no Spaniard. Wherefore, by elimination, he's probably a Basco.

Whatever he is, he seems peaceable and even grateful to Blue John for sparing his ewe lamb or whatever it is and he endeavors to convey the same to him. Blue John gathers from signs that he is extending an invitation to him and, being hungry and there being no sign of enemies about, he accedes and rides along behind this party across the crest of the ridge and down into a swale on the other side where they are bedding down a couple of thousand sheep or so. There is another man here with a sheep wagon and three dogs such as Blue John has never seen before. They are tall, heavy animals, with hair growing on them in bushes and hanging over their eyes and they have no tails to speak of. But they can sure make those imbecile sheep step around regardless, and act almost as if they had sense.

The other man, who favors the first one somewhat, leaves the flock and comes over while the first one sets the sheep on its feet and lets it lope off to join its friends. Then they palaver in that strange tongue. Finally the first one turns to Blue John.

"Sir," says he, in something that bears a faint resemblance to American, "we are plenty grateful for your consideration. You have spared our sheep. What we have is yours."

That is the gist of it as near as Blue John can make out and they back it up by summoning him to the festive board. They feed him royally on a sort of Irish stew consisting of boiled mutton and numerous vegetables including chili, cooked in a pot. Being hungry he feeds heartily, and the Bascos wait on him with gestures so polite and cordial that he feels himself getting fond of these aliens. Which it seems that Blue John has a turn that a way for foreigners and such.

When he can't eat no more they take their own turn at the pot, and while they eat they try to talk, or at least the near-English-speaking one does. And pretty soon it appears that he is right wise to who Blue John is.

"We see the señor and hees lady ride in and make the shoot," the Basco remarks. "Those is very good shoots he make. Me, I no like that Rusty Mike for the reason that he make the big kick on my person for the why he say that he do not like the smell of mutton. And the lady—she is very pretty lady that the Blue Johnny ride away with."

"She is surely all of that," says Blue John, soft and sentimental, and the thought of the golden-haired Hilda swells his bosom fit to burst a button off his shirt. He sighs with the loneliness for her that is already

creeping in on him and with thoughts of deeds he can be doing in the future to be of service to her. And the Bascos, being something sentimental themselves, look at him sympathetic and nudge each other.

"You loaf her much?" asks the linguist of the two, and Blue John respires like a gust of wind.

"You're sure shouting!" says Blue John fervently. "I love her just like a prairie fire."

"Those ees grand feelings," says the Basco. He had tried to intimate that his name is something like Mario and Blue John lets it go at that. "I have those feelings one time for my own sweetheart, before I keel a border policemans and elope with her. And now, she is make a marry with you when she get that divorce from the lawyer at Prescott?"

"Whatever is this about a divorce?" asks Blue John, who has heard nothing of all this. And Mario explains.

"There is young ranger man come along and he make the eyes like the sheep at the yellow lady. It is he who sends for that divorce and the lawyer from Prescott arrives when I am leaving the Verde with my wagon. He is there now one, two, three day, maybe."

"He comes in on the stage on Wednesday then?" asks Blue John. And Mario says he does.

"And those ranger," he adds, "asks many question about Lost Eden. He don't ask me, for I know nothing and can speak little of the English when he talks to me. But I listen much and it ees plain that he sends the lady to Prescott for the divorce while he goes on the mesa to look for Lost Eden."

This all gives Blue John something to think about and he sets to doing that right heartily. First off, it strikes him that this divorce is not so bad an idea but pretty soon he gets to thinking about this ranger and the other sports at the Verde and he isn't so sure. But just at present he lets the matter slide, only he borrows a paper sack from one of the Bascos and writes on it with a piece of charcoal. Then he gets the Mario fellow to promise him something, which he does readily enough. It appears that these Bascos has some inherent sympathy for outlaws and such which ties them to Blue John—that and his refraining from butchering their mutton.

Which last is funny too, seeing that, when he goes away, they begs him to wait a minute while they go out and grab a sheep by the leg and butcher him out of hand, skinning the carcass and handing it over with their compliments. But sheep-herders is queer that a way and that's all there is to that.

Blue John goes back, covering his trail careful, and arrives in camp in time to feed Rabbit Dick with some of the mutton. And then he gets to thinking, while Dick talks about the people he aims to slay and the means whereby he hopes to accomplish his murders, to none of which does Blue John listen at all. The following morning Mario lights out on the back trail to the Verde and that night there mysteriously appears on the doors of the Montezuma restaurant, where Mario has tacked it up, a paper sack with charcoal writing on it, to wit:

TO ALL WHO IT MAY CONCERN!

I, Blue John, being in my right mind, hereby give notice to all and sundry, wheresoever they may be found:

I have spread my blanket over the head of Miss Hilda Raffe and she belongs to me. Any one molesting said lady with matrimonial or sentimental designs will darn soon find it out!

Miss Hilda, coming to work in the morning, is the first to see this declaration and she turns pale and gasps, before doing the opposite, which is to flush an indignant hue and explode with anger.

"I belong to him!" she cries, so that every one can hear her. "It is an impudence to be wondered at! This ruffian! This robber! This slayer of innocent men! Will no one punish him for this insolence?"

There are plenty of right-soon hombres in the Verde who would tie onto that job if it wasn't that the ranger, Whistling William, has sort of had the inside track of late and so they lay back and wait for him to speak up. He comes up, reads the epistle and waxes plenty indignant.

"To-morrow," says he, "you board the stage for Jerome and on out to Prescott with this lawyer sharp, to get your divorce. In the meanwhile, leave this picaro to me. I'll have him greeting a judge before he's twenty-four hours older and come back to receive your thanks, my dear, from your own sweet lips."

"And if you arrest him," says Hilda loudly, "those thanks you shall have. This is an intolerable outrage!"

Which it may have been but nevertheless, it arouses some curiosity in the lady's mind what with her memories of Blue John, and the way he Lochinvars her right out of Swanson's clutches and gallops off with her. She recalls that Blue John is a right comely sort of chap, even more so than Whistling William, and his talk of chivalry and serving her has had its effect. Now she hears he is laying claim to her and warning off the populace, it can't but give her a thrill to anticipate strife and murder of men for the sake of her blue eyes and golden hair. She can't make up her mind which she hopes will win out, the ranger or Blue John, though she tells herself it must be Whistling William; but anyway, the thought of that divorce presents itself to her as desirable, with two swains ready to slay each other for her. Without anticipating the outcome in any too raw a way, it occurs to her that, after the smoke has cleared away, it would be the part of wisdom to be free of legal encumbrances in case the right man should survive. Wherefore, she waves a tearful and blushing farewell to Whistling William as he rides out of the camp that morning, wasting no time, and then sets herself to depart with the lawyer on next day's stage for Jerome, where they take train for Prescott.

Now, Whistling William isn't any too cautious a man to trust with a ranger's badge and what he has heard of Blue John don't give him no great opinion of that young fellow. He judges that he is romantic and something unbalanced and should be easy gathering for an energetic sleuth. With his usual cheerfulness he spurs on up across the Buckhorn, heading in over Beaver Creek, strikes the old Apache Trail and follows it along to Long Valley, whence he turns off toward the Blue Ridge and finds himself skirting Lost Eden and peering into the tangle of ferns and game trails about a half hour from sundown, after riding a good forty miles that day. Which alone argues he isn't no Julius Cæsar for strategy, seeing he's got a tired horse under him and don't know no more than a rabbit where he's going to find his man.

But Blue John isn't in the same fix. He is anticipating a visit from the ranger and he is scouting around waiting for him. He doesn't know when he'll come nor where he'll strike in at, but he guards the only trail that will lead to himself. And as luck would have it, out of all the blind trails and paths that Whistling William could have wandered around in he strikes maybe the only one that would bring him into the trail that Blue John is watching. And, hastening along it, through the ferns and the thick spruce, unable to see where he's going or what's in his way, Whistling William hurries to get somewhere before dark. He don't arrive where he expects but he walks right into the loop of Blue John's lass' rope, which is cunningly disposed to snake a man out of his saddle whenever he rides into it, with Blue John ensconced at the other end of it which he has snubbed around a sapling. The upshot being that Whistling William finds himself lying suddenly on the ground with the wind jolted out of him and his arms tied down to his sides unable to get at his gun. And while he's wondering who does this to him Blue John walks out and gathers him in.

"Son," says Blue John to him, "you shouldn't wander into these places so disrespectful. There are gents holing up in here who would puncture your anatomy as soon as look at you and you're lucky you haven't fallen to no criminal by nature. If you'd encountered Pete Bradley, the train robber or 'Pigeon-toed Harry,' the murderer, or even Blue John from Showlow, I don't know what would have happened to you."

He says this to see if this hombre knows him and not being desirous of adding any more iniquities to his score than he can help. And Whistling William falls for it.

"It's that Blue John I'm looking for," he says. "If you-all are a law-abiding sport, you leads me to him and I lets you go."

"Whatever are you looking for him for?" asks Blue John, innocent. "And thanks for your considerations for me. However, I reckon you'll let me go the same way the fellow did who got the bear by the tail."

"That's neither here nor there," says Whistling William haughtily. "I represent the law and, whatever sort of outlaw you may be, I overlook it for the time being. My one concern is with Blue John and his impudence in laying claim to a lady of my acquaintance who is too good for him to come within her shadow. I'm up here to avenge the insult to her and no he-man stands in my way."

"What insult is this and who is the lady?" asks Blue John, and this simple

ranger tells him. When he is through, Blue John assists him to rise, but he sequestrates his small gun and his carbine from its boot on his saddle, and he relieves him likewise of the handcuffs he carries in his saddle pockets. Then he herds him along the trail, after blindfolding him, until he comes to his own camp, where the Rabbit is busy bending over the fire. Here Blue John relieves him of the bandage and points with a whisper to Rabbit Dick.

"There he is," says he, and slips his small gun into his hand. But he has shaken the loads out of it first and he don't return neither belt nor holster. The ranger doesn't notice either oversight but with his usual impetuosity trounces right into the firelight and drags down on Rabbit Dick, who utters one squawk and tries to claw a star right out of the sky.

"Blue John!" says Whistling William in a loud tone of voice, "I arrest you in the name of the law for the matter of various assaults and manslaughters!"

Now, Rabbit Dick is scared white, but there is one thing that penetrates to his egregious intellect and fills it with pride in spite of his scare. He has been mistaken for Blue John, a hero of the outlaws, and though he anticipates disaster a-plenty he can't refrain from rejoicing. He swells with importance and tries to scowl.

"You got me foul, stranger," he says, with barely a tremble. "But if you hadn't crep' up on me unawares, I'd sure have sieved you a-plenty. But have a care! He who encounters Blue John most generally bites the dust before the baile's over."

Which all confirms William in his impression that Blue John is a romantic fool and a bluff. Meantime the real Blue John whispers from the brush:

"That hombre's dangerous and I don't want the name of double crossing any comrade in misfortune, ranger. Wherefore, I'm going to hit high spots only out of here."

So saying, he back trails without waiting for the ranger's answer, and, leaving Whistling William to herd Rabbit Dick down to the ignominy of a jail, he gathers in the ranger's horse and his own where he had left them, and, changing mounts to save them, he hits it out for the Verde.

Before sunup he has crossed Beaver and struck into the desert west of the camp and is aiming to cut the stage road about ten miles from Camp Verde. Here he ties up his horses where he can get to them handy and lies out to await events.

That morning, still fluttering with the romance of the thing, having visions of fierce and goodly men-folks shooting each other all to pieces over her charms, Miss Hilda Raffe packs her grips and boards the stage in company with the lawyer from Jerome who is to escort her to Prescott and saw off a divorce for her. He is a short and dry party, without no great amount of manly pulchritude, and Miss Hilda rather ignores him except to seek information about Whistling William, whom he knows as an estimable young man of rather slender prospects, and of Blue John, whom he don't know at all, except as son to old man Adams over to Showlow and Holbrook, who is reputed to be wealthy.

They are driving along this way, with the driver half asleep and totally unguarded since they don't send no express nor money of value in these days out of the Verde and no one rides guard. There is only one other party, who is a drummer out of the East down around Albuquerque, as a passenger and he drowses plentifully while Hilda remarks a large diamond ring which he wears on his finger. She is thinking some of rings in connection with William and Blue John and naturally this one gets her eye. But for the life of her she can't decide which she favors. Of course Blue John is an outlaw and disreputable according to her lights, but then, her lights are changing color so to speak in the atmosphere of Arizona and his peculiar ways of showing his devotion intrigues her a whole lot, as the fellows who write the stories in the magazines say. And the fact that he is old man Harvey Adams' son has its effect, too, while William appears merely as a cheerful young sport with a couple of gold teeth and a nice smile. Still, William has gone off like a hero in her quarrel and that counts too, almost enough to outweigh the fact that his salary ain't but a hundred a month and find your own equipment and horses.

She is dwelling on these things and looking forward to being free from legal snarls and tangles in the way of wedlock when the driver wakes up with a start and a loud snort of profanity, reining in sharp, throwing on his brakes and sticking up his hands all in the same motion, like a wise hombre used to the ways of the country. The law-

yer sticks his head out of the window and drags it in again with a resigned sigh. The drummer wakes up and stares with his mouth open.

"A damn' road agent!" says Pete Murdock, the driver.

And Mister Short, the lawyer, ejaculates: "I thought the last one was caught and caged in 1897."

"What is it?" asks the lady and the drummer right together. But just then Blue John sticks his gun through the window.

"Pile out and line up!" he says sternly. The drummer utters a yell and Hilda a faint scream while she turns white. But she recognizes Blue John and so she is too curious to faint. All in a twitter, yet with something like a thrill running through her, she sidles timidly out after Short, while the drummer nearly falls out in his hurry.

"You drive on, Pete, and don't turn around at all,' says Blue John. "But wait a minute. That's a nice ring you-all have there!" this to the drummer, who is shaking like an aspen in a March breeze.

"It is," says the drummer plaintively. "It cost me eight hundred dollars in Kansas City, Mr. Robber," he adds hurriedly, "and it is yours! Take it—but don't get violent with me. I have a wife and children."

"I never get violent unless it's plumb necessary," says Blue John, mildly. "You needn't be frightened. But it is generous and handsome of you to offer me that rock and I accept with pleasure. However, you-all are witness that he gives it without coercion?" He appeals to the driver and Short.

"He appears to be quite willing," says Short, right dryly. And Pete shifts his quid and snorts something that might be assent. Blue John waves the drummer into the stage.

"Good-by," says he, "and remember me to your wife and kiddies, sir. You've really obliged me by your generosity and I hope to repay it some time in the future."

"Don't mention it," says the drummer hurriedly, and climbs in. Pete hesitates but Blue John waves him on and he drives off toward Jerome. There isn't any station this side of the halfway house and it isn't likely he will spread any alarm until some time after noon.

Then Blue John turns to the pair on the road and takes off his hat.

"Ma'am," says he to the lady, "I am surely overjoyed to encounter you again and render you my homage. Furthermore, I wish to assure you that, for a little while, your friend the ranger won't be annoying you with attention, he being now herding a poor maverick down to jail as fast as he can find his way out of Lost Eden, in the belief that he has bagged Blue John. But he hasn't, because I'm here—and just in time to save you from making a great mistake.

"Wh-what mistake?" twitters the girl, blushing.

"The mistake of having the knot of matrimony untied before the time is propitious," says Blue John. "I've been thinking over this problem while I eat beans and sow belly up at Lost Eden and I've come to a conclusion. Owing to the exigencies of the law and the annoyances of sheriffs and rangers, I can't ride attendance on you as my devotion inspires me to, but I am ever at hand to watch over you and guide your destinies. However, it occurs to me that, if you remain married to old Bishop Swanson a whole lot, these pestiferous and amorous cow hooters about the regions adjacent will have to lay off and court some one else, and you will therefore be spared a lot of annoyance while I'll be relieved of the necessity of smoking up half the population of Yavapai County and environs. Wherefore, I rode right out to stop this here petition for a divorce in your own interest."

"But," says Short sternly, "the young woman desires a divorce—or rather an annulment, seeing the marriage was never legally consummated."

"Yes," says Hilda timidly. "I—I would prefer being free."

"And so would I," says Blue John, "providing I could ride herd on you and lasso these lovers around here. But I can't and therefore, to save bloodshed and recriminations, I have to interfere. You'll think better of it when you've considered it, and in the meantime I'll escort you back to the Verde and turn you over to your natural guardians."

"See here, young man," says Short, in the manner befitting his name. "These are mighty high-handed proceedings you are conducting on the public highways. Likewise, it seems to me to be plumb unchivalrous to go against a lady's desires as to divorces and whatever future matrimonial

plays she may wish to make. It isn't the way it is done in Arizona."

That put Blue John in a dilemma, but he was single of mind in his way. He shook his head dubiously.

"That's true in a way," he asserts. "But this lady hasn't had any opportunity to know me sufficient to have a mind toward me yet. If she judges me precipitate, she likely makes a mistake. Likewise, as a sporting proposition, I deserve some chance unencumbered by my present disabilities with sheriffs and such. With me on the outside of the law and with amorous hombres from all over the Tonto milling around, the cards are stacked against me. So what can I do?"

Short slips a slight wink to the lady, who is in a twitter of mingled anticipation and fright but somewhat reassured by Blue John's mildness of demeanor and the evident adoration that looks out of his romantic eyes.

"That's the solution," says Short. "Make it a sporting proposition. A toss of the coin as to whether this young lady goes her untrammeled way or yields to your pleas for an opportunity to set yourself right and rehabilitate yourself in her eyes and those of the law. And if she loses, I'll work toward getting you squared myself."

Blue John reflects on this. "It seems fair," he said, "and I never refuses a sporting chance. But there is the question of chivalry. How does it stack up to go gambling on the affections and hand of a young lady like this one?"

"Oh, I'd not object at all!" says Hilda, as the best way out of it. Short dives into his pants and fishes out a silver peso, balancing it on his hand and he winks again at the girl.

"I'll toss," says he. "Heads we go on to Prescott. Tails we go back to the Verde. What say?"

"All right," says Blue John reluctantly. "But best two out of three."

"Sure," says Short readily and he is so confident that Blue John, who is a right-soon hombre in some respects, bends an eye on him. Short tosses. It comes down in the dust and he bends over it.

"Heads!" says he. And he lifts the dollar. Blue John looks keenly at him and something straightens out his mouth.

"Toss!" says he. "Toss high!" And Short with a smirk, flips it up.

Blue John swings his gun and the roar of it makes the girl shriek and cover her ears with her hands. The dollar goes flying off at a drunken angle into a soapweed, where Blue John retrieves it. He hands it, all bent, to the crestfallen Short.

"There ain't no head on it whatever now," he says, "because I shot both of them off. So we'll just allow it falls tails the last two times trying. What do you say?"

Short looks sheepish and somewhat scared as he pockets his phony dollar with a head on either side. It being of lead, it is so badly bent you can't tell what was on it, hardly.

"Maybe you're right," he mumbles, and the girl stares in puzzlement. But Blue John turns to her and bows, holding out his hand. She puts her own, the left one, into it as though she was afraid she was going to be bit. And Blue John slips on her finger the ring which the drummer has given him.

"This was a free gift," he explains, "as I didn't use any coercion on that drummer. I makes it a free gift to you. But it is my pledge and my security that, as long as I can't come wooing you none after the accepted fashion, there ain't any one else going to do it either. Wherefore, you remain wedded to Bishop Swanson, but you also rests engaged to me."

"Ye-yes, sir!" says Hilda, whimpering a bit.

"And now," says Blue John, "we'll track back toward the Verde, though I regret that I'll have to leave you on the outskirts while I circle and take to the hills again. And you, Mr. Short, will remember that you strive to reconstruct my character in the opinion of all and sundry."

Mr. Winter will have another "Blue John" story in the next issue.

ONE PERIL AFTER ANOTHER

Now that the astronomers have quit talking about the danger of our world being knocked crooked by a shooting star, the legislators warn us that it may be done by flowing moonshine.

Environment

By L. Patrick Greene

Author of "Blood and Fire," "Play Ball," Etc.

In which it appears that heredity may be everything—or nothing at all.

ONCE, when the men of the Rhodesian Mounted Police threatened to get a little out of hand, feeling that they were being subjected to certain indignities which no white man should be called upon to suffer in black man's Africa, the colonel in command dealt with them contemptuously—threatening to discharge half of them and enlist men from the slums of London to take their place.

This effectively quelled any idea of mutiny on the part of the men—not that they were snobs, but because they took great pride in the corps, believing that on it depended the successful future of a young country. Nevertheless, the colonel decided to carry out his threat. The cables hummed and, as a result, advertisements appeared in certain quarters in London frequented by the "gutter scum" he needed to curb the high-and-mighty spirits of his rank and file.

The gutter scum read the posters and mocked blasphemously. The freedom and cleanliness of life on the open veldt had no appeal for them; a horse meant nothing to men whose only knowledge of horses was confined to the list of names which appeared in a pink sporting paper under the running head of "Top of the Form Racing Selections."

And nowhere was the circular treated with more derision than at the Dog and Duck public house; and none among that iniquitous den's habitués scoffed more loudly than "Sneak" Marlow.

Sneak was a creature of the London slums; as much a part of them as the stale, odoriferous street smells and the raucous, quarreling voice of drunken costers.

The sun never penetrated into the dirty basement room which Sneak shared with four other men—each as unwashed and as furtive-eyed as himself. Even had the tiny, iron-barred window been washed, the only light which could have filtered through would have been from the flickering gas jet burning in the room opposite across the areaway; a yellow light, murky as a London fog.

The air in the room was stagnant, poisonous, impregnated with stale tobacco smoke and the fumes of gin; nor would the opening of the window have improved matters—sanitation in the London slums is very crude.

Darkness, smells, the filth and vice of a great city!

The Sneak reveled in the sordidness of his surroundings and rarely left his room until the shadows of night fell upon the

city, when necessity, the desire for food and drink, led him to one or other of the city's breathing places—to Hyde Park maybe—where he stayed only long enough to snatch a purse from some unprotected shopgirl. Then, as a rat having nibbled at a cheese returns to his hole, the Sneak would return to the Dog and Duck and there spend the night and the contents of the purse.

The Sneak seemed to be devoid of every good trait; there was no task so low, so paltry, so contemptible that he would not perform it—provided that it was profitable, called for no great exertion and did not place his valuable hide in jeopardy.

He did not hesitate—lacking, even, loyalty to the pack—to give information to the police when assured such information would be paid for; and, as he was too great a coward to double cross the law, his information invariably led to the arrest and conviction of some one of his associates.

Perhaps the Sneak got careless and bragged when in his drunken cups of this sure-and-easy source of revenue, or perhaps the police had informed on the informer. Whatever the explanation, the Sneak could not help but notice that many hostile looks were directed his way as he entered the Dog and Duck. He affected to ignore them and, standing with feet a-spraddle, his dented derby hat cocked jauntily over one ear, again read the advertisement calling for men to enlist in the Rhodesian Mounted Police.

He jumped nervously as a blear-eyed, rouge-lipped girl thrust a paper before him and pointed to the scare headlines reading:

DESPERATE ESCAPE FROM PRISON.
Sam Bloman Murders Guard and Makes Good His Escape.
Believed to Be Heading for London.

The Sneak had been responsible for Bloman's arrest; it was his testimony which had sent that man to prison for life, and with a terrible sensation of nausea he recalled the message from Bloman which had been given to him by a ticket-of-leave man.

"Tell the Sneak," Bloman had said, "that I'll get him before the year's up."

And the Sneak had laughed! The prison walls were so thick, so well guarded.

But now!

With an effort he pulled himself together, read the police circular again and then turned to face the other occupants of the barroom. They were regarding him with an almost morbid curiosity; it was as if they were looking on a man already dead. One or two shook their heads pityingly, but on most of the faces was a look of malicious enjoyment.

"Blast it!" the Sneak cried brazenly. "Wot are yer lookin' at me fer? Nobody ain't goin' ter put me in a wooden box, not fer a long time yet.

"Drinks round," he said to the barmaid and, swaggering up to the bar, threw down a gold coin.

The others crowded about him—men and befeathered girls—their animus forgotten for the moment.

" 'Ere's 'ow," cried the Sneak as, their glasses filled, the others stood looking at him expectantly, waiting for him to give a toast. "A nice new rope an' a long drop fer Mister Bloman—blast 'im. Drink 'earty, cullies."

His voice broke into a high, ratlike squeak; then, gulping down his drink, ignoring the snickers and gibes, he rushed from the bar; ran with fear-induced speed to the nearest police station and stayed within its protection until morning came when, escorted by a burly constable, he presented himself at the recruiting office of the Rhodesian police.

How he passed the medical examination is not quite clear. Perhaps the letter from the divisional superintendent, who recognized that his recent promotion was in some part due to the arrests he had made following the Sneak's information, helped materially—that and the examining physician's knowledge of the colonel's determination to punish the mutinous mounties with a delegation of "gutter scum."

Undoubtedly many strings were pulled, and by noon the Sneak, equipped with tickets, letters of instruction and a suit case full of clothes—supplied by clerks at the London office who believed in his avowed determination to "run straight"—was speeding Southamptonward on the boat train.

By five o'clock he was on the *Goorka*, sailing for Capetown on the six-o'clock tide, watching with sneering visage the gay crowd which centered about a blushing, sweet-faced girl and her stalwart, good-looking husband on the first-class deck.

"Oo's them?" the Sneak asked a passing steward who, idle for the moment and recog-

nizing in the Sneak a man from his own beloved "Lunnon," was glad to stop and gossip.

"Them? Oh, them's a pair o' newly-weds."

"Anybody 'u'd fink they was the bloomin' king an' queen," the Sneak said bitterly.

The steward smiled.

"The chap," he said, " 'e's a younger son —not arf a toff, 'e ain't. 'E can call 'imself 'on'rable, or somefing like it, if 'e wants. But 'e went an' married hout of 'is class" —gossip spreads very quickly aboard ship— "she's only a farmer's daughter; she ain't nobody. An' so 'e 'ad a row wiv 'is old man an' got a job wiv a big tradin' company hout in Rhodesia. But, lumme, 'e won't 'ave to work 'ard—a bloomin' good job hall made for 'im an' yer can betcha life 'is old man'll come round in time, an' send fer 'im to come 'ome."

At that moment a bell rang loudly and incessantly; stewards paraded up and down the decks shouting: "Last warning! All visitors ashore. All ashore that's going ashore!"

The gangways were thronged with sad-eyed people who moved slowly dockward, their heads turned back toward the ship as if they were loath to miss for one instant the faces of their voyaging friends. The people left on board lined up against the rails and, with handkerchiefs in hand, ready to wave or dry a tear, smiled bravely.

"I see as 'ow they've caught that bloke Bloman," a voice said at Sneak's elbow.

He turned quickly and snatched a newspaper from the speaker's hand, swiftly read the short paragraph which told of the recapture of the man he feared, then dashed for the gangway. In his haste he collided with a thickset, muscular fireman and fell sprawling to the deck. Before he could recover himself the gangways had been hauled in.

He felt nervously in his pockets for a cigarette.

"It is a terrible sensation, isn't it?" a soft musical voice said sympathetically. Looking up, the Sneak saw the bride standing beside him—in the confusion of the moment she had become separated from her husband.

"England's such a dear old country," she continued. "How can any one ever leave it? I felt like going ashore too."

"Blast yer!" the Sneak said roughly, "oo asked fer any tork from you?" and sought the privacy of his cabin, there to bewail the ill-considered act which had placed him in such a predicament. He might have known, he told himself bitterly, that Bloman would soon be recaptured. All that he needed to have done was to lie low for a little while.

But now——

In a little while the boat slipped her moorings, and long before the ocean swells cradled her the Sneak surrendered ungracefully to his fate—everything forgotten save the present agony.

By the time the Sneak landed at Capetown three weeks later he had definitely mapped out a campaign.

By judicious handling of cards he had increased the five pounds advanced him on his pay to twenty. With that, his native wit and agile fingers he decided to see South Africa before returning to England. Of course he had no intention of making the long train journey to Rhodesia and completing the details necessary to final enlistment in the police force of that budding colony; neither did his desire to see Africa include anything outside of its cosmopolitan cities. Johannesburg appealed to him irresistibly.

He had heard much talk of that wealthy, wicked city during the voyage, and of the free-and-easy way in which the miners handled money. The Sneak was not slow to realize the glorious opportunities which existed there for a man of his peculiar accomplishments.

A year, he thought, in Jo'burg would be long enough for him to reap a rich harvest, unless reports of that city were grossly exaggerated—and they weren't. As a matter of fact it would have been almost impossible for that city's vice and wealth to have been overestimated.

For a year the Sneak planned to apply himself industriously to the picking of pockets and certain games of chance, all of which, when played by Sneak, had the common peculiarity of having chance entirely eliminated from them.

A year of easy picking and then back to England—to London—with enough money in hand to buy a pub like the Dog and Duck.

It was unfortunate for the Sneak's plans that he could not have waited until reaching Jo'burg before commencing operations; but the railroad station at Capetown was

crowded with excited people taking the northbound train, and the girl—he could not see her face—seemed so helpless and alone; she carried her hand bag so carelessly.

Furtively the Sneak crept up closely to her and quickly snatched the bag. Turning quickly he ran into a tall, good-looking man who caught him by the collar with a grip which held despite the Sneak's kicks and struggles.

The girl—it was the same sweet-faced girl who had spoken to him on board the *Goorka*—picked up the bag the Sneak had dropped.

"Oh, let him go, John," she said with contemptuous pity. "You collared him in time, so there's no harm done."

"Yus, let me go, guvnor," the Sneak whined. "I ain't done nuffink."

The man looked around the crowded station but did not slacken his grip.

"He's a sneak thief, Mary," he said curtly. "He deserves to be punished and I'm going to hand him over to the police—if I can find one," he added under his breath.

"But it's such a rotten way to celebrate landing in a new country—having a man arrested, I mean. And perhaps it's his first offense. Let him go, there's a dear."

He laughed derisively.

"You're terribly green, Mary. I'll bet he picked a pocket the first day he could walk—he's got jailbird written all over him. He was on the *Goorka*, wasn't he?"

She nodded.

"I thought so. Well, if he's arrested now they'll ship him back to England and he can rot in the slums—where he belongs. This country's not for mongrels like him. He's a pollution."

But she was still unconvinced.

"You may be right, John, but—well, this is how I look at it; I don't think he's been broken right. He hasn't had a chance."

"The lydy's speaking gospel, guvnor," the Sneak said hastily. "I ain't never 'ad no chance. Wot can a bloke like me do in Lunnon. Lumme! Until I came hout on a ship over 'ere I 'adn't 'ardly ever seen the sun."

"Why did you come to Africa?" the man asked, although from his expression one could see that he was not particularly interested in the answer.

"I was sick o' Lunnon, guvnor. I wanted to run straight——"

"And that's why you tried to steal my wife's purse, eh?"

At the scorn in the other's voice the Sneak ducked as if to avoid a blow.

"I 'ad to do it, guvnor. Some one pinched all my money an' I 'ad to go on the train hup to Rhodesia to-day."

The man thrust his hand into the Sneak's trouser pockets and brought out a handful of gold and silver coins.

He looked at the girl, who shrugged her shoulders in resignation.

"But listen, guvnor," the Sneak cried in alarm seeing that he could no longer look for support from the girl. "I'm in the perlice. I've joined the Rhodesian perlice."

"You in the police—don't talk rot."

"It's God's truth, guvnor. Look 'ere."

The Sneak fumbled in his coat pocket and taking out some papers handed them to his captor, who hurriedly glanced through them.

"He seems to be telling the truth this time, Mary," he said noncommittally, "though I don't see how they came to accept him. I've always understood that it was a crack corps."

The girl's eyes sparkled mischievously.

"At least," she said, "that settles the matter, doesn't it, John? It would be bad form to have a policeman arrested, wouldn't it?"

"Just what are you getting at, Mary?"

"Why, let him join the police. They'll either make him or——"

"Kill him," the man added with a smile. "And I think the world would be better off if they killed him. But that's a good thought, Mary."

He shook the Sneak fiercely and said:

"Do you understand? I'll not have you arrested, but"—noting the gleam of cunning triumph which shone in the Sneak's eyes—"I'm not going to let you go free. Oh, no. As it happens we're going to Rhodesia too and I'm going to see that you go all the way. Indeed, I shall take it upon myself to hand you over to the officials at Salisbury.

"How's that?" he appealed to his wife.

"Splendid," she said.

A few minutes later a porter announced that the Rhodesian train was made up and the three, the Sneak still in the clutches of the man, climbed aboard.

"You wanted to see me, sir?"

Captain Blake, in charge of the Fort

Usher district of the Rhodesian Mounted Police, looked with a kindly twinkle in his wide-spaced gray eyes at the slim, jaunty little man who sported a sergeant's chevrons on the left arm of his close-fitting tunic.

"Yes, sergeant." The captain clipped his vowels after the manner of the colonial born. "I've got here," he went on, tapping a paper which was on his desk, "your application for a furlough. It's overdue, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir. I was in charge of the cattle guard, you know, hand—and didn't want to leave until the plague scare was over."

The sergeant spoke very precisely, enunciating each word with care, seeming to sound it to himself before repeating it aloud; but even so an occasional misplaced aspirate crept into his speech. When this happened he repeated the word quickly, and correctly, so that it sounded as if he stammered slightly.

The captain nodded.

"I'll indorse this application at once, if you like, sergeant. Only——" The captain hesitated. "Only there's a case I'd like you to tackle up Mphoengs way."

"All right, sir." The sergeant's eyes gleamed. "I've never been up in that section. I've heard there's good shooting there."

"Yes," the captain replied dryly, "and I've heard there are game laws which the police are supposed to enforce."

They both laughed.

"Wot—what's the trouble, sir?"

"The owners of the Robin Mine—it's a small affair; a two-stamp mill, that's all—suspect that the natives are stealing gold. But that's a minor detail. The real trouble is that the natives of the district are getting out of hand. They've done nothing we can put a finger on but—well, that's why I specially want you to go up there. I don't know another man in the force who can handle natives as well as you—and I'm hanged if I know how you do it: you've only been out here a little while."

"Nearly six years, sir!"

"So long?" The captain's tone was mildly sarcastic. "Well—I've been here nearly forty-five—my nurse was a Totty—Hottentot but I can't speak the vernacular as well as you can. How do you do it?"

"I just came by it, naturallike, sir."

The sergeant was a little uncomfortable. Although the captain's tone was sincere, the sergeant suspected that he was having his leg pulled.

"Ah, well! Some chaps have a gift that way. But never mind. How about the case? Are you game to go up there and look things over?"

"Very good, sir."

The captain looked relieved.

"That's fine. Better look up the new storekeeper; he'll need investigating. He has a bad reputation and all the trouble seems to date from his appearance at Mphoengs."

The sergeant nodded.

"And you'll put my furlough through when I get back, sir?"

"Certainly." He hesitated a moment and then said with an embarrassed laugh: "I've been looking over your conduct sheet, sergeant. You certainly were a black sheep the first three years of your enlistment. What was the trouble? Did they ride you too hard?"

"They rode me hard," the sergeant said stolidly, "but not a bit harder than I deserved."

"It's none of my affair, of course, and you're at liberty to tell me so, sergeant, but just what changed you?"

The other hesitated.

"It's 'ard—hard to say just what it was, sir. I think I was changing all the time and didn't know it. A chap like me, like what I was, had to change—and I had to change for the better; I couldn't have been worse! The recruit drills sweated all the rotten gin out of me and gave me some muscle. And then there was always something new I had to learn. But most of all I fink—think it was because the chaps in my squad was so different to them I knew back 'ome."

He stopped short and did not correct his pronunciation.

"Of course," he continued, "I kicked against my medicine; I didn't understand what discipline was. You'll see from my conduct sheet, sir, that I was mostly on the 'peg' for insubordination—that and for not keeping my kit clean: I found that the hardest of all. I didn't know anything about keeping clean."

"They say you're the cleanest man in the corps now, sergeant."

The sergeant smiled with pleasure.

"I still clean my own equipment, sir. Native servants are all very well—but it's a

soldier's spit and a soldier's breath what cleans a soldier's buttons."

He twirled his small well-waxed mustache and glanced down at the buttons of his tunic, at his neatly rolled putties, polished shoes and glistening spurs.

Then he smiled reminiscently.

"They ducked me in the horse trough, the boys did at headquarters, before they learned—taught me to be a clean soldier; and they ragged me real hard before I got over whining. Yes, sir, they made it easier for me to be a clean soldier, and a good one, than a bad egg."

The captain nodded understandingly. He remembered that when the sergeant first arrived at headquarters, the only representative of the late colonel's threatened contingent of "gutter scum," the older men had vowed to make or break him. Several officers—the captain among them—had carefully directed their efforts and had prevented the schooling from becoming aimless bullying.

"Where will you go for your furlough, sergeant?"

"I'm not sure yet, sir. Last time I was broke when it was due. I couldn't have gone anywhere if 'Dutch' Reamy hadn't invited me to go with him down to his father's farm in the Transvaal. So I went. That's where I learned to speak the Taal and all I know about natives. Dutch taught me a lot of other things: about following spoor, and things like that. I picked hit—it all up easilylike. You see, sir, I'd never been taught anything before, so my head was empty and took in things like that. But why did you ask where I was going, sir?"

"I'm taking my furlough too in a month. I'm going on a surveying trip up in British East. It's a government job—special duty, with double pay and generous allowance. I'd like to have you along with me. We could forget this 'sir' and 'sergeant' business for a while."

"Thank you, sir, but I'm afraid I can't come. I thought I'd like to go home. I 'aven't—haven't been back for nearly six years and——"

"I see."

The captain looked disappointed and the sergeant rose hurriedly, ill at ease. "I'll start for Mphoengs in the morning, sir," he said, saluted and walked to the door. There, with his hand on the knob, he hesitated a moment, then said slowly:

"Will you ask me again about that surveying trip when I come back from Mphoengs, sir? I'd like to think it hover—over."

"All right, sergeant. Good luck!"

Five, nearly six, years' service in a force which boasts, with some justice, of being the best in the world, had done a great deal for the man known in certain quarters of London as Sneak Marlow, but it had not made him a perfect rider. So, when he came to a collection of huts which marked the storekeeper's quarters just outside the kraal of Mphoengs, he sighed with relief as he lowered himself wearily from his tired horse.

He had been on trek eight days, yet his equipment was as clean as if he had just turned out for inspection; his horse was free from sweat marks, his two pack mules were as fat as butter, his tunic buttons glistened as brightly as they had that day in the captain's office.

He was surprised that no one had come out of the huts to greet him, surprised, too, that no natives were to be seen in the neighborhood—though their absence might be explained by the fact that it was nearing sundown.

Then, just as he was about to announce his arrival with a shout, an uncouth white man shambled out of one of the huts and leaned against the side of it—a spineless, spiritless man.

"Who are you?" he asked thickly. "What do you want?"

"Name's Marlow," the sergeant answered crisply. "Thought I wanted to camp on you fer—for the night. Don't know that I do now, though. But at any rate I want to have a tork—talk with you."

The other sneered and ran a dirty hand over his stubbled chin.

"A blooming low-bred little cockney in disguise, eh?" he jeered.

"And what, may I ask, are you? A bloomin' lord?" the sergeant retorted hotly.

The storekeeper laughed.

"You're coming nearer to it than you'd think, my man," he said heavily. "But it's none of your business who I am—or what I am."

"I know it—keep your hair on. Still, I like to name the man I'm talking to."

The other laughed mirthlessly; beneath

his bedraggled, ragged mustache his teeth showed—broken and discolored.

"You can call me Hamilton—the name's as good as any other, and it happens to be my own."

The sergeant snorted impatiently and made as if to remount.

"What's your hurry?" the storekeeper asked.

"I'm tired—trekked a long way to-day. I'm going up to Mphoengs' kraal." The sergeant jerked his thumb in the direction of a large kraal which was built close to a tall kopje about half a mile distant. "Perhaps they'll know how to treat a white man better than you do," he concluded.

The storekeeper's eyes narrowed. "Can you talk their lingo?" he asked.

The sergeant nodded.

The other was silent for a moment, then he cried excitedly in the native dialect:

"Jump! There's a snake behind you."

The sergeant did not move but looked at Hamilton with wondering eyes.

"What's the matter," he asked. "'Ave —have you gone crazy?"

The storekeeper's laugh had a note of relief in it. "I thought you could talk Kafir. I asked you to stay and have skoff with us."

The sergeant grinned sheepishly.

"You caught me for fair. As a matter of fact I only know the usual line of kitchen Kafir; just enough to tell my servant to bring coffee in the morning and hall—all that. You see"—he waxed confidential—"I've never been out on patrol before. Up to now I've had a cushy job at headquarters —drilling recruits an' such. But I had a row with the sergeant major and he, blast him! had me transferred."

"You've got a lot to learn then, cockney. But what are you up this way for? No trouble, is there? The natives are behaving themselves and the two old-timers at the mine are all right."

"Captain Blake said he'd send me on an easy trip for my first patrol. This is it, blast him! I'm chafed raw after being in the saddle six days. And I might just as well have stayed in camp. This is a nice bloomin' job for a sergeant—seeing if the natives have all registered their dogs."

The storekeeper hitched up his dirty khaki slacks and spat expertly onto the back of a small grass snake coiled about a near-by stone.

"You'd better stay and take potluck with us," he said presently. "I didn't mean to be inhospitable, but—the truth is we don't have many callers, not white men, that is, and I've forgotten how white men behave. The mine chaps don't come here—I don't think they like me; they're funny old codgers anyway. But you stay and have skoff with us—you can bunk here for the night, too. That's the guest hut." He pointed to a dilapidated hut set a little apart from the store building. Its mud walls bulged, threatening to collapse at any moment; the thatch of the roof was rotten. "By the time you've unsaddled and given your horse and mules a feed—there's the stable over there—skoff'll be ready."

"All right," said the sergeant cheerfully. "I'll be ready in half an hour at the most."

The storekeeper watched his guest for a few moments as he inexpertly unloaded the pack mules, then, whistling softly, he reentered the large, rectangular-shaped hut which served as the store and the storekeeper's living quarters.

When the sergeant entered the store some time later he was surprised to hear a woman's voice raised in acrimonious argument.

"It's not my fault," she was saying, and her voice was strained, almost strident, "that I look like this. What chance have I had to get new things when——"

The storekeeper's voice broke in sneeringly:

"That's right, blame me. I suppose it's my fault that your hair is coming down and your face is dirty."

The sergeant paused irresolutely by the long deal counter. A brown-burlap curtain hung across the middle of the hut, separating the store proper from the living quarters, and his entrance had not been noticed.

The argument on the other side of the curtain continued, the woman's voice becoming shriller, impassioned; the storekeeper confining his replies to taunting remarks about his wife's personal appearance.

With a practiced eye the sergeant quickly appraised the contents of the store, wondering at the paucity of trade goods and the filthy untidiness of the place. On the counter, near to a pile of cheap, gaudily colored calicos, was a large box full of fine copper wire cut into lengths of about twelve inches.

The floor was cluttered with Kafir truck

—sacks of rotting grain, empty calabashes from which emanated the sickly odor of native beer, poorly tanned skins giving forth a meaty smell, and a weird collection of native weapons and musical instruments.

Beside the counter was an empty bottle of familiar shape and size.

The sergeant picked it up and held it to his nose. The stench nauseated him; it smelled as bad gin, to which some corrosive acid had been added, would smell.

The sergeant recognized it and his eyes glinted coldly.

One more look around the cluttered place, then he tiptoed quietly out of the hut, smiling grimly at the sudden turn in the conversation on the other side of the curtain. The woman was weeping softly now, murmuring—and her voice was strangely sweet —while the man was promising better things as soon as he'd "made enough money to get away from this hellish country. Next year——"

Once outside, the sergeant deflated his chest, expelling from his lungs with a whistling noise all the foul air he had breathed in the hut; then he breathed deeply of the pure, clear air and felt, somehow, immeasurably cleaner, stronger.

The sun had set, darkness was fast approaching.

A symphony of sounds, softened by distance, came from the kraal at the foot of the kopje: the lowing of cattle, the bleating of goats, childish laughter and the deep, booming voices of men.

Sergeant Marlow found it all very good and it was with a sigh that he again entered the store hut, banging the door noisily.

The storekeeper immediately came from behind the burlap curtain.

"Come on, cockney," he said, and the sergeant passed through into the back of the store.

A woman rose languidly to greet him. Her face was chalky white, her eyes lusterless and her unkempt hair hung down on her forehead, threatened to fall about her shoulders. The loose, ill-fitting gown she wore was made from figured colored calico similar to that which was used for native trade. She tugged nervously at the collar of it, as if embarrassed at her slovenly attire.

Yet there was something appealing about her; the sergeant was conscious that her features were lovely and the expression in her eyes won his sympathy. He saw there disappointment, the hurt look of a child who has been betrayed by something in which he had placed great faith.

"This is Sergeant 'Cockney' Marlow, Mary dear, gallant defender of our fireside," the storekeeper said with a heavy attempt at joviality.

She smiled wearily.

"Sit down, sergeant," she said. "Skofi's ready and you must be very hungry."

"Thank you, ma'am, hi—I am," answered the sergeant as he seated himself at the table.

He found himself wondering if there were not another woman somewhere in the hut. This one's voice was low-pitched and had a musical cadence: it was hard to believe that she was the possessor of the strident voice he had heard a little while back. Hearing her speak now made him forget her frowzy, disordered hair and her blowziness.

The room was unfurnished except for the chairs, table and a trundle bed in a far corner. It was lighted by two candles, stuck in their own grease on the dirty table. Insects, large and small, fluttered about the flames; occasionally one flew too close and fell into the melting wax and a pungent odor, like unholy incense, arose.

Through the open window and back door mosquitoes entered in hungry battalions; they *pinged* and bit savagely.

But the sergeant was oblivious to all these discomforts. He appeared, too, to be oblivious to the storekeeper's meaningless chatter. He ate the tough, highly flavored goat meat in silence, watching the woman's face, listening for her voice and, when she spoke, wondered where he had heard her before.

The unsavory meal finished, the storekeeper produced with a great flourish a bottle of whisky, knocked off the top and, the sergeant refusing, poured himself out a drink. He gulped it down, grimacing. This drink was followed quickly by another and another. A fourth he swished around his mouth, getting the full flavor of it before swallowing.

"They say it's bad for a man to drink a lot hout—out here," the sergeant commented casually. Mrs. Hamilton had gone out to the cook hut with the remains of the meal and the dirty dishes.

"Bosh! It's the best malaria preventative there is."

The man glared fiercely.

The sergeant would have debated the point, but just then the woman returned.

"Have you been out in this country long?" she asked, seating herself close to the sergeant.

"Not very long, ma'am. Only six years."

"That's a lifetime," she said dispiritedly. "We've been out about six years, too."

"Then I take it that you don't like the country, ma'am?"

"I loathe it. It's a lying fraud. It saps your strength, it takes everything and gives nothing. It tells you to sleep—and when you do you never wake up until you have lost all that meant most to you."

"I haven't found it that way, ma'am. This country's done a lot for me. But, if you don't like it, ma'am, why don't you go home?"

She sighed. "We will—some day—John says. But it takes money and he won't write——"

"No! I won't write home," the storekeeper interrupted irritably.

With an air of defiance he poured himself another drink; his eyes were wild and bloodshot.

The sergeant fidgeted, then his attention was attracted by a golden gleam on the woman's arm. He leaned forward.

"That's a funny bangle," he said. "Native work, ain't—isn't it? Can I have a closer look at it?"

She covered it up quickly with her dress sleeve and looked frightenedly at her husband.

"I told you not to wear any of those native bangles, Mary," he said wrathfully. "It's the sort of thing you'd expect a housemaid to do." He turned to the sergeant and continued, "Yes, it's just a cheap, native-made brass armlet. They're common enough around here."

The sergeant nodded understandingly.

There was a silence for a little while, then the policeman rose.

"If you'll excuse me, ma'am," he said with a yawn, "I'll turn in. Good night."

"Good night, sergeant," she said softly.

" 'Night," growled the storekeeper.

Although the sergeant went at once to the miserable hut which had been allotted to him, he did not undress—the desire for sleep seemed to have suddenly left him—but lighted his pipe and sat down on the end of the wooden-springed bed, thinking of the sordidness of the storekeeper's household and wondering how a man could allow himself to slump so terribly—physically, mentally and morally. The condition of the woman puzzled him still more.

"They ain't the sort of people for this country," he mused. "They're too soft-like. They ought to be back home in some village with the yokels touching their hats an' the little nippers a-curtsying.

"An' I'll have to arrest him in the morning. There isn't any doubt but what he's the chap that's been stealing gold from the mine. That's a clever scheme of his and hit'll be hard to get the goods on him. Yes, he's clever—too clever. He don't give any one else the credit of having brains. Else he wouldn't try to tell me that fairy story about that bangle being made of brass wire. He's been selling booze to the natives, too, unless I'm greatly mistaken, and that'll be harder still to prove. A man must have sunk pretty low to do that; it's most likely all rotten stuff like what had been in that bottle. An' I bet it's that what's upsetting Mphoengs' people—it 'ud upset a stone image, that stuff would.

"Wonder what'll happen to her while he's in prison—it'll be for a long time, too. She's got a nice smile, and her voice is pretty too—sometimes. She'd be a good-looking woman if she took care of herself and washed now and again."

The sergeant slapped his thighs excitedly as another thought came to him.

"What a fool I am. Course I've seen them before! John and Mary! She's the woman whose purse I tried to snitch the day I landed and if it hadn't been for him and her I'd be—God knows what or where I'd be!

" 'This country isn't for gutter scum like you,' he told me then: him with his high-and-mighty way, and she treating me as if I were a horse that hadn't been broken properly. I'd have liked to have knifed them both then. I'm glad I didn't have the chance to. If it hadn't have been for them, why——"

He stretched himself out on the bed and indulged in daydreams which were punctuated by nightmares of what might have been.

"Lord!" he exclaimed presently, "that's marvelous."

Through a gaping hole in the roof of the

hut the sergeant could see the star-strewn sky. It made him think for a moment of the costume of a variety performer he had once seen in the old days—a black velvet on which small electric-light bulbs were cunningly fixed and twinkled constantly. He quickly discarded the comparison, swearing softly to himself in self-condemnation, sensing that it was profanation to compare the wonders above him to anything so trite and common as the costume of a dancer in the music halls of the London slums.

Later, when the stars paled before the rising moon, he rose from the bed and went to the door of the hut, where he stood for a moment—a little frightened by the vastness of the moonlit veldt; he had never conquered this feeling of smallness, of fear commingling with appreciative awe. Then he walked slowly over to the store, telling himself that he was lonely and needed company.

But the real reason for his return would not be gainsaid and he whistled cheerfully. He was going to gloat. He had gone up—they had gone down. He wanted to strut and pose before them.

A light was burning in the storeroom; the woman was huddled on the ground beside the counter.

She rose as he entered and he saw that she had been crying again.

"Wot's—what's the matter, ma'am?" he asked, kindly concern in his voice.

At the same time he was conscious of a feeling of disappointment. There was no joy to be gained in strutting before her. He could do nothing to make her sense her degradation more completely.

"Oh," her hands fluttered in an expression of despair. "I'm so sick of it all—the dirt, the heat, the insects. Ugh!—the smells and the loneliness!"

"Why don't you go back home then, ma'am?"

"I've told you why. We have no money."

"It doesn't take much—a hundred quid, say, for the two of you."

"It might as well be a thousand."

"Your 'usband said at skoff you'd be able to go next year."

She laughed mirthlessly. "That's what he always says—next year."

"He has enough to send you back, surely. This is no way for a white woman like you to live."

"I couldn't leave him—even if he had it, and he hasn't it. He needs me. Oh, why did we come to this hellish country!"

The sergeant started to say something in defense of the land which had given him everything, but stopped, seeing that all the things which the woman had suppressed during the long years of loneliness were seeking expression.

He contented himself with a sympathetic clicking noise.

"It all seemed so beautiful at first," she continued. "John was sent to a large store; but he didn't know the country, or the natives, and men told him whisky would keep off the fever and he drank and—and got careless with his accounts. So they moved him to another store, a poorer one in an unhealthy district, and the same thing happened again—and again—until we have come to this!

"It wasn't John's fault. He was poisoned by the gasses of the swamp and the evil insinuations of the people: the white people who laughed when they saw him drunk, who played cards with him for more money than he—or they—could afford, who laughed at his code of honor until he adopted theirs and then turned the cold shoulder on him when he committed the only sin they recognized—being found out. And the natives! Ugh! I hate them. They leer and lie and smell like—like the monkey house at the zoo."

She smiled faintly at her weak metaphor.

"The natives are all right," the sergeant said curtly. "They're just overgrown nippers—that's all. And the country's all right, too. But how about you? Did you get the whisky habit? You look like 'ell—hell."

She flushed and brushed back a lock of hair which clung to her damp forehead.

"No. But how can I be different, living like this? The laborers on dad's farm have more than I have. And there are so many things a woman mustn't do in this country because"—her voice became very bitter—"the superior white race is so careful of its women. They mustn't walk or ride unattended; they mustn't go out in the heat of the day, or after sunset; they mustn't do this, they mustn't do that! And what with the emptiness of her existence and loneliness a woman ceases to care about her appearance."

She paused, considering the lot of so many white women in black man's Africa,

who, lacking some indeterminable thing, shrivel up, become withered shrews, or dissolve into gelatinous torpidity.

She leaned forward suddenly and stared into the sergeant's face.

"I think," she said in puzzled tones, "that I've seen you before somewhere, haven't I?"

"Yes," he assented laconically. "On the *Goorka* and at Capetown."

"On the *Goorka!*"

She still could not place him and, as he did not help her any further, gave up trying, but lived for a little while in her memories.

Her eyes sparkled, the loose lines about her mouth vanished, she drew herself erect with an imperious gesture and hummed a few bars of a lilting melody swaying slightly to the rhythm of it. The sergeant recognized the tune—the ship's band had played it at the dance the night before the ship docked at Capetown.

"Where's your husband?" he asked suddenly.

The melody ended in a discordant gasp, the sparkle vanished from her eyes as she drooped back to the present.

"He went to the kraal on business," she said dully.

"Oh," said the sergeant, and shook his head slowly from side to side. "Good night, ma'am. It's a pity your husband hasn't got more sense."

"What do you mean?" she retorted hotly.

"Good night, ma'am," he said again, and hurried out of the store.

He hastened now toward the kraal, cutting straight across the veldt, scorning the wandering Kafir path.

As he neared, he took advantage of every shelter, keeping, where possible, in the shadow. The last hundred feet or so—across the clearing which surrounded the kraal—he crawled.

And so he gained his objective unobserved and, finding a weak place in the encircling stockade, squeezed through it, thus avoiding the possibility of conflict with the guards who would, he thought, be posted at the gate of the stockade.

Once safely in the kraal, knowing that all save the chief and the men-folks were in their huts, asleep, he walked boldly forward toward the council place, guided thither by the sound of men's voices raised in anger.

He came presently to a group of large, well-built huts set apart from the rest, and before them, squatting on their haunches, were a number of elderly natives—the chief and his councilors—while, standing before them, was the storekeeper held firmly in the grip of two warriors. Other warriors—all armed with assegais and knobkerries—stood near by.

By the light of the moon and the flickering flames of the fire the sergeant could see that the faces of the natives were inflamed with passion; he saw, too, that the storekeeper was greatly alarmed as he strained to free himself of the warriors' hold.

Empty gourds littered the ground——gourds and several square-shaped bottles.

"They've all been drinking," the sergeant muttered. "Rotten gin and Kafir beer. That's a hell of a combination."

He was standing in the shadow of one of the huts, confident that his presence would not be noticed. It is easy to hide when none seek.

"You have lied to us," the chief, a pot-bellied, gray-bearded man, was saying. "You have lied, white man, and made a mock of us in many ways. Because you promised us many guns and much powder, I gave orders to my young men who work at the mine to obey you in all things. And they made charms for you—charms which you said would turn the pieces of wire you gave them into guns."

"I did not lie, Mphoengs. The charm is not yet finished. You—your young men did not understand. First, because of my magic, the medicine which is in the big tubs at the mine turned the wire into gold—that is no lie; you have seen that."

"Aye. That I have seen. What then?"

"Then, as I have told you before, when sufficient gold has been made I will exchange it for the guns and you shall be the greatest chief in the land; none will be able to stand against your warriors—not even the white men."

The chief smiled coldly.

"I have heard that before, yes," he said. "But it was at a time when much drink was in me. Now I am empty, and my mouth is closed, my eyes and ears open. So I say that you lie, that you have made a mock of us. Worse, because of your charm making, my son, is very near death."

"That is not because of the charm," the storekeeper blurted. "It is because of the fire water he drank. He——"

"It is enough!" The chief's voice was hoarse with rage. "*You* gave him the fire water."

The storekeeper, who had relaxed during the conversation, now kicked viciously at the shins of his guards and, with a violent wrench, managed to break from their grasp.

Before the warriors fully realized what he was doing he had drawn his revolver and, crouching animallike, was backing slowly from the council place.

The sergeant, seeing that the storekeeper's course would bring him to within a few feet of where he was standing, was content to wait further developments.

"Kill the dog!"

The chief's command broke the stillness just as the storekeeper turned to run.

A volley of assegais and knobkerries hurtled through the air and one of the knobbed sticks struck him on the back of the head. He lurched forward like a drunken man and fell in the shadow of the hut, close to the sergeant.

A swift scrutiny satisfied the sergeant that the man was not seriously hurt, but would stay unconscious for a while. Then, revolver in hand, he stepped out of the shadow into the full light of the moon. He advanced toward the warriors who, knowing the potency of the white man's weapons, were closing in slowly and cautiously about the hut.

At his sudden appearance they halted in astonishment; their eyes bulged, their mouths gaped wide open. The most superstitious of people, they were, as always, ready to accept a miraculous explanation of a commonplace occurrence. They had seen the storekeeper—a gaunt wreck of a man in ragged, dirty garments—disappear into the shadows, and now this man came toward them—slim, dapper, self-confident and wearing the uniform of the *Nonquai*—the mounted police.

It smacked of witchcraft, of magic beyond their comprehension; they had witnessed a transfiguration and were greatly awed.

"*Au-a!*" they murmured, and retreated slowly before his advance.

"You have acted like a child, Mphoengs," the sergeant said in a cold, clear voice. There was no hesitation in his speech now. He spoke the Matabele language better than he did his own.

"True, great one," the chief answered fearfully. "But a child's sins are forgiven him. Who are you? What shall we call you? The storekeeper we knew—but you, you are not that one."

"He was white as I am white, Mphoengs, and in every man there is good and evil. Maybe the evil in him was sent to test you—and you have failed. You have become swollen with pride. You have allowed your young men to drink that which is forbidden; you have ordered them to do evil because you thought to become a great power in the land. Fool!"

The chief quailed at the scorn in the sergeant's voice.

"So," the policeman went on, "for the evil intent there must be just punishment."

"Let it be light, *inkosi*. For truly, I had this night decided to go no farther with the matter."

The sergeant nodded.

"That I know. Yet you must learn that the power to kill is not yours. Consider. Had the assegais of your young men drunk the blood of the storekeeper, would their thirst have been satisfied? Not so. They would have gone to the store and killed the woman, they would have found there much fire water, and then—how many whites in this district would have lived to see the setting of to-morrow's sun?"

"It is true, *inkosi*. The bloodthirst is not easily satisfied."

"And then what, Mphoengs?"

"*Tchat!* Then many white men—dressed as you are dressed—would have come against us with loud-speaking guns and I would be no longer a chief, my people would not be. *Wowe!* The *inkosi* speaks truly. I have been a fool."

"And there must be a punishment?"

"Truly."

"Then bid your warriors to come before me, one by one, and, breaking their assegais over their knees, throw them on the ground at my feet."

Quickly the order was given, quickly obeyed. No voice was raised in protest.

"What now, *inkosi?* Is what we have done sufficient?"

The sergeant hesitated a moment. Then:

"Yes. This time I am merciful, for your folly is greater than your sin. Now command that four young men carry my other self—the storekeeper—back to his place. That done I will come and make well your

son who is so near death—that is, if the spirits look upon it with favor."

Early next morning when the sergeant entered the store Hamilton was seated on the counter, a bandage about his head, a half-frightened expression in his eyes.

"What happened last night?" he asked with an attempt at levity. "I must have been damned drunk—my head feels like a barrel."

"You were knocked on the 'ead—head by a knobkerrie. If I hadn't been there you'd have been killed—and good riddance, too."

The storekeeper did not reply. He was watching the sergeant as if anticipating his next remark and dreading it.

"Of course, you understand you're under arrest?"

"On what charge?"

"Selling liquor to natives and stealing gold from the mine."

"How did you find out—about the gold, I mean?" The storekeeper's voice was expressionless.

The sergeant chuckled. "That would have been easy, even if I hadn't been at the kraal last night an' got the story from old Mphoengs."

"So you speak the lingo. You were playing a part last night?"

"Sure I was. No need to tell everything I know. But yes: I suspected you when I saw the wire in the store and saw what sort of man you were. I was sure when I saw that bangle on your wife's arm. Why did you do it?"

"For Mary's sake—for my sake too. I knew I'd never be able to pull myself together in this country; it's hell. I wanted to go back home."

The sergeant spat contemptuously.

"Funny pride you've got. It won't let you write home for money, but it will let you steal, and sell booze—poison, at that—to natives, and promise to give 'em guns so they can kill white men."

"I wouldn't have done that."

"No. I don't think you've got down as low as that—yet. But that don't matter. Where's your wife?"

"In there."

"Have you told her?"

"Yes."

"What did she say?"

"That's none of your damned business!" the storekeeper retorted hotly, then added softly: "She told me to take my medicine and then we'd go home together."

"It won't be very nice medicine," said the sergeant.

There was silence for a while.

"Where's the rest of the brass bangles," the sergeant asked presently.

The storekeeper indicated a box on a near-by shelf.

"Pretty cocksure you'd never be suspected," the sergeant remarked as he took it down and opened it.

It was half full of twisted-wire bracelets—each with a thin coating of gold which could be scraped off when occasion demanded.

"Call in your wife."

"She had no part in this," the storekeeper protested. "She knows nothing."

"Call her in."

The storekeeper was about to protest further but the burlap curtain parted and the woman came out and stood protectingly beside him.

She was very pale and wan looking, but her eyes gleamed with a stern, purposeful light; her face and hands were clean, her hair neatly arranged.

"You wanted me?" she asked, facing the sergeant.

"Yes, ma'am. You know all about your husband?"

She nodded.

"Would you go home now if you had the chance?"

Her answer came without a moment's hesitation.

"No! I couldn't go—not without John. He needs me now more than ever."

The sergeant turned to the storekeeper.

"Would you take her home now if you had the chance?"

"Why ask such damned foolish questions?"

"I take it you would. Well, look here. I figure that this country's better off without you; you ain't the right sort. You'll be all right in England where there are 'edges—hedges along the road to keep you from straying off. Back home blokes like me 'ull touch their hats to you and call you 'sir.' But here, where a man has to make his own roads, you don't fit. So, look here: I'm going to take these bangles over to the mine and square things with the owners. Then I'm going to forget the whole bloomin'

mess on condition you take the first boat home."

The woman's eyes glistened as she looked hopefully at her husband.

"Oh, he's good, John," she said. "He's good. Think! In a month we shall see green fields again, and violets and primroses and——"

"We can't go, Mary," he interrupted heavily. "The sergeant's having a game with us. How can we go without money?"

"Oh!" Her face fell.

"Not so fast, mister. You'll have money when you get home and have made it up with your old man, won't you?"

Hamilton nodded.

"Well, I'm going to lend you the necessary."

"But I can't take——"

"There goes your bloomin' funny pride again! You'll take it or serve a long term in *trunk.*"

The storekeeper hesitated no longer.

"I'll take it, sergeant, and thank you. We'll leave here to-morrow. You're a white man, sergeant, and——" He half choked and turning away passed through into the back of the store.

The woman looked up at the sergeant, tears of gratitude in her eyes.

"Thank you, sergeant," she said brokenly. "Thank you. When you come to England——"

"I ain't never goin' back to England! Hi 'ates the bloomin' 'ole."

She looked at him in bewilderment, wondering at the bitterness in his voice, at his lapse into the whining cockney dialect. Then she went on breathlessly:

"Then how can we thank you?"

"I don't want no thanks."

"Why do you do it?"

"I'm just returning the compliment—that's all. Do you remember a covey who tried to snitch—steal your purse at Capetown."

She nodded, beginning to understand a little.

"Well, I'm 'im—him. I'm the chap your husband called a sneak thief, a gutter rat. I'm the chap he said was a pollution—you see I ain't forgot anything, 'ave I? And I was all the things he said I was. It was you and him that made me go upcountry and join the police. And so——"

He stopped short.

"And so," she said, her eyes shining, forgetting for the moment the misery of her own failure, "you succeeded." She held out her hand. "Oh, I'm so glad! So very glad!"

Then she hastened away to help her husband get together and pack what few things they found worthy to take with them on their long journey to home and rehabilitation.

Twelve days later Sergeant Marlow again stood before his captain.

"I'll be glad to go on that surveying trip, sir, if you still want me."

The captain beamed.

"Fine, Marlow. We start next week."

"Very good, sir. But can you—er—arrange an advance for me? I'll need to get some kit."

The captain stared at him in astonishment.

"Of course, Marlow," he said. "But I thought you had plenty saved from your pay, not to mention two years' deferred."

"I did have, sir," the sergeant said with some show of confusion, "but I had to pay a debt, sir."

GIVING HIMSELF AWAY

Whenever a man says he likes to go to another man's house to spend the evening because he feels so thoroughly at home there, you may be sure that his wife has never let him know what the feeling really is.

READING THE FUTURE

"I approve of the utmost publicity regarding campaign contributions," remarked old Ephraim Blankenbaker to the crossroads gathering. "It gives us countrymen reliable advance information on who'll be our next ambassadors to foreign countries."

Desert Brew

By B. M. Bower

Author of "Bootlegger's Luck," "Goat Pro Tem," Etc.

WHAT HAPPENED IN PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Woods Morgan, who wrote stuff about the desert for a living, was three weeks late when he turned his back on the Pacific's golden strand and headed for the Grape Vines, where Hank Hawkins was to guide his somewhat tender feet in search of local color. The delay was occasioned by a strange lady with an engagement she wished to break and a ring she desired to return. She wasn't engaged to Woods Morgan, but she seemed to think she was when she found him dozing face downward in the sand. At any rate she told him the engagement was off, flung the ring in his beard—all before he had time to come wholly awake and tell her who he was not—and fled. So he lost three weeks trying to find her and restore the ring. They were wasted weeks. He still had the ring when he headed into the tortuous trails of the Grape Vines in seach of Hank and the local color. He found the local color soon enough—lots of it in the shape of trouble—but he did not come on Hank until, with his horses stolen, his outfit rifled, and a badly sprained ankle, he wandered, by good fortune, into the Marshall corral and beheld his missing mentor placidly milking a cow. A surprising coincidence—but Woods Morgan by that time was beyond surprise. What he craved was water first, then food, and then a bed. Later, when the Marshall hospitality had somewhat repaired the ravages of the desert, he found strength for wonderment. And there was plenty to wonder about. What was Hank doing there? And "Barby"—the girl of the broken engagement and the ring—where had she come from? She was there, too. And the Marshalls! City folks! What brought them to this God-forsaken corner on the edge of the desert? He pumped Hank and got evasive fairy stories. Meanwhile the Marshall ranch was wondering about Woods Morgan. They were a well-read company, all but Hank. They knew who Woods Morgan was. But they did not recognize him in the destitute victim of the desert who turned up calling himself Bill Woods. Woods Morgan hoped they wouldn't, for he liked to leave his notoriety behind when he went adventuring. He had never revealed his real name even to Hank. But he was discovered. Not by Hank, nor yet by "Barby," nor again by Marshall or Daughter Josephine. It was Mrs. Marshall who penetrated his alias and welcomed him as Woods Morgan. But she kept his secret. For the reason that she needed his help and believed he could serve best as plain Bill Woods. Marshall, it appeared, was drinking again. She had brought him to the desert to keep him from it. But he had tapped some source of the old deadly supply. Would Woods Morgan help her to locate the evil spring that was poisoning her husband, and lend a hand in bottling it up? He would. He enlisted gladly.

(A Four-Part Story—Part III.)

CHAPTER XVIII.

TRAGIC EVENTS.

BILL had never been near that part of the ranch where the tenant, Nelson, was living. He had never seen Nelson, for that matter. He was under the impression that the tenant was a clod of a foreigner who did the ranch work well enough but did not enter into the life of the Marshalls in any other way. He wondered now why he had never before seriously suspected Nelson of making moonshine, or at least of bringing it to Marshall.

He walked wide of the house grove, keeping to the edge of the largest alfalfa field,

and made his way leisurely toward the eastward. He did not want to arrive too early, and he hoped that Nelson would be in bed when he got there. At first Bill smoked, but when he had gone a half mile or so he put away his pipe lest the smoke should betray him.

It seemed to him a long mile to where the outbuildings of the Nelson place bulked vague in the starlight. He hoped there was no dog, but for fear there might be one he approached the place cautiously, stopping often to listen. The first building was a sketchy affair of corrugated iron, plainly used to house the farm implements. Bill poked about in there, sniffing occasionally without detecting that particular odor he sought. Then, leaving the shed, he made his way to the next building.

So he came finally to the house, a board shack of no more than two rooms. Through an open window came the sound of rhythmic snoring—proof enough that Nelson was lying within, at peace with his world. Bill went close, caught only the mingled odors of bachelor cooking where the cook likes plenty of onion flavor, and turned away with a half smile and a faint wonder at the content of a man who has chosen a life of plodding toil in such complete isolation that his nearest neighbors seldom see him. What did Nelson think of life? What were his hopes and fears?

"Hopes he's good for a lot of money before he gets caught," Bill's suspicions told his imagination. If Nelson were a moonshiner his mental reactions would be simple and sordid with no romantic notions whatever.

Bill prowled about the place until close to midnight before he was convinced that Nelson did not answer to any of his preconceived notions of what a moonshiner should be like in his home. There was evidence enough that Nelson was a hardworking man who liked to live in an orderly fashion. The yard was immaculately clean, the corrals were in perfect repair so far as Bill could determine by starlight and an occasional match blaze, the tools were well cared for, a rock building evidently intended for stable and storehouse was under construction. A pile of covered cement bags beside the hand mixer, the general litter of building materials, was proof enough that Nelson's spare time was not spent over a still.

Bill went home and went to bed, tired out and completely baffled. It must be that Hank was after all the key to the situation. To-morrow he meant to go back to the Whistlerock and make as comprehensive a search as he had made here at the ranch. He ought to have done that before, but it was not too late, perhaps. Hank wouldn't suspect him after this long interval of routine work. He might even worm the truth out of the old scoundrel by pretending to think well of bootlegging or moonshining, or both.

It was late morning when Bill awoke. He raised upon one elbow to look at his watch, hot sunshine in the open door informing him that it must be near breakfast time, or even later. His hand went out negligently to the box at the head of his bed, hovered in midair while his eyes dwelt incredulously upon the bed opposite him, then dropped to become a brace when his body surged upright under the thin blanket. He stared, shut his eyes tightly for a few seconds, then opened them suddenly and stared again. There could be no doubt this time; he was not having a nightmare.

On the white spread, which Mrs. Marshall had decided was none too good for the bunk house beds, patches of dried blood gave mute testimony of tragic events. On the white pillow slip was the bold imprint of a bloody hand, fingers spread. On the floor beside the bed a puddle of blood, dried around the edges, with a film on top. Woods Morgan himself could not have painted a more sinister scene for the eyes of a peaceable man to rest upon when he first comes back from the frontier of the soul. A dead body upon the bed might have added a horrific detail, but it would as surely have robbed the room of its subtle air of dreadful mystery.

No old fireman ever got into his clothes any quicker than did Bill Woods that morning, and he took the path to the house at a run. But when he arrived his tone was much calmer than his emotions and he hoped that his words were fairly unalarming.

"Thought sure I was going to miss breakfast," he said to Barby, who was buttering toast at the kitchen table. "Am I the last one up?"

"Why, no. It isn't much later than usual, Bill. Auntie's just getting up, and Joe's

milking the cow. Uncle Charlie isn't out of bed yet."

Bill did not say anything to that, but he walked around the end of the house and approached the screened rectangle where Marshall slept, well away from the house and its possible espionage. Those gruesome stains in the bunk house couldn't be explained too soon to please Bill, and as the head of the house Marshall could not do less than assume a certain sense of responsibility.

But Marshall's bed was unrumpled, his few belongings in perfect order. Bill stood for a minute looking, then returned to the kitchen shaking his head. There was the prospector yet to be accounted for, but he would need to excuse his absence from breakfast while he went down to the camp.

"Did you want Charles for something?" There was no dodging the women—Mrs. Marshall had seen Bill pass her window and she was waiting for him on the porch.

"I did, but he's up and gone."

"Why, that's strange! Charles seldom gets up before eleven o'clock, Bill."

"Does he make his own bed, as a rule?"

"I should say not! Charles never made a bed in his life, so far as I know." She gave Bill a searching look and came down the steps toward him, then started anxiously toward Marshall's sleeping place. "Don't try to keep things from me, Bill," she said tensely, glancing back at him. "Affairs are getting rather desperate with me; unless we can prevent Charles from getting liquor I've almost decided to put him in a sanitarium somewhere. This can't go on."

Bill turned and followed her slowly with a vague idea that the sooner he told her the better, though he dreaded adding anything so sinister to her worries. She gave Marshall's bed no more than a passing glance and returned pale faced to consult with Bill.

"Something has happened to Charles," she said in a flat, lifeless tone. "He hasn't been near his bed, and that is something I never knew him to do before. Charles is curiously regular in his habits of sleeping. Bill, I'm afraid he has wandered off somewhere. What can we do?"

"Find him," said Bill, and forced his lips to smile. "There's the breakfast bell, Mrs. Marshall. Let's be sensible and eat our breakfast before we do anything else. He's no doubt curled up somewhere asleep—maybe took on a bit more than usual. It's nothing to worry about, you know."

"If he's going to act like this I can't keep it from the girls much longer." Mrs. Marshall bit her lip to keep back her tears of utter discouragement, but she went with Bill to breakfast and even mustered a smile when she entered the door, and began at once to praise Barby's coffee and to find little, inconsequent things to talk about. Bill watched her with a growing wonder in his eyes. If she could put so brave a face upon her troubles, he surely could make shift to hide for a little while longer that gruesome evidence in the bunk house, he thought. Let them start the day comfortably, at least.

During the meal he had caught Joe's eyes fixed upon him, a question in their clear depths. Barby, too, seemed artificially cheerful. He was glad when he could catch Mrs. Marshall's glance and receive the signal to rise, for minutes seemed to him rather precious just now. That prospector needed looking after before he broke camp and left, if he had not done so already—which would not harmonize with his professed desire to see Marshall about a lease. He rather expected to find the man in camp, and he was on his way down there when Joe overtook him, running down the path with her bobbed hair flying in the hot wind that was blowing up from the desert. Lobo trotted patiently at the end of his leash.

"What's on your alleged mind now?" she demanded when she had overtaken him. "Mom's worried stiff about something—is it dad again? You'd better tell me," she added grimly, "because I'll find it out anyway. What has dad been up to now, that I don't know about?"

"Nothing, so far as I know." Bill gave her an exasperated glance before it occurred to him that he might need Joe and her dog before he was through. "Your mother is worried because your father didn't sleep in his bed last night and he hasn't shown up yet this morning."

"Good glory!" She looked up at him appraisingly. "But that isn't all that's worrying you, Bill. What is it that you hate to have mother find out about? Do you know where dad is?"

"No." Bill looked at her sidelong, measuring that mature sagacity which struck so strange a note in her youthfulness. He never knew exactly where Joe stood on the

path to womanhood. If he treated her like the child she was, he was as likely as not to be set in his place as a presumptuous fool; on the other hand, she was too young to be depended on he thought.

"Well, what is it, then? I hope you don't think you can fool me, Bill Woods. Is it something about that prospector? Is he a bootlegger? I thought perhaps that was what brought him out here."

"I thought so, myself. But I don't know anything at all about him."

Joe walked along beside him until they had passed the corral and not once did she speak. Where Hank and the prospector had turned toward the ditch, Lobo's nose went to the ground investigatively, and Joe turned and watched him for a minute.

"All right, honey. You tell Joe all about it," she crooned, and the dog looked up adoringly into her face. She turned to Bill with a bit of a swagger. "You don't have to talk, you know. Lobo can tell me all I want to know. I didn't hear any airplanes in the night, so I guess we won't be long finding dad—and the prospector, too, if we want to badly enough to follow him up. His car's gone, but Lobo says there's something interesting around here. Go on, Lobo. You show Joe just what happened."

There was sense in that, Bill admitted to himself. He walked along behind the girl, Lobo pulling her forward as he forged against the stout leash. They came to the ditch, and it needed no dog to show them the imprint of a man's knees on the bank, a spatter of blood on a rock and the tracks going toward the mesquite tree where the stranger's car had stood.

"You see, that's plain as print," Joe announced in a superior tone when they stood where the car had backed and turned. "He's gone off, and some one was hurt and went with him." Her face paled a bit as the same thought struck them both, but she pulled herself together and turned again to the dog. "Now we'll just follow the trail back to where they started from, and see what happened."

Bill thought he knew where that trail would lead them, and he was right. Lobo stood with both feet planted on the doorsill, looked into the bunk house and whined before he walked stiff legged with ruffed neck to the pool of blood.

Joe sat down abruptly on Bill's bed and stared white faced at the marks on the counterpane. Horror filled her eyes, so that Bill involuntarily sat down beside her and laid one arm across her shoulders.

"It may not have been your dad who was hurt," he said in his low voice. "Probably it wasn't. This is what I saw when I woke up this morning. It's what I had on my mind at breakfast. It's pretty mysterious——"

"Don't you know?" Joe turned her head slowly until her eyes met his. "It looks as if you had beaned somebody."

"It does for a fact—but if it's necessary I think your dog will give me an alibi. I went up to Nelson's last night and prowled around till past midnight. You may put the dog on my trail and welcome."

"Lobo's a wonder, but he doesn't guarantee to tell the correct standard Waltham time," Joe pointed out with a faint smile. "But that's all right, Bill. I'll believe you as long as possible. And I can tell if it was daddy." She put the leash in Bill's free hand and rose. "Just keep Lobo here for a minute," she said, and was off before Bill could have answered her if he had wanted to do so.

Lobo proved himself a pup of intelligence beyond animal instinct. He sat down on his haunches and waited, wolflike in his patience—but with his nose pointed toward the open door. Bill knew by the gleam in the dog's eyes when Joe was returning. She was panting a bit, and she held a soiled collar in her hand.

"It's the one dad took off yesterday," she said. "Now, we'll get the whole story—if dad's mixed up in it."

Lobo took one sniff, gave Joe a glance of meaning and cast his eyes around the room before he got up and walked out, the two following. Beyond the door Lobo hesitated, then walked straight to the end of the bunk house and stopped beneath the window.

Bill heard Joe's breath drawn into her lungs in one quick gasp, but her voice was steady when she spoke.

"Pick it up, Bill—that wrench. I—I'd rather not touch it. Is that blood?" The last word she whispered.

"I'm afraid it is, kid."

"Well—just lay it on the window sill till we come back. Now, Lobo, which way from here?"

Lobo gave her another glance, looked down at the ground and trotted with a shambling ease down the trail past the cor-

ral, as he had done before; only he did not turn off this time toward the ditch, but kept to the road.

"Better give him another whiff of collar," Bill suggested. "It doesn't look reasonable that your dad would start out for town afoot; not when there are two cars on the place."

"You can't fool Lobo," Joe retorted breathlessly, and kept on to where the footprints left the road and struck through the scattered desert growth.

"This looks crazy, Joe." But Bill did not refer to their work of trailing; rather, to the man who had gone that way before them.

"I can't help what it looks like, Bill, Lobo has taught me a lot of things about tracking. And it's plain enough that *somebody* went this way. If Lobo says it's dad, I say he knows more about it than we do."

For a full half mile they followed the tracks, and Lobo gave no sign that the end of the trail was near. The ranch and its irrigated land lay farther to the left. Before them and to the right stretched the desert, flat and gray for mile upon mile to where the mountain range that divides Nevada from California for a space stood etched in purples and pale blues against the sky. The whistling, hot wind pushed steadily against them as if it would warn them back. Bill stopped and squinted under his lowered hat brim. Before them, as far as he could see for the clumps of sage, the footprints held straight, toes deep as of a man running.

"Here, kid. This won't do at all." He took her by the arm, halting her and the dog. "We'll wear ourselves out and be useless when we do find him. We haven't even got a canteen with us. And your mother will be wild with worry."

Joe's chin set stubbornly.

"Dad doesn't know what he's doing, and he's wandering around out here somewhere," she said fiercely. "Do you think I'm going to let him go—and be a regular Woods Morgan victim, maybe? You must be crazy, yourself."

"I don't see what Woods Morgan has to do with it," Bill flared irritably. "I'm talking plain common sense."

"You're not. You're talking foolishness. You'd have me go blandly back and let dad stay out here and furnish a regular Woods Morgan ending to the story. Coyotes gnawing the bones of the victim in the moonlight and so forth; sifting sand and desert dawns. I'll have you know he's my father, and where he can walk Lobo and I can follow and bring him back." She pulled to free herself, but Bill held on. Lobo turned, eyed Bill for a minute and lifted his lip at one side.

"You see. Lobo would make a Morgan finish of you, in two shakes, if I told him to!"

"At your mercy!" Bill grinned down at her ironically. "But it just happens that I have no intention of leaving your father out here. What I mean is to go back and explain to your mother, and then drive back and pick up the trail right here. We couldn't carry ourselves back, much less your dad. Whereas with the car——"

"I'm the dumbest thing when I'm worried!" Joe yielded unexpectedly. "But I won't go back. Lobo and I will keep on the trail, and you can bring the car—and tell mom. It better be the truck, because the lady car couldn't pull some of this sand. And throw in some blankets for daddy when we find him. He'll be tired, I expect. And hurry, Bill. I'm awfully thirsty."

"I wish you'd sit down somewhere under a bush and wait for me, kid." Bill laid his hand on her head, felt how hot her hair was and took off his own hat to give her. It dropped ludicrously to her ears and he laughed.

"You'll get sunstruck, out here bareheaded. Now promise me you'll rest till I get here. You can't beat the car, so there isn't any sense in wearing yourself out, you know."

"And bring some sandwiches, Bill!" Joe had waited until Bill was trotting off bareheaded and was almost out of hearing before she called after him. Which is the way of womankind.

CHAPTER XIX.

ON THE DESERT.

BEFORE he reached the corral, Bill considered his experience out in the full heat of the desert afoot sufficiently vivid. After trotting and walking a half mile bareheaded, with parched throat and the feeling that his back was blistering through the thin, light shirt he had borrowed from Marshall, he was sure that he knew just how it must feel to perish on the desert.

More and more of the same sensations of thirst and heat and exhaustion, until the endurance snapped under the strain—that was all. He hadn't been far off, in all the stories he had written of the desert.

Then his professional pride rose up to battle. "A regular Woods Morgan finish!" Did Joe mean to discount his realism? She ought to know the desert well enough to see how true his pictures were. She'd find out, soon enough, unless they got to Marshall in time.

There was the mystery of the blood in the bunk house and on the wrench, the dog's story of the trail. That would make Marshall the aggressor—but who was the victim? Not the prospector, surely; unless he had recovered in a remarkable manner after the blow. He had been able to drive off in the night. Then, too, there had been two men at the ditch—the tracks proved that beyond question. Two had walked to the car. Yet there was the dog, trailing Marshall straight out into the desert!

The simplest explanation was to belittle the intelligence of the big pup. Bill did not like to call Lobo a liar, for he loved dogs and his faith in them was strong. There was, of course, the bare possibility that the prospector had a companion who had chosen to walk in. An unlikely proceeding, especially in view of the fact that the front seat of the Ford had been piled half full of camp gear, leaving room for the driver only. Still, it was the only explanation Bill could think of that would account for all the footprints. He never once thought of Hank, nor dreamed that Marshall had been mistaken in the man he struck at.

Barby and her aunt were at the bunk house, dumb with the horror of their discovery, panicky over the absence of Bill and Joe. It struck Bill that it would be nothing less than merciful to give them something to do. They rushed toward him when he came panting up the path, perspiration streaming profusely from his crimson face.

" 'S all right," he gasped. "I just came back—after the truck." He made straight for the water bucket and poured a dipperful over his head.

"Have you found Charles?" Mrs. Marshall's voice was thin, strident with fear.

"No-o—but no one was killed in here. I'm sure of that." He shook the water from his hair and grinned at them without any feeling of mirth.

"What you should do is take the car and follow that prospector who camped here last night. He went off with somebody—the kid and the dog trailed two men to where his car was parked. Another set of tracks leads out across the country, and we're following them. I came back after the truck—too far to walk. Joe thinks it's her father; I don't know what to think. But anyway, if one of you can drive——"

"We can both drive," said Mrs. Marshall more calmly. "But where?"

"Wherever that Ford went," said Bill. "I'll go fill up the gas tank for you while you get ready. Joe wants some sandwiches—I suppose for her father or whoever went off out there. Better hurry—don't wait to doll up."

"We're not quite that bad," Barby retorted spiritedly. "When it's a case of life and death we can skip powdering our noses, I hope! Come on, auntie. Bill's right. Don't keep us waiting, Bill!"

"Oh, bring Joe's hat, will you? I had to lend her mine." Bill was running toward the garage.

Filling the gas tank was a maddeningly slow proceeding. First the gasoline must be siphoned through a short piece of garden hose into a can, then poured into the tank. The gasoline drum was two thirds empty and the siphon correspondingly hard to start, and Bill swallowed a mouthful of gas inadvertantly when he was sucking hard on the end of the hose to start the gas running. Gasoline does not make a pleasant beverage and Bill was pretty sick for a few minutes. Moreover, being a new hand at that particular makeshift, he permitted the gas in the hose to run back into the drum while he poured the first canful into the tank on the touring car, and was obliged to start the suction all over again and be sick all over again before he could fill the second can.

"There's enough to get you to Goldfield, anyway," he muttered thickly, wiping the dust off the gas gauge with a forefinger while he screwed on the cap. Barby and her aunt were already in the car. "Wait till I look at the radiator—guess there's water enough in the canteen. That wind's mighty hot, and you'll have it behind you. All right, folks. Plenty of water—— Oh, say! Don't take the straight trail across that

first little dry lake, out ten miles. Some one spilled a lot of nails in the best road, so you'll have to go around."

He laid a grimy hand for just a second on Mrs. Marshall's gloved knuckles, ready on the wheel. The starter was whirring, the motor gave a cluck and began to pur. Bill's eyes sought hers reassuringly, then went to Barby's veiled face.

"Good luck, folks. Don't you worry for one minute. I'll look after this end of the job. If you don't run across any sign of that car, drive on into Goldfield and inquire there. If it looks too bad, tell the sheriff about it. Joe and I will bring in the fellow that struck out afoot. He couldn't go far, and we'll soon overhaul him with the truck. Then if everything's all right, we'll stay right here and look after things till you come home; if it's your husband, and he isn't in good shape, we'll follow you up. So take your time—after you get there. No news from here is good news. Adios."

Barby gave a squawk as the car was starting off, and twisted around in the seat, reaching behind her.

"Oh, here! There wasn't a thing to make sandwiches of, Bill. I used the last bit of bread for toast, because we were going to bake to-day. But I filled this bottle with milk—it's all I had time for. You can cook whatever you want when you get back."

"Fine! Good luck to you!"

He stood for a moment watching them, then placed the bottle of milk in the truck seat and went to the bunk house for bedding. It was a great relief to have the two women off his mind for the present, and he told himself that they could trail the prospector's car as well as any one. They had gone off calmly enough. No need to worry about them any longer.

Barby had forgotten to bring down Joe's hat, but Bill found an old felt hat in the bunk house which would do for himself. No use wasting time on nonessentials—he was uneasy over Joe, out there in that hot sun alone. What if a rattlesnake should bite her, or a tarantula or scorpion or centipede? She might even run across a rabid coyote—though the dog would probably protect her from anything larger than snakes and insects.

He threw the blankets and pillow into the back of the truck, looked to make sure the radiator was full, and thought of the gas tank. The idea of siphoning more gas out of the drum made him retch.

"Four gallons in the tank, five—six, seven in the two canteens—that's enough to carry us a hundred miles if we had to go that far. Might need water, though."

He found an extra canteen and filled it, then cranked and started, driving as fast as was practicable after he left the road, the tires sinking into the loose soil deeper than Bill had expected. The kid was right about it, the touring car couldn't have pulled through the sandy patches. Even the truck had to take some of the hollows in compound low.

But he made it well enough by using intermediate and compound. It surprised him that he could not travel at all in high. But then it occurred to him that the wind probably had a good deal to do with it. He strained his eyes ahead after the first few hundred yards, hoping to see Joe waiting for him where he had left her. It was easy enough to follow their tracks, but he was obliged to make many detours with the car, to avoid high brush, rocks or those small, bothersome corrugations that wrinkle the greater part of the desert. Striking straight across country with a car was not so simple as he had thought it would be, but it was nevertheless a vast improvement on walking, especially when they would have to bring back Marshall.

Joe had gone on with Lobo. Bill thought he saw her hat bobbing along, far ahead; but the brush was whipping in the wind and he could not be certain. He could only follow the trail as best he could, grinding along sometimes at the pace of a desert turtle where the sand was softest. At that rate Joe could keep ahead of him as long as she could walk, but he could not help that. To attempt a faster progress meant that he would spin the rear wheels and heat the engine without getting anywhere at all. He simply had to take his time or else stall the car.

"She'll see the truck coming," he told himself after a while when he had successfully negotiated a gully that threatened for a time to hold him there. "If she's got any sense at all she'll wait."

But Joe did not wait, and Bill almost lost her trail permanently when he had to drive around another deep wash and then found himself in a nest of rocks. He was compelled to get out and move a dozen or

so before he could get through without cracking an axle or the crank case.

To top his troubles and delay him further, a front tire went flat and Bill suspected a slow valve leak—than which there is no tire trouble more exasperating when one hasn't an extra valve. He removed the tire, failed to find any puncture in the tube, removed the valve, cleaned it with gas which he let out of the carburetor, and replaced the same tube within the same tire and spent a hot fifteen minutes becking and bowing over the tire pump. Woods Morgan had dealt more misery, ticking out troubles without mercy to his characters, but Bill Woods couldn't think of anything worse than what he was doing just then; whereas he was merely taking the fortunes of the desert trail and having no unusual misadventures.

He climbed and stood clinging to the cab top while he looked for Joe. She was not in sight, so he was forced to drive down along the edge of the gully until he picked up her trail again; which cost more time and gasoline, though it was the wasted minutes which worried him. The child had been thirsty when he left her. She must be suffering acutely now, he knew. He tried to hurry along, racing the engine and then shifting into high gear. But the wheels gouged too deep and the wind blew too hard against him so that he stalled the engine and had to get out and crank.

He looked back toward the ranch and was surprised to see it lying below him, at the foot of what seemed to be a very definite slope of three miles or so. He had not dreamed that he was climbing a hill, but that might account for the drag on the car; though it might well be one of those optical illusions with which the desert delights to fool men's eyes. He strained his eyes ahead, but the Joshua trees standing here and there over the great expanse looked so human that there was no knowing whether he saw Joe or Marshall or a yucca in any of the objects standing above the brush. At any rate the truck could scarcely be overlooked. Joe would be watching for it and could not possibly miss seeing its high, black top.

He drove on, staring ahead at the tracks and beyond at the desert. It was with a stupefying sense of amazement that he heard Lobo's deep *"Woohh! Woohh!"* behind him and off to the right. His head swung that way as he abruptly cut off the ignition and stopped. There was Joe, sitting cross legged in the scant shade of a Joshua tree, fanning herself with Bill's hat.

"Rotten service, is what I mean!" she croaked with indomitable spirit when Bill ran back to her swinging the extra canteen by its canvas strap. "I thought I told you two hours ago that I was thirsty!"

CHAPTER XX.

WHISKY.

"DAD'S some hiker," Joe observed when her own thirst was satisfied and she had given Lobo a drink out of Bill's hat crown. "He must have walked all night. We'll have to keep right on his trail—I don't suppose the old dear took a drop of water with him, and this wind simply blows all the moisture out of one's system. I couldn't have gone another yard on a bet, and I'm used to hiking. I don't see how dad could possibly keep it up much farther; do you, Bill?"

Bill was contemplating the front tire, which had gone flat once more. There was nothing to do but pump it up again, so he got out the pump and stood back to the wind, becking and bowing until his arms ached. The brief jaunt was dragging out toward noon in spite of him, and he did not want to discuss Marshall's probable whereabouts and condition with Joe, who had waited until she was certain her question would go unanswered and then had climbed into the truck and sat staring sourly out across the wind-whipped desert.

Bill cranked, threw the pump into the truck and crawled behind the wheel.

"You'd better take off the leash and let the dog run," he said as he released the brake. "This wind is a fright. I overlooked your tracks where you left the trail, and it's going to be hard to follow one set of footprints."

Joe made no reply, but she unsnapped the leash from Lobo's collar and pushed the dog out with her foot. Lobo misunderstood her intent, evidently thinking his abrupt dislodgement an accident; for he looked up at her reproachfully, timed a jump and scrambled in over her feet.

"Dumb-bell! What do you think you are—a tourist?" She pulled the limp collar from her overalls pocket and wiped his nose with it impatiently. "Get out! Go find dad. Go on, you lazy thing!"

Bill had stopped the car, but Lobo flattened his pointed ears and lay as flat as he could. He was passive as a dead dog while Joe cuffed his ears and scolded.

"Maybe if you get him started on the trail again he'll hold it, and you can hop in," Bill made bold to suggest. "He's only a pup, you see—and he loves his Joe girl."

"I don't want that kind of love," snapped Joe. "He hates d-daddy, is what ails him. He doesn't *want* to find him unless I'm right there with the leash in my hand. Lobo! You——"

"Listen, kid." Bill laid a hand on her shoulder. "I've owned a dog or two, myself, and I find it's bad business to raise an issue unless you can be sure of the outcome. Right now is a kind of poor time to fight with the pup, don't you think? You slide over here and drive, and I'll walk and watch the trail. The dog will be all right, after a bit. He's afraid you're going to drive off somewhere and leave him stranded, is all ails him."

"I hate a quitter!" Joe's lip trembled. "I'll give him away. I'll shoot him! I won't have a dog that doesn't play the game all the way through! I hate a dog that sticks back his ears and flattens out just when you need him the most. I'll——"

Bill was ten rods from the truck and he failed to hear what more Joe would do. Having had a sample of her displeasure himself, he did not worry about the dog. Nor did he glance back. Joe had not killed the engine, at any rate. She would come along if he left her alone, so he bent to the wind and plodded ahead, following the blurred footprints that led on and on into the desert. After a bit he heard the truck coming and heaved a sigh of relief. That particular storm was over.

He came to another gully too deep for the car to cross where Marshall had gone, and turned back, waving the girl to a stop while he scouted along the bank for a passable crossing. Joe leaned out and shouted into the wind, but he could not hear what it was she was saying, until he had gone back almost to the truck.

"Hey! The tire's flat again!"

Bill swore and went up and yanked the pump from the car. At this rate Marshall could die before they overtook him. He unscrewed the dust cap from the valve stem, attached the pump tube and began to pump.

"What did you do with the sandwiches, Bill? I'm starving."

Bill stopped pumping and looked at her glumly.

"There's a bottle of milk right beside you."

"I despise milk. I want a sandwich."

"Barby said we could cook whatever we like when we get back." Bill's tone was heavy with sarcasm. Speaking of sandwiches reminded him of something he was trying to forget; which was a neglected breakfast.

"Do you mean to tell me——"

"Sandwiches is what we have anything else but. Barby used the bread for toast." He went back to lifting and pushing the pump handle—a form of exercise which never can be made popular. He heard things then about Barby, but he did not stop his pumping to listen. He tossed the pump into the truck and was starting on when he swung abruptly back.

"Where's the dog?"

"On his way home, I expect. I gave him a whipping and told him to beat it."

"Bright trick."

"He's no good parked on my feet with his eyes shut, is he? That dog's got to mind if I have to break his neck!"

Bill shut his teeth on a sentence that would have opened a battle. Joe was so red and warm and tired and discouraged that he hadn't the heart. After all she was a game kid and a sulky dog will wear out the patience of the most forbearing soul in the world. Bill patted her on the shoulder instead and grinned.

"Let me sniff that collar, then, and I'll double for him till these Joshua trees grow bananas. Come on, little Joe—you won't have to whip *me* and send me home."

"I shall, if you don't shut up about things to eat," Joe retorted, flushing under his intent look.

"Well, slide over and let me coax the old boat across this wash. She's liable to stand on her ear, and if I yell I want you to jump and no argument about it, young lady. I know where your dad crossed, and we'll pick up the trail beyond. Don't need no dog nohow."

"In other words, buck up." Joe gave him a reluctant smile. "Oh, Bill, you may try to fool me, but—I'll do my jumping now, and keep dad's trail right under my eyes."

She was out and gone with the same verve which Bill had come to associate with her in his mind, and a smile and an upflung hand as she ran down into the gully and up the other side.

Bill watched her across before he started the car. His eyes held a new glow and his thoughts formed half a sentence. "Another three or four years, and little Joe Marshall will——"

There came a time when they looked back and saw only the gray-green bushes, that looked all gray in the distance, standing ragged against the purple of the Grape Vines. Before them a wide expanse, pale as wheat straw, lay like a huge platter broken against the stark hills beyond. Now the crest of the slope was passed the truck picked up speed and bounced along quite as fast as any car would dare travel. Joe was driving and she was obliged to stop now and then to wait for Bill to scout out the trail ahead.

"He surely wouldn't get out on that dry lake," Bill panted, swinging onto the running board as Joe came up, and standing there clinging to the braces and keeping his eyes to the trail. "We want to keep a sharp lookout from now on, kid. He can't have gone much farther than this."

"It feels as if that tire is flat again," Joe informed him apathetically. "Maybe you'd better take a look."

The tire was flat. Bill pumped it up again while Joe walked ahead to spy out the footprints and save time, and when Bill finally overtook her they changed places, Bill walking ahead while Joe followed with the truck. Bill figured that they were making much better time than Marshall could possibly have done, and he did not believe that even a man in delirium would walk much farther than they had come. He wondered if Joe had noticed how erratic the tracks had become in the last mile; how they weaved back and forth like a sailboat tacking against the wind. Still, they made toward the lake—Bill wondered why.

There were fewer washes on this side of the low ridge, less of that corrugated terrain which made slow going. They hurried on into the howling, hot wind that blew straight up from Death Valley fifty miles away and reaching bare arms closer wherever the hills failed to bar the way. The dry lake before them was perhaps a far-flung tentacle of that accursed replica of one of Dante's visioned purgatories.

"I think we're out of gas," Joe shouted into the wind, when the motor gasped and stalled in a shallow depression.

Bill turned back, dragging his feet a little in the sand.

"All right, hop out and I'll see."

"Didn't you fill the tank, Bill?" Joe climbed in behind the cab for sake of the shade, and peered over the seat back while Bill pulled out the cushion and unscrewed the cap from the tank.

"I didn't. I knew how much was in the tank, and I knew we had plenty in the canteens. I was in a hurry. Besides, I didn't count on so much low gear."

"Well, don't apologize. I merely wondered if we'd used a tank full already; because if that was the case—we've got to get back, you see, and it would take some thinking."

"Yes. Well, we've used four gallons, just about. And we have seven gallons along. It's all right, kid. We've been making good time the last five or six miles. We won't have much farther to go."

Joe gave a little sigh, quickly repressed. Bill unfastened the five-gallon canteen from the running board nearest him, brushed off the twigs of sage that had caught in the fastening when they plowed through bushes, and unscrewed the cap, lifting the heavy canteen to where he could tilt it over the opening in the gas tank.

"I hate to spill any of this," he remarked, setting the can upright. "There ought to be a funnel, but there isn't. Let's see." He studied the situation for a minute, then grinned widely.

"My gigantic intellect is still percolating," he boasted, and pulling off his hat, set it upside down over the hole and with a convenient screw driver from the tool box punched a sizable hole in the felt. "We may want every drop of this gas," he went on cheerfully, "because it's going to be uphill for a while, and I wouldn't put it past that wind to change and blow in our faces again."

"You'd better pour fast," Joe advised skeptically, "because gas will soak right through that felt."

Bill had not thought of that peculiarity which will send gasoline through chamois that holds back water, but he made no reply; time was still precious and he lifted

the canteen once more, tilted it well over the hat crown and began to pour.

He lifted his eyes and stared at Joe, who stared back at him incredulously. A gush of gasoline had ended abruptly as it had begun, and the canteen refused to give up another drop.

"Why—I thought it was full!" cried Joe.

"It is," said Bill. "Stopped up, maybe. Cork inside, or something." He shook the canteen with an audible sloshing sound, then tilted it suddenly again. There was no gas. He stared again at Joe, who leaned over the back of the seat glaring at the canteen.

He shook the canteen, ran a forefinger into it and held it there for a moment, feeling carefully. He set the canteen down on the tank and began to experiment with the screw-top collar. It turned, after a twist or two, and he began to unscrew it. The thing that he presently pulled out might have been a long test tube made of aluminum Bill put his nose to the canteen and gave one sniff.

"Whisky!" he said in a curiously flat tone.

"Whisky?" Joe stared blankly at the canteen.

"Close to five gallons of hooch." Bill gave another sniff as if to assure himself that he had not made a mistake.

Joe looked at him, looked at the hat that had been made to perform the duty of a funnel, looked again at Bill. She gave a shriek of laughter, born not of amusement but of worry and weariness and now—fear.

CHAPTER XXI.

BILL MAKES A MISTAKE.

BILL halted, glaring down at the slim little person in the blue bib overalls and the hat out of all proportion to her size and riding her ears. The slim shoulders moved forward until Bill stopped the owner by the simple method of catching her by the arm and hanging on.

"You go back to the truck and stay there! Do you want me to tie you up?"

"Now don't get tough! Go back and stay yourself, if you think the truck ought to be stayed with. Let go of my arm. You're merely holding up the parade."

Bill released the arm and got her by the shoulder, schooling himself desperately to persuasion.

"Listen, little Joe. You're fagged, right now. There's no sense whatever in your idea of going on. I'll go—I can go much faster and easier if I know you are safe at the truck and I needn't worry about you. When I find your father he may need to be carried. I'll have a sweet time, won't I, packing in the two of you?"

Joe tilted her head far back so that she could look up at him from under the wide hat brim.

"Don't kid yourself, Bill. I'm no more fagged than you are. And we don't either of us amount to much if we can't hike all around dad. I'm going along so I can carry the canteen and dad's feet. I guess I'll come in pretty handy."

"Now, Joe——"

"Look here!" Joe spoke through set teeth. "You can't bully me and boss me, just because I laughed over your wild preparations to pour a teacupful of gas into the tank. I appreciate the shower, all right—but you wasted a lot of water on me when I didn't need it. I *wasn't* hysterical. I *always* laugh like that. And you can't stop me from going. I've got to. It's—daddy!"

"You know what happened to Lobo when he wouldn't mind," Bill stated darkly. But when he started on he was holding Joe's hand clasped tight in his own and helping her along, the water canteen slung over his shoulder. Joe was carrying the bottle of milk, which they both refused to touch, tacitly reserving it for Marshall. Joe wondered if Bill thought she had completely forgotten his first meeting with her, when he had drunk half a coffeepot of milk fresh from the cow; and Bill wondered if Joe thought he had never observed her tall glass of milk at every meal. But neither mentioned these small matters.

The footprints had become erratic and hard to follow, as if Marshall had lost all sense of direction and walked at random. They found the marks of wallowing, where he had fallen down and groped about in the sand for a space before he got to his feet again and wandered on. Neither made any comment upon those grim signs, nor upon the places where the tracks went into some high bush and out again. And although each stole furtive glances at the sun, neither spoke of the amazing speed with which it was setting—until Bill had worked out a solution.

"Soon as it's dark enough we'll light

bushes along the trail. A couple of dry sage stubs will make corking desert torches. It will be a heap better than now, kid. Your dad will see our fires and come back to meet us. Probably this wind will go down, too. It will be a snap. Won't have long to wait, now. Sun's almost down."

After a moment Joe gave an hysterical laugh which she checked immediately.

"One way to handle your worries is to turn the darn things wrong side out and play they look pretty. Instead of seeing our Morgan finish, we'll all sing 'Roamin' in the Gloamin'.' It's the elephant's powder puff when you look at it with your left eye shut, isn't it, Bill?"

"I wish you'd let up on Woods Morgan," Bill said pettishly.

"Why? Are you a warm admirer of his?" She waited for the retort which did not come, then added resignedly, "That's all the thanks one ever gets for bucking up and being brave. I suppose you'd rather have a Morgan heroine on this party: limpid eyes and creamy skin and gobs of sentiment over the sunset."

Bill let go her hand.

"Well, all right. Make it as pleasant as possible! To add to the romance, how would you like a plate of fried chicken right now?"

"I'll run one down for you if you like."

She was beginning to fall farther and farther behind, so Bill relented and once more took her hand and pulled her along. He wondered if the child realized the gravity of the situation, or whether she was simply tired and hungry and cross. He never dreamed that Joe, dragging her feet wearily beside him, was wondering if he was such a tenderfoot as to think this a mere trifling incident.

They walked and walked. Bill lighted greasewood bushes, which will burn fiercely for two or three minutes and then char and go black when the stiff, tarry-sapped needles are consumed. It made slow work of the tracking, because they must wait until a lighted bush flared beside the last visible footprints, then follow the tracks as far as they could see them in the ruddy glow and fire another bush before continuing farther. They lost their sense of direction because of the thin haze of clouds that obscured stars and moon, and time became merely a matter of gauging their endurance and Marshall's. If it were Marshall who had fled into the desert. Bill was beginning to doubt Lobo's testimony on the identity of the man they were following. It did not seem possible that Marshall would come so far afoot, or that he had been the man who evidently had stood outside the bunk house and struck down an unknown man through the window. It was more likely that Marshall was the victim of that blow, though he would never hint it to Joe who was pinning her faith to the dog's trailing.

Yet the footprints beside the ditch and out here in the sand did not fit the probable facts, and Bill was too tired to use his power of deduction very successfully. It was clear that some one had run off here into the desert, last night. Joe and Lobo insisted that it was Marshall. The quickest way to make sure was to overtake the man and see who he was, and Bill's tired brain was glad to let it rest there. Mrs. Marshall would follow the other clews, he was sure of that.

"We seem to be traveling toward home again," Joe observed in a flat, tired voice when they stopped for a minute to wait for a fresh fire to blaze up so that they could see. "Unless the wind has changed. Look at the smoke." Then she added wistfully, "It doesn't look as if daddy is very close, or he'd come to the fire. Can't you call him, Bill?"

"Better save our breath for walking," Bill demurred. "We're on his track, Joe girl. I could holler my head off without accomplishing as much as a half hour of plugging right along will do."

Joe said nothing to that, but when they had passed to the extreme edge of that firelight and must wait for another she herself began to call, her voice infinitely beseeching out there in the night. Bill's heart ached for her, but he would not yield to the impulse of wasting his energy in useless shouting. Nor could he steel his nerves against Joe's tragic young voice imploring the daddy who might be dead, for all they knew. He set his teeth and knelt doggedly beside a bush that refused to blaze up and shed the light it should, and coaxed it with dry twigs. But whenever Joe cried, "Daddy! *Daddy!*" an unpleasant ripple went from Bill's scalp to his toes.

"There's a coyote following our trail," he said with a suddenness that stopped Joe on the edge of another shrill cry. He had reached the point of sheer nerves when he

knew he was going to shake her if she persisted in that wailing call.

"Where?" Joe gave a half sob and moved closer to Bill. "Do you suppose it'll come at us?"

"Wait. See those two greenish lights back there? He's stopped to watch us."

Joe saw them and reacted in the purely feminine way by catching Bill by the arm and swinging herself behind him. And Bill himself reacted instinctively to the wordless call for his strength and courage to protect her from danger—fancied or real, it made no difference to either just then. Almost without thinking he pulled his Luger from where it hung safe inside his belt and fired forthwith at those two greenish points of light.

On the heels of the report came a yelp of surprise and pain, and Joe stiffened and went limp against Bill.

"It's—it sounded—like Lobo," she whispered aghast. "I——" Her knees gave under her and she went down in a huddled little heap, her fingers still clawing weakly to retain their hold on Bill's reassuring strength.

Bill stooped, caught her by the shoulders, hesitated and then eased her to the ground, his mind a confused mixture of emotions in which the dominant sensation seemed to be consternation. He hurried back to where the eyes had looked at him in the dark, bent over the animal and felt gropingly for the head and neck. His fingers encountered a warm, sticky spot in the hair; that, and a collar there was no mistaking. His head turned involuntarily and his eyes tried to bore through the gloom to where Joe lay huddled beside the bush that would not burn but sent tiny wisps of pungent smoke into the air to be whipped out in thin streamers with the light breeze that blew.

"Good Lord—I shot her dog!" Had it been a man he would not have felt much worse over it just then. He had forgotten all about Lobo—had taken it for granted the dog had gone home long ago. He bit his lip, too sick at heart to realize or care that he was shaking, that his groping hands could scarcely control their motions sufficiently to find the heart, to see whether it was still beating.

"Bill! Where *are* you, Bill?"

A lonesome little cry, coming out of the dark like that. Bill muttered something through his teeth, slid his arms around the limp body and rose. In a moment he came striding up to Joe, her dog in his arms.

CHAPTER XXII.

HANK HAS A HEADACHE.

IN the deepening dusk of that evening when the prospector came, Charles Marshall stood just inside the doorway of the garage, his lean neck craned like a wild turkey on guard for the flock. He looked, listened, lifted a pint flask to his lips and took a long gurgling drink. He craned again, peering into the faint light cast by the new moon not quite so near to setting as it had been the night before. If that damned, snooping Bill Woods happened along—spying—watching——

"I'll kill him as I would a snake!" The thought took definite form in his mind, forced itself into audible speech. "The sneaking spy! The ingrate! Took him in when he was crippled—nursed him and fed him, and that's the thanks! Bites the hand that fed him. Snoops and watches and spies—crawls in the grass like a snake! I'll kill him—clear self-defense. He'll ruin me if I don't stop him—a man's home is his castle—can't come limping in here and play the spy. Hank was right, he's a treacherous hound—world has no place for a sneak like——"

He listened again, his fuddled brain reading danger in the very stillness of the evening. He stooped, felt for something in the pale light, stood up balancing the thing in his hand; a pipe wrench such as plumbers carry for repair jobs.

"Get him in the bunk house—saw him go in. Every hour means danger. Got to stop his damnable searching and spying—stop it once for all—stop his mouth, too. They'll think—— No matter what they think. Got to stop him right away before he—before—damnable spy—stop his damned spying before——"

His muttering dwindled to whispers, to silence. He slipped from the garage, keeping well in its shadow, edged to the shade of the hill. He was afraid his wife might discover that he was not in his bed, but the piano was going in the living room—Henrietta and the girls were there. He would be in bed——

He moved cautiously along in the shadow until he reached the rear of the bunk house, where he stood craning and listening, his

suffused eyes peering and prying, his ears strained to catch a sound. From the open window of the bunk house came the sound of a man clearing his throat; a sleepy sound, mechanical and faint, no intent behind it. He started, stopped, slipped along by the wall; a step sidewise, a pause while he craned and listened, another step, a pause.

He was by the open, unscreened window; the window where Bill had crawled out to watch him, that morning—though he did not know that and it would have been but one more item against the man he thought a dangerous enemy. He listened. He thought he heard steady breathing, thought it sounded close. His eyes turned once to the young moon slipping down to stand for a moment on the high peak before it went seeking the sun. It shone faintly in at the window. He could see——

Very cautiously he lifted the wrench and held it ready while he pushed his lean face forward on his long neck and peered in. He stiffened, licked his lips. It seemed to him that fate had placed his enemy carefully to receive the blow of vengeance; sitting on the edge of the bed, arms folded upon his knees, head bowed, drowsy, only half awake after a sleep. Yawning.

Marshall blinked, set his teeth hard together, reached in and struck at the bowed head; a vicious blow that meant to kill. He heard the dull impact of steel against flesh. The sound sickened him a little and he drew back frightened. He looked at the wrench and the thin moon showed him that it was wet and smeared.

A sound behind him made him start and turn. A man was almost upon him, reaching out to grasp him by the shoulder. Marshall gave a choked kind of gasp, dropped the wrench and ran. Straight down the trail, past the corral and on beyond toward the young moon he went, and the sound of running feet followed him, drove him on. A hundred yards, two hundred, three hundred—he left the road then and ran wildly out through the sagebrush, swinging a bit to the left, which brought him running south. The pursuing footsteps halted where Marshall left the trail and the man stood there watching until the fleeing figure merged into the vague outlines of the sage. He shook his head at some thought and went back to the bunk house, where the sound of groaning and swearing greeted him as he stepped into the gloom.

"That you, Charley? Gawd, he tried t' kill me! Whyn't yuh stop 'im? *N-n-nhnn!*" He groaned dismally as those fated souls beyond the river Acheron. "Gawd, he put' near killed me! Told you Bill was up t' somethin'. *N-n-nhh!* Mashed m' head in —rock or somethin'. Right through the window. I'll kill 'im for that! *N-n-nhhh!*"

"Sshh!" warned the man in a whisper. "He'll hear you and come back to finish the job. Come on. I'll get you out of here before he comes to see——"

He took Hank's arm, urging him with a gentle pull to rise and follow. Hank yielded dazedly, stifling his groans and whispering terrible epithets against Bill. Half the time his eyes were shut tight with the pain of his hurt and he never dreamed that he was not being assisted by Marshall. Hank owned plenty of that kind of nerve which is sometimes called gall, but his capacity for endurance was slight. Joe would not have made more fuss over a bleeding scalp wound than did he; perhaps not so much. The fact that he was able to keep up a fairly coherent stream of curses and threats indicated that his wound was not going to prove fatal. The prospector's mouth twisted sidewise in a sardonic grin.

"C'me down t' tell you we got t' have another packer—*n-n-nhhh!* M' brains is layin' wide open! Better git two, fer Bill won't live long after I set eyes on 'im—*n-n-nhh!* Oh, Gawd!"

The prospector piloted him quietly down to the irrigation ditch below the corral, pressed Hank down upon his knees and scooped water with both hands to wash the blood from the wound. It was a nasty hurt, though superficial. The square corner of the wrench had glanced on Hank's round dome and had peeled up the scalp in a jagged patch that would need several stitches before it would heal, and would leave an extensive scar. He was still bleeding copiously.

"You're going to need a doctor to sew that up," the prospector diagnosed after he had turned a flash light briefly on the wound.

"Hunh? Hank sat down abruptly on the bank and peered at the other through the gloom. "Thought you was Charley Marshall! Who'n hell *are* you?"

"Just a prospector, camped right close by. I was going up to the house to see if I could buy some eggs and milk and maybe

a loaf of bread. Saw somebody reach in through the window and then beat it. So when I heard you groaning in there I thought I'd better investigate."

"Well-I'll-be-dogged!" Hank shot the sentence out in one breath. He thought fast—much faster, probably, than his brain cells had ever turned over in his life before. "Prospector, aye?" He tilted his head and eyed the other blearily. One hand went involuntarily to his bloodstained beard, which he did not notice at the time. Hank was thinking, and he could never think comfortably unless he had hold of his whiskers.

The prospector was wetting his handkerchief in the ditch. Now he stood up, wrung the cloth lightly, flipped it open and began folding it bandagewise.

"I'll tie this on to keep the dust out of that gash, brother. They say that it's the road dust that breeds tetanus germs."

"Hunh?"

"Lockjaw germs. That's a bad-looking cut you've got, and I'd better rush you in to the doctor. I wouldn't be surprised if you had concussion, along with the abrasion."

Hank groaned.

"Wish I had a little good whisky to give you. That would brace you up for the journey. You've lost a lot of blood, do you know it?"

Hank groaned again.

"I gotta—see Charley," he muttered weakly.

"That will have to wait, I'm afraid. You're losing strength fast—I can see that. It's a long ways to Goldfield. Come—can you manage to walk to the car?"

Hank didn't know whether he could or not. A deadly chill was creeping up his spine and there was a coldness under his belt.

"Prob'ly Charley's got some booze," he whimpered as the prospector pulled him to his feet.

"Afraid we daren't wait. I'll drive like Billy-be-damn. Don't you worry, old fellow—I'll get you in alive or I'll make Henry Ford look foolish. Come, buck up. It's only a few steps to the car, and I'll just have to fill the radiator and start. Lean on me as hard as you like. Feeling faint?"

"N-n-nhh!" groaned Hank feebly.

"All right, here we are. Now, wait till I get the blankets fixed in the back. Luckily I hadn't unpacked much. Here you are—can you get your feet on the running board? I'll—wait, hang on while I get in front where I can pull you in. That's right. Lie right down on those blankets, and I'll throw this over you."

He fussed with the bedding, meticulously arranging a cushion for Hank's head, which undoubtedly ached considerably. You simply can't have your scalp torn up like the flap of an envelope without feeling uncomfortable above the collar button.

Hank gasped and groaned and was convinced that he would never live to reach Goldfield.

"If I don't make it through," he gasped between moanings that would not have belittled greatly the tortures of the rack, "Bill Woods is my murderer. Remember that—Bill Woods done it."

"I'll remember," the prospector promised gently. "Better let me tie you in with this rope. It will help hold you steady, and protect your head from further injury."

Hank did not reply, and the prospector proceeded to rope him securely to the braces of the Ford top. Hank in his misery was grateful for the support the ropes gave him, never thinking that they might as easily be considered bonds.

The young moon was long gone when the prospector dumped his few cooking utensils into the car, climbed in and put his foot on the starter. He wheeled slowly but surely in the loose soil, pointed the radiator toward Goldfield, approximately, and proceeded to stir up the dust along the road. Behind him Hank grunted and mumbled curses and, finally, makeshift prayers to the God he little dreamed of supplicating.

The prospector smoked his expensive cigarettes and grinned with the sardonic twist to one corner of his mouth, and drove like a wild man through the night.

CHAPTER XXIII.

REMORSE.

MARSHALL stopped and listened, his eyes straining into the dark. A car was leaving the ranch—driving swiftly down the trail, the flicking wisps of light on bush and rock showing the speed with which it traveled. Into his fuddled brain crept a chill dagger of a thought that thrust aside the whisky fumes and planted a fresh terror instead. The murder had been discovered and they were going for the sheriff.

His own wife—it must be his wife, or Joe; unless the strange man who had almost caught him in the act was gone for help to hunt him down. He did not waste much time in wondering who that man could be, but he had a vague idea that it was Nelson.

He ran on, cunningly choosing a straight-away course to the south and making no detours for washes. He tried to estimate the time it would take to bring the sheriff on his trail. He should have brought a canteen—but there hadn't been time to think of preparing for flight. He was lucky to get away at all. That fellow had almost got his hands on him before he dreamed of his presence.

Well, Bill was dead. There would be no more snooping and spying from him. If he had known in time he might have killed the other fellow too; Nelson, was it? He had always believed that Nelson minded his own business and would not interfere with his boss. Fine performance, coming down at night and sneaking around like a coyote! What was he after? In cahoots with Bill, perhaps. Maybe Nelson had reported him, had sent for Bill to come. That was probably the way it had happened; Nelson had sent for Bill, and Bill had purposely lamed himself so that they would be sure to take him in. A damnable trick to play on decent people. A mean, sneaking cur was Bill.

But Bill was dead. No man could live under the terrific blow he had dealt with that wrench; the heavy, sharp corners would crash through bone. Marshall shivered involuntarily as he remembered the thud of that blow. But Bill deserved it—if there had been any other way, or if Bill had not been so utterly despicable Marshall would never have dreamed of taking such a drastic course to protect himself. A spy takes those chances. He knows what he may expect from his outraged victims. Man must be a fool if he thinks he can act the part of a spy and walk safe and arrogant before the men who have trusted him and been betrayed. The mildest nature will revolt against treachery, and Bill had been an ungrateful, treacherous cur who was bound to reap one day what he had sown. Any jury in the country would agree that he had given one spy his just deserts. To come right into a man's family and beg for help, to be taken in and nursed and trusted, and then to repay the debt as he had done—a man like that should not be allowed to live.

Of course, with Bill dead in the bunk house there would be a hue and cry. It wasn't right, nor just, but that was the fool law—that a man has no right to protect the integrity of his home and his own personal freedom. Like the prohibition law. An outrage against free-born citizens, a law no one should obey; better broken than kept. Fellows like Bill they hire to snoop and sneak around a man's home—and like Bill they get what they deserve, sometimes.

If they caught him they'd call him a murderer. Funny, how a man rushes into things he never has dreamed of doing and being. A murderer! He would have expected as easily to be called a leper as a murderer. It wasn't in his nature, in his way of living. It wasn't just to hound and hunt him down like a criminal just because he had become so desperate he had taken matters into his own hands—an impulse of the moment, too. A man driven into a corner will turn and fight for his freedom—which is his honor. Any man will do that. It wasn't his fault that Bill had driven him to desperation.

But Bill was dead—now, back there in the bunk house. He was lying in a heap, his head smashed with that one blow. A heavy wrench; the head of it was covered with blood—the blood of a man he had killed. How easy to kill a man! One blow, with something heavy! A man walks at the mercy of his fellows, at the pleasure of his enemies. One blow with a wrench and they can stretch him out dead, with his head smashed in. It was a wonder so few men were killed for their baseness; a wonder that so many men suffered treachery and wrong; hated, and stayed their hands from giving the lethal blow. Why? Was he less forbearing than his fellows? What right had Nelson to go for the sheriff? To hunt him down like a criminal just because Bill was dead—back there in the bunk house—and there was blood on the wrench? Wasn't a man's freedom as dear to him as —as his wife? What was that verse?—something about not loving thee so well, loved I not honor more. Well, a man's freedom is the same as his honor, and he had killed to protect his freedom. Same thing as protecting his wife. Same thing.

Only, his wife wouldn't think so. Henrietta had liked Bill. Probably she liked him

better than she did her husband—women had no sense of loyalty. Maybe she'd uphold the law in hunting him down—would call him a murderer, even.

Marshall ran on, feeling terribly abused and sorry for himself and indignant with his wife and the sheriff—and Bill for deserving to be killed. Why couldn't Bill have behaved like a gentleman? Like the gentleman Marshall himself had always been, for instance? He bridled a bit, lifting his head and holding it proudly while he dwelt on the pleasing thought that he had shown himself a man of iron in the face of an emergency. That would surprise them! Folks had probably put him down as a weakling who couldn't stand up and deliver a blow for himself. Didn't think he had it in him, probably! The next spy would think twice before he came snooping around as Bill had done. He'd think of what had happened to Bill, and he wouldn't be quite so ready to take over the job.

Marshall himself thought of Bill, and the first reaction of a perverted kind of pride in the deed became darkened with a growing horror at the details. In spite of himself he began to form an incredibly vivid picture of Bill Woods lying in a distorted heap on the floor with his head shattered. He pictured the extent and appearance of the wound, he heard again and again the dull impact of the wrench, saw it gory and spattered in his hand when he drew it back from the window. He began to wipe his fingers down his trouser legs as he trotted through the sparse sage; a furtive movement obeying the persistent idea that his hands were smeared with Bill's blood. The blow struck in defense of his freedom began to lose a little of its glamour. The picture of Bill Woods lying dead in the bunk house became the impelling motive for flight, the injustice of being pursued by the sheriff fading to a dim, unformed dread of capture. He felt again the stark terror that had seized him when that strange man had reached out from behind and all but laid hands on him by the bunk-house window.

He bettered his pace for a while, then dropped back to the shambling trot that was easier on his wind. In a deep wash he lay down for a while and rested, his head on his folded arms. Perhaps he dozed—certainly he dreamed; a sequence of past experiences that began away back in his school days and carried him forward, scene by scene to this final act, the dreadful sound of that blow delivered in the half light of the young moon. He shivered and opened his eyes, turning his head instinctively to stare back along the way he had come.

So this was the end of everything, this flight into the desert with a dead man behind him, driving him on. He could not drug his conscience now with self-justifications—that terrible cinema of memory had relentlessly shown him scenes wherein he had been given the choice and had weakly chosen to indulge the desire of the moment; had stripped his soul of sophistry. The dead body he pictured to himself smothered him under the weight of its accusation.

After a while he got up, stood hesitating. He had done a murder, he, Charles Marshall who had once been a man whose integrity none might question. Should he go back and let them take him and hang him? He wept, and his tears were not altogether maudlin tears of self-pity. He was thinking of certain times in his past when he might have gone right, might have held his place among men. He could not go back. His wife—Joe—he could not go back and add that final scene to the burden of their disgrace. Enough that he had killed a man and had gone off and died in the desert. It could be said then that he was insane; they could gloss the facts, people would sympathize with them because of a great affliction visited upon them. No glossing things over for them, if he were caught and hanged.

He swung about and faced the desert, lying so quiet under the stars, with the quiet of invincibility. Away off there lay Death Valley, the very name carrying a sinister note of its own. He could walk that far, if he kept going. It would be better for Henrietta and for Joe if he could add that touch to his passing. Better than to have it said that he had died almost within hail of his own bed. A picturesque touch—also a touch of finality. Only let him walk far enough toward Death Valley, and the desert would take care of the rest of it! Especially since he had no water. If he could walk far enough before he lost his grip on this last decent impulse, he'd *have* to go through with it. He couldn't get back when his determination weakened and he would live at any price. The price would be too high, his endurance couldn't pay it.

Already he was thirsty. With the im-

pulse of long habit he pulled the flask from his pocket, drew out the cork. But there he stopped as if a hand had stayed him. Whisky—it would rob him of the power to choose what he should do with the little time left of his life. Why couldn't he be decent at the very last? Wasn't it enough that the whisky had driven him to murder? Must he let it order his last few hours? How could he hope to walk into Death Valley if he let whisky cast the deciding vote? And if he should go stumbling back —drunk—maudlin——

He lifted the bottle high, sent it smashing down on a rock. The fumes rose mockingly from the liquor spilt in the sand, and he snarled and kicked at the wet spot until glass fragments and moisture were covered from sight. Then he glanced up into the star pageant, located the North Star with some difficulty, pressed his lips together in a grim line and started south, straight as might be for Death Valley.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DESERT DAWN.

"HE'S perking up," Bill announced after what seemed an interminable plodding through sand with the limp body of a seventy-pound dog in his arms, the head grotesquely bandaged with his handkerchief. "Cheer up, Joe girl. He'll live to take many a call-down and track many a rabbit to its lair."

"I can't cheer up till we find daddy," Joe returned dispiritedly, and knelt beside Lobo where Bill had laid him on the ground beside a bush that must be lighted. "It's almost morning and we haven't found him." She gathered Lobo's head into her lap, her fingers sliding with a caressing motion down along his neck. "If Lobo was all right he could help. I wish mother hadn't trained me to be so darn' just and sensible. It would be some comfort if I could blame you for everything and hate you for it."

"Help yourself," Bill invited ironically, groping with his bare fingers for dried grasses that would burn easily at the touch of a match flame. "I have a few things in mind, but I can't very well mention them except in self-defense; your driving Lobo off with kicks and ladylike curses, for instance, so that the poor brute was forced to manifest his loyalty by sneaking along behind in the shadows."

"That isn't true! You were too lazy to get out of the car and walk, so you wanted me to make the dog do it. What I should do right now is drive *you* home with kicks and curses that are *not* ladylike! A great big hulk like you, laying all the blame on me and the dog. And how do I know you didn't hurt daddy, your own self, there in the bunk house? It's all very well for you to come tagging along, but how do I know you didn't *plan* to shoot my dog so he couldn't find daddy for me in time? Probably," she went on furiously, rising upon her knees to lend emphasis to her hysterical denunciation, "probably you nearly killed daddy and chased him into the desert! And now you don't want me to find him if you can help it. And that," she finished wildly, "is why you shot—my—dog!"

Bill had the bush blazing, and now he stood up and looked at Joe, sobbing tearlessly with her face buried in Lobo's shoulder. The dog lifted his head, looked at Bill with his lip curled at one side, and began licking Joe's cheek to show how well he understood and sympathized. Bill had wanted to rouse her out of her apathy, but he hadn't counted on so sweeping a success as this.

"All right," he sneered half-heartedly, "since you know all about it, what are you going to do? Funk the job, and make me carry you as well as your dog? Or shall I call a taxi? This blaze won't last forever, you know."

"What do I care for the blaze? There are plenty more bushes," Joe retorted after a considerable interval during which Bill stood looking down at her and biting his lip. He couldn't carry her, that much was certain, and it began to look as if he had hastened the collapse he had tried to avert. But there was spirit in her defiance, though she still lay with her head on the dog.

"Well, I'll go on, then." But he did not move. "Here's a match. I haven't many left, so one is all I can spare."

When Joe refused to stir or answer him, Bill stooped and placed a match in her hand. He saw her fingers close over it and snap it into pieces, and he swore under his breath. He had told the truth when he said he was almost out of matches. He waited, one eye on the firelight that was fading as swiftly as it had flared. When it was almost gone he searched and found a dry sage branch, pushed it into the heart of the

small blaze that was left, and when the flame took hold he hurried on to another bush and thrust the brand beneath the shaggiest of the branches. He glanced uneasily back over his shoulder and sighed with exhaustion and an impotent anger that was more than half pity. Joe had not stirred. She and the dog lay just as he had left them, the two figures blended into one vague huddle beside the reddening branches of the bush that would presently be all black and leafless, a stark skeleton whipping bleakly in the wind.

He would have gone back, but the spitefulness of those fingers breaking the match and dropping the pieces on the ground chilled him and roused a certain stubbornness in himself. He shrugged his shoulders, found the footprints in the sand and went on with his lips drawn to a line. Let her sulk. She'd soon get over that tantrum if he left her alone, and she would be all right with the dog to look after her. Just now the important thing was to follow the footprints and find the man who had made them before all three reached the limit of their endurance, which Bill thought might well be rather near. Joe and the dog could come on, following the line of burned bushes. If the dog was not able to keep the trail Joe would find it simple enough. And as she had pointed out to him, the night was almost gone.

So he shambled on from bush to bush set burning. Pity they were over the ridge and out of sight from the ranch, he thought, for that moving line of fire would tell a tale of need to any eyes that glimpsed it. But the long slope hid them completely, and only the desolate borderland of Death Valley lay within view of their toilsome search.

It was with a distinct shock, for all his hours of expectancy, that Woods came so suddenly upon the prone form of Marshall that his foot actually struck against one sprawled leg. He was lying half on his face, as if he had fallen and lacked the will or the strength to move, though his forehead rested upon an arm. Bill hurried to a bent, dead yucca that would not prove too close for comfort, and fired its shaggy base, returning at a heavy trot to Marshall, the canteen plopping awkwardly against his back. He knelt, lifted the inert head and began to use what simple first aid might be had from a canteen half full of tepid water.

Dawn came, pearly gray, then rose and crimson and violet, but Bill scarcely noticed it. He was down on both knees, wetting Marshall's handkerchief from the canteen and sopping the man's thin, gray hair and pinched face, with its leaden pallor, when Joe came walking through the sage, Lobo with the handkerchief still bound rakishly around his head and closing one eye completely.

For a girl who had lately displayed all the makings of hysteria Joe's behavior was singularly undramatic. She turned a shade paler and dropped beside her father, gathering his head into her arms with a maternal tenderness wholly and unconsciously feminine. She put out a hand for the wet handkerchief, and pressed her lips upon her father's forehead before laying the handkerchief there. He was alive, breathing almost naturally, and that seemed to suffice for the present.

"I went to sleep, back there," she stated quietly after a space, turning her head to meet Bill's eyes. "You'd better take a nap while I watch daddy. You look about all in, and we've got our work cut out for us, I expect. I'll call you when he wakes up."

"Be careful of the water," Bill muttered. "There isn't more than a quart and it's got to see us to the truck."

"All right—but Lobo's got to have a drink. He's feverish from that bullet hole. He can have my share. I'm—not a bit thirsty. Will you pour out a little water in my hat?"

Bill hesitated, lifting the canteen and shaking it. But the wistful look in the dog's eyes, the head cocked sidewise expectantly, weakened his resolution. He poured out a little water and stood by while the dog lapped it up thirstily. Bill held out the canteen to Joe.

"Better take a big drink now, before you begin to want it," he advised. "I did, just before you came up. It's the best way to stave off thirst later on—keep your system satisfied longer."

Joe looked doubtful, but Bill had a specious explanation and she drank what she wanted, convinced that she would thereby need less later on. Bill swallowed and turned away, satisfied with his lie. If Marshall recovered sufficiently to walk to the truck they would suffer no more than a certain amount of discomfort. He would have shot a rabbit and broiled it for their breakfast, but there didn't seem to be any

rabbits; nothing but lizards, and they had not yet reached the point of resorting to such fare. He lay down in the sand, pulled his hat over his eyes and slept.

He awoke with a confused sense of misfortune, and with the strident voice of a man hammering at his consciousness. For a minute or two he failed to identify that voice or his surroundings, but presently a reiterated phrase or two brought him back to the present and he sat up.

"I don't *want* to live, I tell you. I came out here to die and be done with it, and I'm going to die in spite of you. It's all I can do, now. I'm a miserable wreck of a man. I won't wreck my family. You can leave the desert and all it stands for—me along with it. A hateful place—a barren, God-forsaken world, fit for a drunkard and a murderer to die in. Better than hanging. Why did you bring me back to life? I was dead, I tell you. I drove myself on and on—and then I dropped. I was almost through with it. I'd have been too dead to come back, in another hour. Then it would have been all right and you could have mourned decently for a little while, and then forgot me. Take that damned cloth away! You're only dragging out the finish, I tell you. My God, can't a man die when he wants to? Go home, Josephine. I don't want you here. This is something I have to do—I *want* to do. I—I insist that you obey me. Go to your mother."

"Not without you, daddy. The truck isn't far away, and—and when you're rested and all, you'll feel a lot different." She glanced up as Bill approached, and her eyes were dark and deep and sorrowful. "He'll be all right in a little bit," she said bravely. "He isn't quite——"

A groan from Marshall stopped her. He was staring at Bill with a great horror in his face, and as Bill walked closer he made a convulsive effort to free himself from Joe's arms, struggled to his feet and ran staggeringly away from them.

They overtook him, stopped him by force and he slumped down again in the sand, his face hidden. Joe gave him an impatient shake, much as she would a child.

"For pity's sake, Dad Marshall, have some sense! I know what would happen if I acted like this—and—— Dad! you've simply got to buck up and go home. Mother is simply *wild*. She and Barby have been tearing all over the country in the car, looking for you. You haven't hurt Bill, you see. You're not a—you haven't done anything to make such a fuss over, and as for hanging, that's all foolishness and you know it. I hate to say it, dad, but I think you're just simply off your head from drinking. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, talking like that about dying out here. You're going home in the truck, and no more nonsense."

Marshall looked up bleakly into her face.

"I'm not drunk. If I lived to be a hundred I'd never touch it again. It's pretty late in the day to swear off." He looked around, at the desert all smiling under the morning sun. "It's as good a place as any for the final act," he said stubbornly. "Go on and let me alone. Tell your mother I'm crazy. Tell her it was too late when you found me." His voice still had the strident, rasping note that had affected Bill so unpleasantly when he woke; weak, yet stubborn beyond the reach of argument; harsh, yet full of a gentleness that would not yield.

Joe stared down at him in some perplexity, the corners of her mouth drooping as though she wanted to cry—would, when the present crisis was safely passed. She had never seen her father in just this mood, and she was obliged to grope her way through his obsession to his reason.

"If you've made up your mind to stop drinking, daddy, there won't be anything more to worry us in this world. And you know it's all nonsense to talk about murdering Bill. You can see him standing right there without a scratch on him."

"No matter," her father insisted dully. "I killed a man. With a wrench. Slipped up——"

"You did *not!* Don't you suppose I know?" She drew in her breath as if she had about reached the limit of her patience. "I'm ashamed of you! Here, take a drink of water and come on with us to the truck. It isn't far, and we'll help you, daddy. Come on, there's a good old dad." Her fingers were busy, unscrewing the canteen top. She held out the canteen toward him ingratiatingly. "Drink a lot, dad. There's plenty at the truck."

It seemed at first as though Marshall would refuse to touch the canteen. Then he took it, an odd, half-crazy light in his eyes.

"Good girl—Joe," he muttered. "Too bad you couldn't have—decent father." He

looked at her, the canteen tilted in his hands, the water streaming from its mouth to the greedy sand.

"Look out!" Bill cried hoarsely because of the parched feeling in his throat. "You're spilling it!" He started forward, but Marshall gave a shrill laugh and flung the canteen mouth downward into the farthest bush his strength would reach.

"A man's got a right to die if he wants to!" he cried, his burning eyes on Joe. "Made up my mind—only decent thing to do. Go home to your mother. Tell her —tell your mother Charles did one decent thing. Future's before you—clean."

Bill came back with the canteen, and his face was grim, a disgusted look in his eyes when they turned to Marshall lying slack in the sand, one arm flung up over his face.

"We ought to leave you here," he gritted, "and let you do your martyr stuff." He looked at Joe and crowding back another biting sentence, made shift to smile down into her pinched face. "We've just naturally *got* to hike back to the car, now," he said. "I'll hold you up so you can maybe spot it and save back trailing." He caught her by the knees and hoisted her in his arms, paying no attention to Marshall, who was like a dead man at his feet.

"I can't see it," Joe confessed reluctantly after a long minute. "We stopped in a wash, you know."

She slid down through Bill's arms and stood staring at her father, Bill's hand on her shoulder. He could feel the tremor under his hand, as if her flesh was protesting dumbly against the hard usage of the past twenty-four hours. She was so little and slim and young, Bill thought, to bear so great a burden; yet bear it she did, with a brave assumption of casual solicitude and nothing more. But Bill was not fooled. He patted her shoulder hearteningly.

"Well," he remarked as cheerfully as he could, "we'd better break camp, since we can't whistle the car up to us. Maybe the dog can take us by a short cut. You might speak to him about it while I get your father on his feet. And don't worry over moods, little girl. They'll pass and everything will be fine when we get headed toward home."

She did not answer, and Bill turned his attention to Marshall, shaking and calling and getting no response. Marshall had lapsed into a stupor which nothing seemed to break, wherefore Bill heaved him up, managed to pull his arms forward across his shoulders and staggered off in the direction Joe and Lobo were taking. Lobo, he observed, was walking steadily, pulling at the leash. He hoped the dog knew where he was going. If not, if they were walking blindly, they would have to retrace the line of burned bushes. Bill did not like to think of that. He grinned sardonically when he thought how he had considered it impossible to carry Joe. A man never knew until he tried, until he was pushed to it. Joe looked often over her shoulder as if she, too, was measuring the quality of Bill's endurance; when he caught her glance Bill would stretch his lips in what purported to be a cheerful grin, and would force himself to a steady gait.

The milk was sour, clabbered thick as cheese in the bottle. They broke the neck off the bottle with a rock and tried to force a little of the stuff between Marshall's set teeth, and failed. So Bill and Joe divided the clabber with meticulous impartiality, using the canteen top for a spoon. The milk refreshed them wonderfully, made it possible to go on.

Bill's mind was divided between two questions that asked themselves over and over until even his incredulous denial of one and his determination in answering the other with proof, reeled together in a drunken dance while reason played the fiddle and mowed and mocked at the two. Could it be possible that they three were to die out here of thirst and exhaustion, in spite of all reason? Was fate meaning to collect a Shylockian payment for one man's sins and another man's human limitations? At first he said no, and believed it. Later, he was not so sure. The second question was whether he were man enough, whether the fiber of his soul was strong enough, to carry Marshall to the truck. For a long while he stoutly declared that he could carry Marshall to the ranch if necessary. After a while he was not so sure; later he was pushed to the point of saying yes to the first question, no to the second; which did not make his grin any more bright or convincing.

Came a time when he would not stop to rest, because he knew that if he laid Marshall on the ground one more time he could never get him hoisted to his shoulders again, even with Joe's help. Joe, he observed, was

staggering a bit, though she kept on steadily, the leash taut to Lobo's collar. Bill was glad she had brought the leash with her from the truck; it helped her now, with Lobo pulling against it.

"Want to rest?" Joe's voice was an odd croak.

"No. Keep going." One foot down, the other foot lifted and moved ahead. Every time he did that he advanced a certain distance. Enough of such advances would carry him through. Had he sounded abrupt? He had not meant it—but the breath and energy used in one sentence might carry him two or three steps, and talking dried the mouth and throat. Marshall wasn't dead. He could feel his heart beat. Lobo was helping Joe, taking half the labor off walking. It was better than when Bill held her hand and helped her along; the pull was stronger. Good thing that wind had blown up a bank of clouds. That might save their lives—that and the sour milk. They could not have gone on under a blazing sun. It couldn't be far to the truck. One foot up and forward—how many to a mile? Bill tried to figure it out in his head and found that his head refused to work on so futile a problem. The next step was all that mattered, after all. If he kept on taking that next step, he'd win, and if he didn't they would probably all die of thirst, since Joe would never leave her father. No use counting his steps—the only thing he had to do was keep going. The dry lake lay behind them, they couldn't have circled, after all, during the night. They must have continued straight toward the dry lake. It was the wind that had changed, not the footprints.

Mountains rose before them, a muddy blue in the distance. Bill went doggedly on, putting one foot before the other, his fingers numb with their grip on Marshall's wrists. Funny about those mountains. The whole thing was funny. They had been out of sight of everything, long before they left the truck. Mirage, probably. The desert plays tricks with a man, once it gets him out away from help. Well, he was fooling the desert, too. He was still walking with Marshall on his back. He wouldn't have believed a man could do what he was doing. Put them in a story—he'd have typed their horrible death long ago. Funny how a man will hang onto life!

Joe sent a queer, dismayed look over her shoulder while Lobo forged ahead with renewed energy, pulling her forward.

"Bill!" Her voice was tragic. "He never started for the truck, at all! He's headed—home!"

To be concluded in the next issue, August 20th.

STANDARD-SIZE BRICKS

AMERICAN brick manufacturers produce seven billion bricks a year, but until recently they were compelled to supply bricks of various sizes and shapes. Now only one size will be manufactured—eight by three and three quarter inches. This change has been brought about by the combined efforts of the manufacturers and of the department of commerce, and as cheaper manufacturing will result from the adoption of this standard size there should be a slight decrease in the cost of brick houses. Should be, we said.

WHEN A BANKER IS COURTEOUS

SEVERAL congressmen in the Republican cloakroom were discussing and bawling out a Washington banker who has the name of being close fisted, tight and rude to would-be borrowers who work on salaries and come to him for loans when they are not loaded down with good security.

"Oh," objected one of them, "he's not so bad. I went in and asked him for a loan of four thousand dollars the other day, and he treated me with great courtesy."

"You mean," put in another, "he lent you all that money?"

"No," said the tight man's defender; "he didn't lend it to me, but he hesitated before he refused!"

Jimmy Williams Mops Up

By Frank Parker Stockbridge

Author of "Jimmy Williams Smells a Rat," "Jimmy Williams Wins a Stake," Etc.

Jimmy and Mary put the Indian sign on the dope-smuggling ring.

JIMMY WILLIAMS looked across the table at Mary Monckton.

"How long will it take you to change back again?" he asked.

"Do you always lose interest as quickly as that?" asked Mary. "I thought you rather fancied me in this get-up."

"I do; as a Frenchwoman you are perfectly charming. I don't wonder Paul Simon was interested. But he's on to you now and so is the countess. If there are any costumes left in that trunk of yours, I suggest another quick change."

"How soon?" asked Mary.

"As soon as we can get you up to your rooms," replied Jimmy. "The night's young yet, and if our birds haven't taken alarm they are less quick-witted than I give them credit for being. Our cue is to work fast. Stick tight here for a minute while I telephone Burnside."

Jimmy rose from the table and crossed the room. There were not half a dozen other diners in the Lafayette, at this middle period between the early-dinner crowd and the after-theater supper rush. His photographic eye snapshotted, registered and classified everybody in the room. Evidently, he concluded, nobody had trailed their taxicab in the wild flight from Le Rat Mort to the Lafayette.

He got the head of the famous detective agency on his second telephone trial.

"This is 324-A," he said. "Will you get hold of 'Slugger' and arrange to meet us in his rooms in half an hour? Line up the groups we were talking about earlier this evening, for quick action."

"The Federal crowd?" asked Burnside.

"Yes; both ends of it," was Jimmy's cryptic reply.

"I will have the local heads of both ends up there," responded Burnside.

On his way back to the dining room Jimmy paused for a brief interview with the man in charge of the coat-check room. Three minutes later, comfortably wrapped in outer garments the ownership of which was doubtful, but concerning the warmth of which there was no room for dispute, Jimmy and Mary were hurrying northward in a taxicab, through the frosty night.

"I'm going to make the effort of my life to get into that soap factory to-night," said Jimmy as the cab sped up the avenue. "I've got a hunch that there's a way to get in there, but I'll need some help. Are you game for another active hour or two?"

"Never felt fitter in my life," responded Mary, "now that I've had something to eat."

"Very well then," said Jimmy as the taxi stopped at the door of Mary's hotel. "Put on something warm that won't hamper your movements—some kind of sport costume, I should suggest—and I'll pick you up here as soon as I've given Burnside and the Federal men the dope. You might bring that pinch bar of yours along; I suspect it might come in useful."

He did not leave Mary until he had seen her safely on the elevator leading up to her rooms, and not even then until he had sent a scout ahead, in the person of the captain of the bell boys, to make sure that Paul Simon, the international crook and putative head of the opium-smuggling ring, had not set another trap for the girl. Then he drove on to his own rooms.

At the door he stripped off his "borrowed" hat and overcoat and threw them into the taxicab with the wrap Mary had worn and an injunction to the driver, backed up by a generous tip, to take the garments back to the Lafayette without delay.

After changing from his evening clothes into tweed knickers, sweater and Norfolk jacket, he shifted his money, his automatic, his flash light and half a cake of toilet soap, with a peculiar rectangular indentation in its broken surface, from one set of pockets to the other, pulled a cap down over his eyes, and descended again to the street.

"I couldn't talk freely over the telephone, of course," he said as he greeted William Allan Burnside a few minutes later in Slugger Forsyth's rooms. The two other men Burnside introduced as Wilkinson, local chief of the Federal narcotic squad and Evan Lewis, chief treasury special agent of the customs service.

"You can talk with perfect freedom before these gentlemen," Burnside explained. "It happens that both of them are in full sympathy with Forsyth's work and we've prepared them for this interview by assuring them that you're not the sort to lead any one off on a wild-goose chase."

"Even if I do go on one myself occasionally," smiled Jimmy. "Thanks for them kind words. But this isn't the first time I've met our friend Lewis here." He stepped out of the shade which had half concealed his face and let the light shine full upon him as he smiled blandly at the astonished customs man.

"Why in blazes didn't you tell me it was *Jimmy* Williams that we were going to meet?" demanded Evan Lewis, as he seized Jimmy's hand with a vigorous clasp. "Why, I'm the guy that started this fellow on his career of crime."

"I didn't name him because he's traveling incognito," explained Burnside.

"I've heard of you, too," spoke up Wilkinson. "I thought you were out of the government service, though."

"I am," replied Jimmy. "Resignation on file in Washington, and all that. I thought from what Mr. Burnside said just now that you were on to our play." He shot an inquiring glance at Forsyth.

The famous ex-football star, whose pseudonym of Slugger testified to the affection in which the memory of his exploits on the gridiron was held by twenty classes which had followed him at his alma mater, raised his eyebrows questioningly as he glanced at the others. Jimmy nodded.

"You tell 'em, Jimmy," said Forsyth. "Of course, it's understood that we don't want any publicity."

"We'll regard this meeting as properly confidential," said Wilkinson, and the others smilingly nodded their assent.

"All I know," said Jimmy, "is that Slugger Forsyth set a trap for me and caught me. I was looking for a nice easy job without any adventure or action in it, and he was looking for somebody to help in his work of coöperating, on this side of the water, with the International Narcotic Commission of the League of Nations. That was yesterday morning; and since then adventures is something I haven't had nothing else but.

"The first one was bumping into Paul Simon."

"Paul Simon!" exclaimed Lewis. "I've heard of him, but this is the first I knew he was in America."

"He's here," responded Jimmy, "and before the night's over I hope to be able to lead you to him. It's a matter of getting a little more evidence, which I am going to try to do pronto. I think we're very close

up on the trail now, chief," he added, turning to Forsyth.

"Mary all right?" asked Forsyth. "Mary —Miss Monckton," he explained to the others, "is a young woman who has a positive flair for secret-service work. She was studying opera in Paris when I first met her and there she did excellent work in helping to round up some bolshevik propagandists. She's an American who has lived in Constantinople, speaks several languages and is an athlete as well as a singer."

"And a damned pretty girl into the bargain," interposed Burnside. "I met her last night or, at least, about two o'clock this morning."

"Nobody's kidnaped her again, have they?" asked Forsyth.

"Not so far as I know," replied Jimmy. "I left her at her hotel a few minutes ago, preparing to make another change of identity. You see," he went on, explaining to the others, "through an entirely accidental, but nevertheless regrettable coincidence, Paul Simon discovered yesterday morning that Miss Monckton was aware of his identity and presence in New York, and he undertook without delay to abduct her. She pried her way out through the floor of a locked limousine, having had enough service as an ambulance driver in France to know how a car is put together, and got away. Then, last night, at the Countess Reynal's masked ball, Simon shows up with a bunch of his apaches and tries to get away with her again. But she was once more a little too clever for him, and his gang kidnaped one of their own women instead. Incidentally, I bumped into Simon and relieved him of half a peck or so of jewelry he had gathered up from the countess' guests."

"I saw something about that robbery in the paper," said Lewis. "They gave you credit for finding the loot, Burnside; I hope you split the reward with our young friend here."

"That was the way I happened to meet Miss Monckton," said Burnside. "Jimmy Williams had her with him when he called at my house, a while after midnight, and gave me the stones to return to their owners."

"And I can assure you that my share of the reward money was entirely satisfactory," said Jimmy, smiling inwardly with satisfaction at the thought of the check for twenty-four thousand four hundred dollars which Burnside had turned over to him a few hours earlier.

"Now, gentlemen, let's get down to business," Jimmy went on. He took the broken cake of toilet soap from his pocket and handed it to Wilkinson, who examined it curiously and passed it on to Lewis.

"It looks to me as if that soap had been molded around a small box of some sort," Lewis suggested.

"That's what it looks like to me," responded Jimmy. "Now, I asked you gentlemen to be here because I think I know where that soap came from and I'm sure I know where you can find a lot of it. If, as I suspect, a little metal box that was inside of this piece of soap before it was broken contains heroin or morphine, then we've got a case, and we've got both Paul Simon and the Countess Reynal."

"The countess is in this, you think?" asked Lewis.

"If I'm not wrong, she's the brains of the outfit," replied Jimmy. "Do you know the lady?"

"Well enough so that I personally met the ship when she came in last, and took a great deal of pains to see that she wasn't slipping something over on the customs," replied Lewis. "Nobody's ever pinned anything on her, but our agents in Paris seemed to think she was worth watching. We didn't get anything, though."

"Well, if you, Mr. Wilkinson, can go out to the old Willoughby place—you know where it is, out on Long Island between Jericho and Hicksville—and get into the second-story-front south bedroom, you'll find a package tied to a slat under the bed. If I'm not mistaken, the package is full of soap and the soap is full of dope. I'd suggest working fast, because I believe Simon and the countess are both thoroughly alarmed by now and they may slip through our fingers if we don't hustle.

"If you'll do that, I'll start out in a few minutes and see if I can verify my suspicion as to the origin of the doped soap, in which case I shall have another piece of work to turn over to you."

"Are we likely to have much trouble out at the countess'?" asked Wilkinson.

"I don't think the countess is at home," replied Jimmy. "There's a houseful of servants, but they're pretty low-class stuff —Paris sewer rats—and I don't believe they'll put up much of a fight. I'd suggest

taking them in as witnesses because one of them, at least, knows that Simon personally took this package of soap to the countess this afternoon. I personally can identify the wrappings, if it's the same package I saw Simon start out with, which I'm sure it must be.

"We've got Mary Monckton to thank for planting the package where it is not likely to have been discovered. She made herself up to look like a Frenchwoman, and went out to the countess' to-day and fraternized with the servants. She was in the house when Simon arrived, and found a chance to hide the package he had brought. Then she took her nerve in her hand, got into Simon's car and drove back to town with him. Before they had reached the city he had offered her a job to sing in his cabaret at The Dead Rat. And she would have got down to the bottom of this affair if it had not been for the accident of her dropping that card you gave her, Burnside, somewhere around the countess' house.

"I happened to be snooping around one of the back doors of Le Rat Mort when the countess came in and put Simon wise that the girl he had hired was the same one he had been trying to put out of the way. It was touch and go for a minute, but between us we managed to get her out of there. Now I'm going back to finish my interrupted explorations."

"The Dead Rat?" asked Wilkinson. "That's at the corner of Varley Street and Rosetta Lane, isn't it? We've had our eye on that place; there's a tough bunch hangs out there. While we've suspected it as a source of dope, they've covered their tracks pretty well."

"Here's the layout, as I get it," replied Jimmy. "It takes in a whole block—a rough triangle, bounded by Varley Street, Jasper Street and a little alley which runs south from the bend in Jasper Street, with Rosetta Lane as the base of the triangle. The Dead Rat is an L-shaped building with entrances on Varley Street and Rosetta Lane. Next to it on Varley Street is an Oriental-rug warehouse, the proprietor of which is known as Varzhabedian. Well, Varzhabedian is Paul Simon."

"The deuce you say!" exclaimed Evan Lewis. "Varzhabedian is passing apparently innocent stuff through the customs all the time."

"That's why I asked to have you come up here to-night," said Jimmy. "I'll come to that later.

"Next to the warehouse is a garage," he went on. "Now, there's a door from the side of the garage to the basement of the warehouse. I know, because I went through it. There's also a door from the warehouse basement into The Dead Rat; I went through that, too, leaving my hat and overcoat in the basement.

"That's as far as I got, and I didn't find any contraband of any kind in any of those places, or anything suspicious except this half cake of soap, but fronting on Jasper Street and backing up to a little one-storied building on Varley Street, with probably a back yard in between, is a big old mansion, into which Mary and I both saw Paul Simon and one of his men enter yesterday. There's a connection, beyond a doubt, between the cellar of that house and the warehouse basement. I think it's the place where he houses his gang of Parisian apaches and their lady friends, who work for him. What else is in there you can guess as well as I.

"What interests me at the moment, however, is the fact that next to this house on Jasper Street, occupying the apex of the triangle, is a soap factory. Now I propose to explore that soap factory in the course of the next hour. If there isn't anything there, then there isn't anything to do, but if my hunch is right we'll find something which'll call for prompt action. I want to suggest, therefore, that among you, you arrange for a cordon around that entire block, ready to guard every entrance of the buildings I've named when you get the signal from me. I won't give it unless I have very conclusive evidence, but if I get that evidence we don't want to let any of the parties involved get away. I believe in making a thorough clean-up while we're at it."

"Sounds all right to me," said Burnside. "I can get half a dozen of my operatives down there in twenty minutes."

"I'll detail a couple of my men to help," agreed Wilkinson. "I think I'd better be starting for Jericho now. I'll take three men with me. I know where that old Willoughby place is."

"It listens good," said Evan Lewis, "but I don't see where the customs service comes in."

"Just this way," said Jimmy, reaching over to the table and picking up a sheet of paper and a lead pencil. He drew some

cabalistic marks on the paper and passed it to Lewis.

"Would the customs people be able to identify imports marked in that fashion?"

"Yes; we keep a record of all the shipping marks as they appear on the manifests," Lewis replied.

"They were wrapping up a lot of rugs into bales, in the basement of the warehouse to-day," said Jimmy, "and all the bales were marked like that. That's an import mark, and it had me guessing. They took the bales through from the basement into the garage and loaded them in a big truck. The truck went out and I heard Simon give instructions to take the bales to 'the usual place' and bring the others back.

"Now, I want to know whether, as a matter of customhouse practice, it would be possible somewhere, on the pier or in a bonded warehouse or somewhere between the two, to substitute bales of rugs properly marked for other bales similarly marked, before the other bales had been opened and inspected by the customs officials?"

"I see what you're driving at," said Lewis. "You think they're smuggling opium inside of bales of rugs and making a substitution at this end, so that the bales which are opened are perfectly harmless?"

"That's my guess," said Jimmy. "I couldn't follow the truck and, so far as I know, it hadn't come back when I left, something over an hour ago. I thought you might be able to check up to-morrow and see what shipments have come in for Varzhabedian and where the bales are supposed to be now. And, if my guess is right, another exploration at the warehouse might turn up some bales with a few chests of opium inside of them."

"I can check that up in an hour," replied Lewis. "We are running day-and-night shifts at the customhouse now. There's been only one ship in from the Levant in the last week. I'll take hold of that end and report."

"Let's arrange about a signal," suggested Burnside. "I'll plant some men inside The Dead Rat and a few others outdoors in the general vicinity."

"Two shots from an automatic ought to stir 'em up," said Jimmy. "Mary and I both carry guns."

Forsyth's four guests departed together, each agreeing to report any developments by telephone or in person. Mary was waiting for Jimmy when he reached her hotel.

"I'm a little bit concerned about the absence of anything that looks like pursuit," Jimmy admitted as they stepped into a taxicab and started for the vicinity of Jasper Street once more. "Simon has been so quick on the trigger heretofore that we can only account for his apparent inactivity now by assuming that either he is covering his tracks even more effectively than before, or that we've got him so scared that he's running around in circles. We'll find out soon, though. Did you bring your jewelry along?"

For answer, Mary produced from inside her rough sports coat an octagonal steel bar, about a foot long, flattened down to a screwdriver point at one end with a claw at the other; at the same time she held up her right hand so that Jimmy could see the muzzle of a pistol projecting from her sleeve.

"I'll take that," said Jimmy, reaching for the pinch bar, which he shoved into his sweater.

"I left the nitroglycerin and the skeleton keys on the piano," laughed Mary. "I'd hate to be pinched for speeding, or anything else, carrying this equipment. But isn't it sport, Jimmy?"

"You said it, Mary," he replied. "I don't know another girl who could go through what you have since we first met—when was it? Yesterday or last year?—and have her nerve and enthusiasm left."

"But look who I've got for a partner," replied Mary. "If it wasn't for that telltale habit of yours of wiggling your left ear, I wouldn't have a thing to worry about."

"I'm not worrying a bit about that," responded Jimmy. "I *am* worrying a little about you, however. I don't know but what it's foolish to bring you down into the lion's den again, even though you do look entirely different. We'd be in an awful mess if anything should happen. We've not a leg to stand on if we're pinched for burglary, and we can't make any public explanation of what we're up to."

"That's what makes it so thrilling, Jimmy," was Mary's reply. In the half darkness of the cab's interior Jimmy could see her eyes glistening. He felt it too—the thrill of the man hunt—the exaltation born of risk. He knew he could never go back to the humdrum pursuits of other men. He

had been foolish to let himself think, even for a fortnight, that the life of the market place could hold any real satisfaction for him. And as he realized this, other thoughts stole in unbidden upon his reflections.

Women had never figured in Jimmy Williams' life except as passing episodes, if at all. He had wondered, sometimes, why he, unlike other men, had never felt the urge to take some one woman to himself, found a home and rear a family; now he realized the answer clearly. They were incompatible, domestic life and this passion for action and adventure. Subconsciously he must have known it all along. There had been more than one girl to whom he had been strongly attracted; more than once he had known, as a man always does know, that he had but to say the word and she was his. But now, before he sensed where this line of reflection was leading him, he found himself squarely up against its unexpected conclusions.

In the fraction of a second that his self-examination had taken, the world had changed for him. The girl by his side was no longer merely a pal, a brave, reckless, true-blue sportswoman; in an instant she had become the one thing in life worth living for, worth fighting for—worth dying for, if need be. The one girl in the world who would not be a drag on him, a millstone about his neck.

The realization tied his tongue. He glanced at Mary furtively, almost timidly. Once before, since he and Mary had first met, he had felt an unaccustomed sensation, when she seemed to have fallen into the clutches of Paul Simon's crew. He had wondered if that was what men call fear. Now he had no word for the emotion which all but overwhelmed him. He wondered if this was what men call love.

With a sudden impulse he tapped the glass in front of him and signaled the driver to pull up to the curb.

"I can't let you take this risk, Mary," he said in response to her puzzled question. "I'll go on from here and let this fellow take you back."

Mary turned surprised blue eyes upon him.

"Snap out of it, Jimmy!" she commanded. "Can the slush until we get the job done. We're still partners, aren't we?"

"Sure are," was Jimmy's response.

"Then I'm in on the risks, same as you. If anybody's going to get bumped off down at The Dead Rat, I want to take a hand."

"Have it your way," replied Jimmy, resignedly, as he tapped again on the glass to signal the driver, who still discreetly maintained the strictly military position of "eyes front."

He stopped the cab and dismissed it in Thompson Street, a block above Jasper Street. Nobody who might have observed the slender young man and the petite young woman in sports clothes, as they strode down Thompson Street on their flat-heeled rubber-soled shoes, would be likely to give them a second glance. In that part of New York, or for that matter in any other part of New York, the old conventions, which were cast overboard during the war, are still disregarded, in spite of the efforts of the modistes and merchant tailors to reëstablish them. One wears anything one pleases wherever one chooses to go. Even the Ritz-Carlton has had to let down the bar which kept out men not in evening dress and forbade women to dance with their hats on. To be sure, one seldom sees knickers in the boxes at the opera, but there are few other places where the comfortable, rough-and-ready outdoor costume of modern youth excites even faint comment at any hour of the day or night. And certainly nobody who had not previously scrutinized their faces with more than ordinary attention could have recognized them as the couple who had so lately danced their way to safety out of The Dead Rat.

They turned into Jasper Street and strolled with outward casualness along that narrow thoroughfare. At the point where it makes a dog-leg angle, swinging northward, they paused.

"If we've stirred up a hornets' nest, we ought to begin to hear the buzzing here or hereabouts," said Jimmy.

Ahead of them, on the left or westerly side of Jasper Street, stood the big old-fashioned mansion, the house of mystery which, Jimmy believed, was the center of the web of intrigue and crime in which Paul Simon played the rôle of spider. Beyond it, silhouetted against the blue-black sky, was the square-topped, towerlike structure that housed the soap factory.

"Look sharp for lights and listen for sounds as we pass the big house," Jimmy admonished Mary as they strolled on.

Jasper Street was alive with the light and

life of New York's Italian quarter. Even at that hour of the night the sidewalks seemed to swarm with children who by all rules should have been long ago in bed. Only the house of mystery was dark. Not the slightest glimmer of light was visible through any crevice of its tight shutters. Strain their ears as they might to catch a chance sound from within, they could hear nothing. Dark, too, and silent, was the factory building adjoining.

They emerged from Jasper Street into Varley Street, into which the narrower thoroughfare debouches at a sharp angle. Here there was light and life of a different kind; taxicabs and private cars were dropping or picking up passengers in front of Le Rat Mort, a short block to their left, or hurrying past with merrymaking parties seeking diversion at other resorts farther on. Few pedestrians were to be seen. As they turned the corner Jimmy whispered his plans to Mary.

"The first thing to do is to get on the roof of the little one-story building between the garage and the soap factory," he said. "I think we can make that without attracting attention."

They slowed down to let an approaching group of merrymakers pass them; then stopped in front of the barber shop until they were sure the coast was clear.

"Now!" said Jimmy. "You first."

He locked his fingers together, Mary put her little foot into his hands, and with a quick spring upward gained a handhold on the coping of the low roof. A final upward shove from Jimmy and she was on the roof itself. A second more and she was lying flat, her hands extended downward to meet Jimmy's. And then, in another instant, he was beside her. So perfect had been their teamwork that to an onlooker it would have seemed to have been rehearsed. No other girl in the world, Jimmy thought, as they suddenly vanished from the sidewalk into the upper air, could match his own perfect coördination of mind and muscle as Mary did.

Swiftly and silently they scurried to the rear of the roof and looked about them. As Jimmy had suspected, there was a shallow yard behind the Jasper Street house, between it and the one-story building. From the rear as well as from the front the big house presented a face of impenetrable blackness. In silence they listened for a moment, but again could hear no sound of voices or movement.

To their left was the wall of the factory building with its fire escape, which came down as far as the first-story level, and a clear six feet beyond the extreme edge of the roof upon which they were standing. They could distinguish its outlines with difficulty in the heavy shadow of the warehouse, just beyond the garage at their right. Looking above the shadow, the upper part of the iron ladder was clearly visible.

"Can you make it, Jimmy?" asked Mary.

"Easy enough," said Jimmy. "You'd better lie doggo while I explore. Better stay on the other end of this roof, down in the shadow of the garage. The signal is two pistol shots. If you hear me, repeat the signal yourself. Burnside and a few of his men will be somewhere around presently, if they're not on the job already."

Jimmy measured the distance carefully with his eye, calculated the handholds and footholds, and launched himself across the open space between the roof and the fire ladder. The metal rattled slightly under the impact of his weight. For a few seconds he clung motionless in the shadow, every sense tense to catch the faintest sign that his action had been seen or heard. He smiled in silent approval as, glancing over his shoulder, he saw Mary's slender figure melt into the shadow and vanish, as she stretched herself prone under the eaves of the arched roof of the adjoining garage. She was as invisible, thus concealed, as a black cat at midnight. No sight nor sound gave indication that he had been seen or heard. At first slowly and cautiously, then with increasing speed and confidence, he swarmed up the iron ladder to the roof. Once over the coping he felt himself secure for the moment.

As he had anticipated, a penthouse on the roof housed the upper end of the interior staircase. Close by it was another which obviously inclosed the upper works of an elevator. The door at the head of the stairway was fastened on the inside. Jimmy's first impulse was to use Mary's pinch bar and pry his way in. Then, as he reflected, he hesitated. Something else new and unfamiliar had come into his scheme of things.

It had never been his wont to weigh chances. Single-handed, the thought of risk had never deterred him. Now, without for-

mulating the thought, he realized that while there might be no moral difference between breaking and entering and mere trespass, there was a very distinct legal difference. Suppose he found no evidence? Suppose he were caught in the building? What defense could he offer, with a splintered door and a jimmy in the hands of the prosecution? His position was like that of an international spy; if he succeeded others got the glory; if he failed his government disowned him and disavowed his acts.

So ran Jimmy's reflections for a moment, but only for a moment. He realized the thought that had inspired them—the thought of Mary. But he realized, too, that what had made him hesitate was not the true mental picture of the courageous, vibrant, reckless girl he had just left below him, but a false picture, conjured out of his subconsciousness, a picture into which Mary did not fit at all.

Mary would never hesitate. The last thing in the world he needed to worry about was Mary. And as he came to the full realization that it was on her account and hers alone that he had, for once in his life, failed to follow a decision with instant action, he cleared his mind forever of the last remaining cobwebs of his old belief that love and marriage meant locks and manacles.

It was the old, confident Jimmy Williams who snapped the flimsy fastenings of the penthouse door with a single twist of his pinch bar and, flash light in hand, stole stealthily down the stairs. At the foot of the first flight another locked door confronted him. Satisfied, after a moment of listening, that he was alone in the building, he pried this door open also. It took but a single quick glance around the room into which it opened, under the rays of his flash light, to identify it as a chemical laboratory; a perfectly natural and obvious adjunct to a soap factory, but something which called for closer scrutiny than the ordinary factory inspector would ever give it.

The first assured confirmation of his theory which Jimmy found was a number of small metal boxes, of precisely the size to be concealed in the interior of a squareish cushion-shaped cake of toilet soap, each box capable of holding an ounce or more of morphine or heroin. The chemical apparatus, of which Jimmy could not guess the precise use, but which obviously had been in recent service, offered no direct clew. Then, in a corner, a device which seemed to be a press of some sort attracted his attention. He scrutinized its exterior carefully, then moved a lever which opened two movable jaws. Between the jaws were the two halves of a mold. The fragment of soap which he had found in Paul Simon's car was still in his pocket. He took it out and placed it in the mold. It fitted perfectly.

He tried one of the small metal boxes. It fitted precisely into the rectangular indentation in the broken end of the piece of soap.

Here was evidence conclusive that his hunch had been right. If the package which Mary had tied to the bed slat at the Countess Reynal's proved to contain soap, and the cakes of soap contained drugs, the chain was complete, linking up the countess and Simon with this laboratory. Remained only the mystery of the source of the crude opium. This, Jimmy was certain, was in some way connected with the mysterious bales of rugs.

Another thing seemed certain; there was an opening or connection of some kind between the soap factory and the rug warehouse. It did not lead through the garage; it must lead behind the garage some way and through the house on Jasper Street. He would not give the signal yet. The factory basement called to him to be explored.

Five more flights of stairs, at least, lay below him, with the probability that he would encounter at each floor a door barred from within. Casting about for a quicker route he bethought him of the elevator. Its door, close to the stairs by which he had entered, indicated that it was a simple freight platform. He opened the door and peered into the shaft. His searchlight showed the platform at the very bottom of the pit, but the steel cable swung invitingly in front of him. Reflecting that, if he found no exit from below, he would at least be able on an upward trip to open the stairway doors with less delay, Jimmy once more leaped into space. He seized the elevator cable, twisted his legs firmly around it, and slid rapidly to the bottom.

He found a foothold at the bottom of his descent, on the steel crossbar to which the elevator cable was attached and from either end of which depended the arms which supported the platform, some nine or ten feet below, now reposing at the level of the

basement floor. Poised there, he listened intently for a moment but heard no sound. The factory basement was in absolute darkness. Again he pressed the button of his flash light and swept its beams around a wide semicircle. Satisfied that he was alone, he swung himself down to the elevator platform and stepped through the doorless opening into the cellar itself.

It took him but a moment to conclude that the cellar contained nothing of special interest to him. What he sought chiefly, however, was a door—a door which must lead into the house on Jasper Street.

He turned his flash light on the south wall. There had been a door here at some time, for an arched opening in the masonry wall had been closed with brick. He had taken a step forward to inspect this more closely, when a sound of voices reached him through the wall! He pressed his ear against the brickwork to catch the words, if possible. As he stood there, tense, with every sense keyed up, he felt something give under his shoulder. The wall itself was moving away from him!

Two long backward jumps, three quick strides to his left, noiseless as the movements of a cat and, guided by his unerring sense of direction, Jimmy came to the elevator opening again. A single step, a leap for a handhold, and once more he was perched upon the crossbar. As he pulled himself up, light gleamed into the cellar through a narrow vertical slit, which widened until, peering down from his refuge, he could see the whole place illuminated through an opening where he had seen nothing but brick and mortar. And through the opening came men, half a dozen of them, carrying burdens.

From behind them he heard Paul Simon's voice giving orders to the men in French.

"Put the chests on the elevator," was the command which Jimmy heard.

Jimmy's right hand went to the side pocket in which his automatic reposed. As yet the cellar was illuminated only by the light which came through the opening in the wall; where he was standing, almost up to the first-story level, he was practically in complete darkness. If they turned on no more light, if none of them looked up the elevator shaft, he had a chance. And if anything happened—well, he had seven shots in his automatic and the rest was on the knees of the gods.

One by one the men deposited their burdens on the elevator platform. Before the last had laid his down the first were back with more. Peering down into the half-lighted space below him, Jimmy recognized the nature of the objects they were piling up there. He had seen thousands like them in the ports of the Levant—chests of Persian opium, each containing about a hundred and fifty pounds of the raw resin of the poppy, and every pound of it capable of yielding an ounce and a half of morphine, or more of the even more vicious heroin. He counted twenty chests—forty-five thousand dollars' worth of the raw drug, but half a million dollars' worth when converted into heroin.

When the twentieth chest had been deposited on the elevator platform, Jimmy could tell by the sound of the men's footsteps that they had left the cellar, but the light still shone through the opening in the wall. To make a single movement seemed foothardy; yet to remain where he was meant inevitable detection if, as he anticipated, the next move would be that Simon himself or one of his men should conduct the load to the laboratory on the top floor. Even though his presence on the crossbar were undiscovered, the raising of the platform to the top-floor level would bring the crossbar up against the gears and pulleys of the elevating machinery and his choice would be between disclosing himself and being crushed and mangled by the wheels.

With the feeling that he was taking the longest chance of his whole experience, Jimmy dropped to the pile of opium chests, leaped swiftly to the cellar floor and slipped in two long strides into the nearest shadow, behind a pillar which, standing squarely beside the opening in the wall through which the light still streamed from beyond, served as a support for the joists and girders of the building. So long as traffic ran only between the opening and the elevator, he was safe; and when the lift started upward—well, the way lay open before him to the house in Jasper Street.

He had barely reached the shadow when footsteps and the clang of metal striking against stone or brick heralded the approach of some one through whatever passageway led from without into the cellar. Then in the half light he saw Paul Simon himself, with something in his hand.

As the man crossed Jimmy's narrow field

of vision, the object he was carrying caught the light and Jimmy recognized it. It was a five-gallon gasoline tin. Then, while Jimmy watched him in wondering amazement, he saw Paul Simon unscrew the top of the tin and pour its contents over the chests of opium!

In an instant of mental adjustment Jimmy grasped the man's purpose. Alarmed by the countess' discovery of Mary's identity, fearful of a raid that would disclose his whole plot, panic had overtaken him and he was preparing to destroy every vestige of evidence that would connect him with the drug traffic. No other explanation of his purpose was plausible.

The unmistakable odor of gasoline fumes reached Jimmy's nostrils. The slightest spark now would convert the cellar into an inferno. With the elevator shaft as a chimney it would be but a matter of seconds, once the gasoline was ignited, before the whole building became a blazing furnace in which no man could live for an instant. And Jimmy himself, unwittingly, had contributed to the efficiency of Simon's incendiary project by leaving open behind him the penthouse door on the roof and the upper door of the elevator shaft; the draft would be perfect.

Jimmy felt that he had never been any place from which he was so anxious to get away in a hurry. Whatever dangers lurked in the passage, far better face them than this. He could not even defend himself now if he were discovered; the flash of a pistol would set off the gasoline vapor.

A cautious glance around the pillar told him that Paul Simon's back was toward him. The lighted opening in the wall was but a few feet distant. Jimmy's rubber-shod feet made not the slightest noise as he crept stealthily toward the archway. As he gained the passage he saw that the light came from a single incandescent bulb. He was in a long, narrow, tunnellike space, one side of which was of rough masonry, the other a smooth brick wall. At the other end of the passage was a closed door. Halfway down the passage another doorway had been cut in the masonry wall. Hinged to the side of the opening through which he had just stepped was a heavy door faced with brick—the brickwork which Jimmy had seen in the cellar. All of these details and his own precise position in relation to them, Jimmy's all-inclusive glance registered instantly; and his trained muscles responded to the plan of action which formed itself simultaneously in his mind.

To turn out the light would give Simon warning that something was wrong. Yet to attempt to close the heavy door with the light still burning would involve turning his back toward the direction in which other and unknown dangers lay. His choice between an encounter in the dark, in which he would at least be on an equal footing with any adversary, and the risk of an attack from the rear, in which he would offer a perfectly lighted target, was instantly made. He snapped out the electric light, snapped on his own flash light, jumped for the edge of the big door, which moved easily on its well-oiled hinges, and swung it toward the opening.

An exclamation from within the cellar apprised him that Simon had taken the alarm. Jimmy threw all his energy into the effort to close the opening before the man inside reached it. The door closed with a crash. The welcome click of a latch falling into place punctuated a volley of mingled French and Armenian imprecations which reached his ear faintly through the wall.

His flash light revealed a bolt. Jimmy's fingers slipped it into place just as the impact of a heavy blow from the other side threatened to burst the door open again. Jimmy turned and covered the thirty feet or so of the length of the passage in a few swift steps. The door at the other end, he reasoned, must lead past the rear of the garage into the basement of the rug warehouse; the door in the side of the passage, midway, beyond a doubt gave entrance to the house in Jasper Street. With Simon trapped—and trapped where he could not destroy the evidence against him without destroying himself in the process—his one thought now was to find the shortest road to the open air and fire the signal for Burnside and the Federal men to close in. But as his hand touched the latch of the iron-plated door he suddenly heard, on the other side of the portal, a clamor of hurrying footsteps and men's voices, and above them the high-pitched tones of a woman's voice. The sound came nearer.

This door, like the one he had just bolted, opened inward into the passage. If he could brace this but for a moment against intrusion there was still a possible escape through the Jasper Street house.

Jimmy's habit, almost instinct, of leaving no trail by which he could be traced, had impelled him to keep Mary's pinch bar, which reposed snugly under his sweater, one end held by his trousers belt. His flash light swept the jamb and threshold of the doorway. A crevice in the stone-paved floor of the passageway, a few inches from the bottom of the door, gave him the solution which he sought. He placed the claw end of the pinch bar in the crevice; the bar leaned against the door at a forty-five degree angle. He pressed the upper end down with his foot until the chisellike edge bit into the metal covering of the door. So braced, the door would withstand a heavy assault for a minute or two at least. The people whom he had heard approaching from the other side were battering upon it as he turned to explore the third opening.

He reached the door in a fraction of a second. The knob turned in his hand but the door remained immovable. Again he brought his flash light into play. The door, an ordinary wooden-paneled one, would have offered no difficulties had he still the pinch bar available. The beam of his flash light played up and down the crack between the door and the jamb. Through the keyhole he could see a key on the other side. This door, like the others, opened into the passage. With a tool of any kind he could have taken the pins out of the hinges, but there was no time even to contemplate, much less to put in operation, a plan of that kind. He could hear the door which he had just barricaded creaking and groaning under repeated heavy blows from beyond it. His one chance, as he saw it, was to force the lock. His quick inspection indicated that it was a flimsy, cast-iron affair. And, Jimmy reflected, if he ever needed help it was now. He drew his revolver and fired two shots into the door, one on either side of the keyhole.

He could hear the clatter of scrap iron as the brittle lock flew into fragments, and through the shattered holes in the woodwork a stream of light gleamed. He seized the knob again. It took a powerful tug, but the door opened at last to his pull.

Ahead of him was a flight of stairs. The light which had shone through the holes in the door came from a flickering gas jet at the top of the stairway. Somewhat surprised at meeting no resistance, Jimmy bounded up the stairs. As he reached the top his face met a draft of cold air and from somewhere in front of him two pistol shots sounded. Directly ahead of him was an opening through which he could see lighted windows. The front door of the house in Jasper Street was open!

Jimmy hurried toward the door, seeing no one; but as he neared the street his eye caught a movement in the hallway, just inside the entrance.

"Hands up!" he cried. On the instant he repeated the warning in French.

Out of the darkness came a voice he knew.

"Don't shoot, Jimmy! It's me," said Mary. "I heard your signal downstairs and relayed it. There ought to be some one here any minute."

As she spoke two men came hurrying up the outside steps.

"Burnside's men?" called Jimmy from the shadow, where he had joined Mary.

"Yes; anybody here?" came the answer from one of the men.

"Nobody in this house but us and two girls they've got locked up on the top floor," answered Mary. "I've just been all through the place. Better get those girls out quick —there's something devilish on foot."

"I don't believe Simon will start his devilment just yet," put in Jimmy. "Go down those stairs and guard that passage. Two of you can hold it. Simon's apaches are trying to get into the passage below and I suspect the countess is bossing the job; I heard her voice."

Two more of Burnside's men came hurrying in answer to the signal. Leaving the four to guard the passageway Mary and Jimmy went out into Jasper Street. They went rapidly through the little alley leading to Rosetta Lane and around to the entrance of The Dead Rat, where panic-stricken pleasure seekers were tumbling out in confusion, but not until each had passed under the scrutiny of the men of Wilkinson's narcotic squad and Burnside's operatives.

Leaving Mary at the door Jimmy pressed through the mob and found Burnside within. In a few swift sentences he told what had happened and what he had seen.

"I've got four of their women and two of their men back in the corner there," the detective said.

"The rest, including the countess, are in the warehouse cellar through that door, unless they've broken down the barricade I

set up and have got through into the passage. The trick is to get them all, quick, before they release Simon. The minute that door is opened into the soap factory all he needs to do is to strike a match and our evidence goes up in smoke," said Jimmy.

"We have them just where we want them," grinned Burnside. "I've got twenty-two men and there are eight of Wilkinson's working with us. I've just sent in a call for some police reserves and a couple of wagons besides."

"Better send for a couple of firemen to stand guard in the soap factory cellar, too," suggested Jimmy.

It was midnight when Burnside, Jimmy Williams and Mary Monckton ascended in the elevator again to Slugger Forsyth's apartment.

"It looks like a complete round-up," said Burnside, in response to Forsyth's question. "There isn't much to add to what I told you over the telephone, except Miss Monckton's personal adventures. Heard anything from Lewis or Wilkinson?"

"Wilkinson just phoned; they found the doped soap just where you had put it, Mary," said Forsyth. "And that's what it is, too."

"Couldn't be anything else after what I saw in the laboratory," said Jimmy. Then he turned to Mary.

"You haven't told me yet how you got into the house in Jasper Street," he said. "Didn't I tell you to stick on the roof until you heard from me?"

"Did you, Jimmy?" she returned, with her most bewitching smile. "I must have overlooked that. Seriously, I didn't have any other idea until I saw the truck come in, and I thought I might as well follow it.

"I climbed upon the garage roof and, as the truck passed in the door, I dropped on top of it and went in with them. There wasn't much head room either; I all but got scraped off into the street, which would have made an awful mess.

"I struck around on top of the truck while they unloaded their bales; then I watched my chance and slipped into the warehouse cellar when nobody was looking. They had a great powwow in there."

"They?" asked Jimmy.

"Simon and the countess," Mary explained. "You were right, Jimmy, when you said the countess was the boss. It nearly broke Simon's heart when she told him to get the evidence out of the way as quickly as possible. She had a hunch, she told him, that something was going to happen."

"It did," remarked Burnside.

"Where were you all this time?" asked Jimmy.

"You know the stairway that leads from the warehouse cellar up to the first floor? I was up there, all wrapped up in your overcoat that you'd left behind earlier in the evening. They couldn't see or hear me, but I could hear and see everything. The truck had brought in twenty bales of rugs. They opened them up and inside of each bale was a big box—I suppose full of opium. They took these boxes through where I supposed the Jasper Street house was located. Then the men all went back into The Dead Rat and Simon went into the garage, got a can of gasoline and returned from the same direction from which he had come. I figured they were planning a bonfire.

"I thought I'd follow along, and I started down the passage behind the garage. I saw that the door in the side of the passage was open. I'd never have a better chance to get inside the Jasper Street house, so I went up that way and locked the door behind me. It seemed a fairly safe proposition, as practically all of the gang were elsewhere. It turned out that way. There wasn't a soul in the house except those two poor girls up on the top floor."

"We got them over to St. Vincent's Hospital," said Burnside, as Mary paused. "I didn't get their names, but Wilkinson's man has them."

"What's the matter with them?" asked Forsyth.

"I talked with one of them," said Mary. "If we can't put Simon across on any other charge, he ought to go to Sing Sing for life on general principles." She shuddered slightly. "It makes me sick to think how narrowly I escaped, myself."

"That's Simon's old Continental trick," Jimmy explained to Burnside. "Kidnaping girls and converting them into drug fiends in order to make them tools for his dope traffic."

The telephone rang and Forsyth answered.

"That was Evan Lewis," he said, after a brief conversation. "There were twenty bales of rugs, consigned to Varzhabedian, unloaded at one of the East River piers to-

day, and there are twenty bales there now; but Lewis put a little pressure on one of the pier watchmen, who admits that a truck drove into the pier to-night and drove out again. That's when they made the swap of bales. And, according to the watchman's confession, this isn't the first time that's happened. Of course, Simon had squared it with him."

"Well, that job's done," agreed Jimmy. "What's the next assignment, chief? I'd like a try at something really exciting."

"You're assigned to take Mary home," replied Slugger Forsyth.

Once more in the taxicab with Mary at his side, Jimmy Williams experienced the same unfamiliar emotion which had swept over him a little while before. Of himself, now, he was sure; of Mary, he could only wonder and guess. Hesitatingly, almost furtively, he turned his eyes toward her. As if moved by the same impulse, her blue eyes turned toward him.

"The same to you, Jimmy Williams," said Mary, although he hadn't spoken.

Jimmy's ear detected an undertone which made him wonder for once whether what he saw meant what it seemed to mean. Mary's expression was inscrutable as she spoke again.

"I got you the first time, Jimmy," she said.

"What do you mean 'the first time?' " he asked.

"The first time you wiggled your left ear on the way downtown to-night," was her answer. "Something surprising struck you all of a sudden and you sent a special-delivery letter about it, just as you always do. That's a terrible habit you have; it'll get you into trouble yet."

Jimmy felt his face burning. What had Mary guessed? He felt more nearly rattled than he could remember ever having felt before. His face must have given some hint of his desperate effort to pull himself together, for Mary broke in once more, with a delicious throaty chuckle in her voice.

"It's no use, Jimmy; you can't get away with it. I got your signal and I've given you your answer."

"Do you mean the same thing I mean?" asked Jimmy.

"I said 'The same to you,' didn't I?"

"Mary!" exclaimed Jimmy. "Do you mean that?"

"That was what *you* meant, wasn't it?" she responded, and Jimmy's eyes answered her. "Yes; I know we agreed that there wasn't to be anything sloppy or sentimental in our partnership," she went on, "but that was a long time ago—yesterday afternoon. Besides, the lady always has the privilege of changing her mind; especially," she added, "if the gentleman changes his first."

Their hands met again. Once more Jimmy felt the warm, comradely clasp of Mary's slim fingers, but now there was a difference. It was a difference which impelled him irresistibly to draw her to him, to turn that adorably insouciant face up to his own——

"That'll be all for now, Jimmy," said Mary.

HOW TO LIVE TO BE A HUNDRED

WANT to live to be a hundred years old? You can do it, according to what Albert M. Johnson, president of the National Life Insurance Company, told several hundred Boy Scouts last summer. But there's a price that must be paid; a list of "don'ts" and "musts" to be obeyed. You mustn't be a professional or college athlete, or an actor, or dance indoors, or drink intoxicating liquors, and you shouldn't smoke. You must take mild exercise every day, marry early, arrange matters so that you will be neither rich nor poor and "be religious in a true way." Obey all these rules and you're likely to make a century—and sure to realize that your life has been a long one.

OUR WELSH STATESMEN

CONSIDERING what a small corner of the earth she is, Wales has furnished a hefty line of statesmanship recently. There is England's Lloyd George. And President Coolidge's cabinet contains two Welshmen, the secretary of state and the secretary of labor. Mr. Hughes is merely of Welsh descent, but Mr. Davis was born in Tredegar, Wales.

Talks With Men

By Martin Davison

FOR a good many years," writes R. V., "I have been in the automobile business. For a long time I bought and sold used cars. The bottom dropped out of that business—at least it dropped out of it as far as I am concerned, a year or so ago. That happened shortly after I was married. I was living then in an up-State town but I had a chance to take over the agency for a big district for one of the really fine, fast-selling cars. I passed this chance up on account of my wife. Her mother was ill and she did not want to leave her—and I think she was quite right and I have no regrets about it at all.

"At present I have charge of a sales agency which handles three cars—two of them cheap and the other moderately priced. I have a small salary as well as commissions—but the salary is very small and it is a long time between commissions. The other salesmen, the men under me, work on commissions only and it is very hard sledding for them—so hard that in order to keep the good men I have to lend or advance them money out of my own pocket—and a lot of this money never comes back. When I married, my wife had a successful business of her own. At that time things looked so rosy for me that I was sure she would never have to work again and I persuaded her to give up her business.

"We are really up against it. Lack of funds and high rents in the city have compelled us to share an apartment with another couple. We have to eat together. They are not especially congenial—either to my wife or myself—and if it were not for the fact that my wife and myself are so fond of each other, and that she is such a good sport and so game and cheerful in spite of her unpleasant surroundings, the life would be unbearable.

"Now here is the problem. My wife wants to go back to work. She says that if she does so she can help finance me in a new agency out of town which I know I could build into a business. At least I think I could. A year or so ago I would have said it was a sure thing—but after what has happened to me recently I am not sure of anything. Some of my confidence I am afraid has gone with my money. Yet my wife has confidence in me still.

"She, as I have said, wants to go back to work—and she can earn more money than I am making now. I don't want her to go to work. It is humiliating to me to think of her going back to business. Besides, would it be right of me to risk any of her earnings in my own business ventures? We have no family—but at the same time I think a man ought to support his wife. I think she understands my feelings in this—and yet I know she is willing to go back to business—or to make any sacrifice to help me. What should I do? I hate the idea of her working. Please do not publish my name. I have not told her that I am writing you."

NO, of course I won't publish your name, R. V. As you notice, those initials are not at all like yours. You are discouraged, you think half the time that you are down and out, and you are ashamed of yourself. You have had several hard bumps. But your worst trouble just at present is yourself. In refusing to allow your wife to go back to work, you are sacrificing her to your own vanity. You say she has been a successful business woman. She must enjoy business then—for people are only successful at things they enjoy. Don't think for a minute that the life you are giving her now is half as pleasant or stimulating as the give-and-take adventure of earning her own living. Let her go back to work by all means.

Your other question is as to whether you should let her advance you money for your new agency. Look at it this way. She is a good business woman. Do you suppose that a good business woman would want to put her savings into something that did not promise a fair chance of success?

My advice to you is to let Mrs. R. V. do the thinking and decide things for a little while. You are shot to pieces. You've been bumped hard and you need a little while to get your wind back. But if you really care for your wife, let her go into business. Pride and vanity never helped any one in the business of getting on in the world—and the first thing you must do is to eliminate them from your mind and spirit. If you take this advice—and I think you will—write me in six months and tell me how it worked out. I know already what the letter will be like. It will be thanking me for good advice.

JUST let me tell you something that may encourage you. Here is a concrete instance, a case something like your own. For the last fifteen years I have known on intimate terms a man whom I will call Jones. When I first knew Jones he was a dentist in a small Western town. He pulled one of my teeth and filled half a dozen others and in the course of drilling and filling—perhaps by way of cheering me up—he began to tell me his own troubles. He was married and had two children. He was not making much money as a dentist, and there was no visible sign that he was likely to make any more. He could not live comfortably. In addition to this his heart was not in his work. He had drifted into dentistry, but his real vocation, the thing that nature meant him to be, was an inventor. He had an invention that might promise big returns, but to perfect it and get out his models would require a year's hard work in a shop. Also he would have to hire an assistant. And then after that, there was the work of getting the thing on the market.

He had no money. He had not been able to save. He was hard working and economical but there was not enough coming in. Life appeared to have caught him in a vise from which there was no escape—and yet he knew that he could do really useful work in the world if he only had the chance. It is no wonder that now and then his drills and probes made me wince, squirm and even moan.

HIS wife had five thousand dollars in securities that she inherited. She was willing, perfectly willing to finance Jones—but he, like you, R. V., had his pride that stood in the way. Mrs. Jones won the day. For a year they lived in a miserable little shack in the Pennsylvania mountains while he worked hard at his invention and the five thousand steadily dwindled down. They just made it. The last hundred dollars was being spent when his invention appeared on the market. Since that there has been no cause for worry.

Jones was in my office a month or so ago. I asked him how things were going.

"I can hardly believe it myself," he said, "but what do you suppose I made last year?"

I refused to guess.

"I have not as yet," he said, "received the royalties for November and December. But for the rest of the year, including all royalties on all my inventions, I received three hundred and fifty thousand dollars. That is what I am paying income taxes on."

This anecdote sounds like a fairy tale but it is literally true. And don't you suppose Jones and his wife are both happier in the fact that he did not do it all by himself and that she helped with her faith and confidence in him and her nice little nest egg of five thousand dollars?

In Siding

By Calvin Johnston

Author of "School of Honesty," "Dead-loss," Etc.

Denny, the old switchman, proves that if a cobbler should stick to his last a railroad man, likewise, is a fool to stray far from the right of way.

WITH a red feather cocked on the stock of her locomotive, the midnight mail swung out of the station on a long curve, leaving the yard silent except for the chirp of the dispatcher's sounder through the open window, and the voices of two switchmen, shanty bound.

"Never do I watch the tail lights out of sight," gloomed young Hogan, "without wishing I was aboard putting the dommed railroads behind forever at seventy miles an hour."

"You may well dom railroads," replied Denny, the ancient switchman composedly, "but it is the railroad man who is dommed when he quits them for something else, as witness Katy Malone of Barlow on the old P. D."

"One more pay day and watch me," threatened Hogan, bitterly.

The smokers on the bench before the switch shanty made room; veterans of a hundred yarns, they had listened imperturbably to Denny's statement, which the inexperienced Hogan was inclined to dispute.

"The blatherin' of you calls up a memory to stalk through the yard this summer night," resumed Denny; "the memory of old Moseby of the P. D., an outlawed man. The shade of Danny Nolan is along of him, and that of the dark-eyed colleen born to the hatred of all things of wire and rail."

Thirty-five, the red ball, was late, and in the hour of respite the crew listened with eyes following the beam of the silent switch engine, as if trusting the headlight which broke a path for them through nights of storm to pick up the scenes and characters of Denny's tale in the cloud of time.

"It is the tale of the railroader who quits railroading—a warning," said Denny. "Listen, I am telling ye."

It is well known that every man on a railroad has a talent which he figures would have made a success of him in any other walk of life. Superintendent O'Hanon of the P. D. had two, one for diplomacy, which is concealed violence, and also a talent for courtesy to his superiors. When a general officer recommended a young man in his office for the job of O'Hanon's secretary, the latter employed him as a matter of courtesy, and two days later Danny Nolan

dropped off at Barlow headquarters with two trunks and hand baggage which he had a hackman carry into the superintendent's office.

Rising to receive so distinguished-looking a young man, what was the indignation of O'Hanon to learn he had been deceived into politeness to his secretary. "A dude!" he thought, but for the moment restrained his temper because of the superior who had recommended him. "I must be low and crafty in getting rid of the dude," he reflected, and having explained that his office was not the baggage room, touched a band box with his foot. "What is that?" he asked.

"'Tis the latest in fedoras," answered Dan. "I will give you a look at it tomorrow. But at present," he said, folding his coat and turning back the cuff of blue silk, "we will be knocking out the correspondence I see stacked up for me." And ordering the cabby to take his baggage to the hotel up the platform, he was seated at the desk with pencil and note book before O'Hanon could order him to get busy. And though he sought his revenge by dictating as fast as possible, Dan easily kept pace with him and the correspondence was fading away when interruption came.

Though for the next half hour Dan was typing his notes in the corner, his touch was so light that he overheard all the conference between the superintendent and his callers, Judge Carnes of the circuit court, and Sheriff Joe Doone; and as a stranger on this rough Western division, he found the subject an interesting one.

"We have come to consult you on the Moseby case," said the judge, gray haired and good humored.

"It is settled," said O'Hanon, his big red face scowling, "that the old train robber will go to trial."

"Listen," said Sheriff Doone, a large dark man. "I have always felt to blame for Moseby quitting the P. D., fifteen years ago. I was special officer of the road then and took to riding his train for convenience. But he thought I was spotting him and objected and instead of explaining, I rubbed it in. So in a temper he quit; and I believe he held up that train just to show me up as a poor excuse of a special officer."

"Listen to me, too," said the judge. "You, O'Hanon, and Moseby and I were good friends in those days. He got little out of the holdup, and then left the country till last year. The charge is fifteen years old, he has been in jail six months——"

O'Hanon brought down his fist. "The charge will be prosecuted!"

So there was no chance of agreement and the three friends forced silence on themselves till the heat of the blood had passed.

"There is Katy Malone on the platform," said Judge Carnes, at a window, "whose father was Moseby's engineer on the High-line run." He recalled how the little Katy would run away from home to the depot platform and squall loudly to see the dragon of a locomotive swallow up her father.

"Sure, Mrs. Malone herself had the same fear," said O'Hanon, "and would have filled many a man with presentiment of wreck and sudden death." Yet Malone had always joked her about it and died quietly in bed at last.

Then O'Hanon began to discuss the P. D.'s right to throw a branch-line track across the rails of the G. S. W., which paralleled the P. D. into Barlow, and Nolan lost interest. Instead he was peering out at Katy Malone and scowled with indignation that so lovely a colleen should have been accused of squalling.

"Sweet creature," he thought, watching her as a train came in and she moved away with some friends. "As if the emotion of her was not to be praised when she watched the locomotive snort away with her father." But though he began from that minute to plan Katy's acquaintance, he never once took into account the hatred born in her of all things railroad.

By now the three old friends were in another disagreement, with O'Hanon stating he would lay his track across the G. S. W. "There is good coal forty miles south, and the P. D. is needing it," he explained, and the judge pointed out that Halloran of the G. S. W. would never permit him to cross without bloodshed.

"Bloodshed let it be," said O'Hanon, and crossing glances with his new secretary grinned with all his teeth. "Write a message to Halloran, demanding for the last time that he let us through or take what is coming to him. And deliver it to him yourself."

"I see your diplomacy is getting more pronounced as you grow older," said Judge Carnes. "You are no companion for officers of the law," and he and the sheriff

went outside, peering back from the hall to see how he had taken it.

"A lawless man who would keep old Moseby in jail," they said, so he could overhear.

The big red-faced superintendent stood at his desk with his hands grasped in his hair. "Purgatory!" he gritted. "Grief! Wrecks, injuries, with business coming up and equipment running down. And now I am hounded by the manager to put down that crossing, and laughed at by Halloran. Give me that message," he commanded, seizing a pen to sign.

Dan Nolan stood looking at him a moment with thought, the message in his hands. "Superintendent," he said, flicking a grain of dust from his cuff, "I am here to use my head, but not on this Halloran's fist."

O'Hanon put a curse on his head and Nolan nodded. "Curse on," he answered. "You say grief is the part of the railroader. But before you dom the law, let me warn you not to do so to its face. Since you are resolved to break the law," he said, "do not begin with threats, for whist, I am in a position to give you pointers. I have not been a Chicago gunman for nothing."

As the cast-iron jaw of O'Hanon dropped open in a dead silence the new secretary in confidence explained that he had turned from outlawry as a profession. "But if I can in the regular course of business put a man out of the way for my employer," he added, "there is nothing easier. No threats or brawling, y'understand: just a quiet shot in the dark and this Halloran will be busy arranging for his own crossing into another world. Psst!"

With that he dropped the torn message in the wastebasket and took his place with notebook and pencil at the desk corner. And after a moment O'Hanon resumed dictating till all the letters were answered.

"Hold a minute," then said O'Hanon, who had all the time been watching the young man from under his eyebrows, and, hardy as he was, his voice quavered a bit. "Y'are to understand there is to be no shooting up of Halloran or any one," he said.

"Sure not till the order is given," nodded Dan. "Just a hint will do any time."

"Y'are not to act on hints and will get no such orders," said O'Hanon, with a pale face and bringing down his fist. "Sometimes the grief of this job wrecks the nerves of me." He stared at the slender quiet young man dressed in the regalia of fashion. "A domned dude—and a gunman," he said. "Well, you will stay in your job because my superior put you here."

"As for your threat of bloodshed," said Nolan, and O'Hanon shuddered at the indifferent manner of him, "if it was because of shattered nerves, why do you try to carry the troubles of the whole railroad? I do not mean to be fresh, superintendent, but you ought to take siding once in a while." Without waiting an answer he went back to his machine to knock out his letters, which were all in the mail by five o'clock.

He strolled up the platform to the hotel, his hat at a little tilt, his garments as unwrinkled and spotless as if he had not done a tremendous day's work. But there was a queer paleness and hunted look in the face of Danny Nolan, and after dinner, with a poor appetite, he hurried out to locate the residence of Judge Carnes.

On the summer evening, the judge was outdoors and they talked at the end of the big porch.

"Divil knows how I got the idea," said Dan, "but seeing the superintendent's nerves gone to smash, I told him in confidence what a bad man I was and offered to shoot his enemy from the dark. 'Twas a grand thought and the cold blood of it cured him of scheming and threats. But where do I stand, who never shot a revolver ten times in my life?" And he wiped the sweat from his forehead, astonished it was not blood.

"You are a young man of genius," said the judge. "Nothing but just such a proposition could have jolted him out of the mood he has worked himself into. Be sure he will not repeat your confession and when the crossing row has blown over I will go with you to tell him the truth."

"With that settled," said Dan, "you can do as much for me as I have done for your friend," and recalling to the judge's mind the conversation while Katy Malone was on the platform that morning, he asked for an introduction.

Judge Carnes was more and more surprised at the promptness of this young man to meet all situations as they came up. "A lucky lad you would be to marry Katy Malone," he said. "Beauty and character

she has, and her mother a cottage and candy shop in her own right. But I have heard that both the Malone ladies have said that a railroad man has no right to marry and worry his family with apprehension of wreck and sudden death."

"My job is not riding locomotives like Mr. Malone," said Dan. "But at that we can keep my business dark for a day or two."

The judge answered that he could refuse him nothing after what he had done for O'Hanon, and as he was going downtown to the post office took Dan by way of the Malone cottage where Katy sat on the porch steps. The judge, being an old friend, went in with Dan and told Katy she should entertain the stranger until he returned from the post office. Dan called again the next evening, and on the third evening met Mrs. Malone, as handsome as Katy, saving her years, and shrewd in business, too, never being caught on the wrong side of the market when the season changed from fudge to lollipops.

"So you are the young gentleman who has been burning the gas in my parlor," said the Widow Malone. "He might be even a handsome young man, Katy, except for the guilty look he has. Now come, Mr. Nolan, and confess what it is, for I have not heard a man confess a fault since Malone, saints rest him, would come home confessing the smell of whisky came from talking face to face with Mr. O'Hanon."

At the name of O'Hanon the young man blushed, for he was, as a matter of craftiness, concealing the nature of his business until he had won over the Malone ladies by his manners. But Katy answered for him:

"I am sure, mamma, that Mr. Nolan has no faults or he would have told me."

"Surely he would. I had not thought of that," agreed Mrs. Malone. "And have you told Mr. Nolan your own faults?"

"Yes, mamma," she answered.

"And you say that without looking guilty," said her mother with meditation, but still eying Nolan sharply.

"She suspects me," thought Nolan, aghast, and rather than bear the accusation of deceit replied promptly that he had told everything about himself. "Except possibly my business. Did I remember to tell you that?" he asked Katy.

"I have been dying to find out," laughed Katy, and with a frank smile he told that he had come to Barlow as secretary to Mr. O'Hanon, and passed lightly to another subject.

But the shock of the disclosure was reflected so plainly in Katy's pale cheeks that he paused, and Mrs. Malone broke the silence with a sigh. "A railroader," she said. "It is too bad. I trust you intend to remain single, Mr. Nolan, and not put some poor woman to the daily torment of expecting you brought in crippled or dead."

"My job is not a dangerous one," protested Nolan, but Mrs. Malone explained grimly that as many men are killed in the yards as on the road.

"And you will not tell me you can keep out of the yards," she said.

"If you wish to know it, Mrs. Malone," he said, "I was down the yard with the superintendent this morning where they are laying the track of the South Branch toward the crossing of the G. S. W."

"And it is common talk," answered she, "that there will be as much danger in laying that crossing as in half a dozen wrecks, with Halloran of the G. S. W. on guard. Well, well," she said, "here am I arguing about what you do, which is no business of mine. I only wish you luck in your railroading, which is full of dangers and caused me many a year's anxiety for poor Malone."

She smiled with sympathy as if Nolan was already crippled or dying, and was leaving; but Nolan was not yet done. "A last word on this, if it please you," he said stubbornly. "Since you have asked, I will answer, no, that I do not intend to stay single; saints willing, I will marry Katy Malone, none other, and that soon." He looked toward the young lady herself for an expression which he had reason to believe would not be unfavorable, and was elated at the quick answering smile; but even in that instant the smile fled and her eyes widened in an uncanny fear as if she read something threatening in his presence.

"You will be walking the yards—and riding the trains with Mr. O'Hanon; a stumble, a foot caught in a frog among the flying switches of the yard engine; or a mistaken order of the road—a washout on a dark night." The girl leaned forward studying him with burning eyes like a prophetess under her spell, and even the calm Nolan felt his blood run cold.

The girl composed herself only with ter-

rific effort which left her wan and weak. "Mr. Nolan will think I am possessed, mamma," she said.

"We are both possessed with the sense which comes of experience," said her mother dryly. "And I am not at all pleased with Mr. Nolan for concealing his business. Why, you might have learned to care for the man."

"Yes," agreed Katy, and she shuddered. " 'Tis well we learned this in time, though I am sure he could not have known the injury he was doing us by concealment." It was plain that the dread Katy had of a railroad was inherited from her mother; greater than an educated fear, it was in the very blood of her, and again, as if seeing Dan Nolan broken and dead in wreckage, she covered her face.

But for all of his youth and inexperience, the two women found they had to do with a man whose boldness rose with occasion.

"This is a hard proposition," he said, "which you put up to me in a way to crowd me out of your life entirely. But I am already in your life and you in mine, Katy. 'Tis plain we cannot keep our present stand," said Dan, "and talk each other down. Thought is required to work out an understanding. Thought—and at present I'm thinking we'll all forget the railroad and go down to the Opera House, where the New York stock company is advertised for to-night."

So the two young people passed the buck to the future and though the widow reflected, "He is a fighting gossoon who will not be stopped short of a knockdown and drag out," she smiled and went along to the show.

But from that time on sentimental discourse was tabooed by Katy, every approach to the subject guarded as if there could be no thought of compromise. "You hold me at a disadvantage," complained Dan after several evenings of this. "If I am a criminal, at least give me my day in court."

"A criminal! Then I should know how to handle you," said Katy, laughing; "for I already have one in my collection." And she told him of Moseby, whom she sometimes visited and took dainties to at the jail, in memory of his old association with her father.

"You're after reforming him, maybe," said Dan sourly. "I'm not ready for that yet." He meant that he was not ready to quit the railroad to induce her to marry him.

She was indeed working hard toward that end, but too shrewd to let it appear, shook her head in answer. "Small chance to reform Mr. Moseby," she said. "An old timber wolf."

Now, Dan, after giving himself the name of a bad man with O'Hanon, had an interest in seeing one, and visited the jail with Katy on a Sunday evening. They found Moseby in the high-walled yard with a guard; he was a lean, grizzled little man of few words, and limped with an old bullet wound. But there was a wolfish spark of phosphorus in his eyes.

"He would turn desperado all over again at the drop of the hat," thought Dan. He looked at the stone walls and the bars and reflected with uneasiness that O'Hanon was convinced Dan Nolan ought to be behind them by his own confession. The way O'Hanon was bearing himself made it worse. Only that morning he had said: "If I was only as tough as you, Nolan, I would soon have that crossing frog spiked down."

As they left the jail, Dan excused himself to call on Judge Carnes for a few minutes. "Saints above! I must straighten O'Hanon out on my record," he told the judge. "He is beginning to expect desperate things of me, I think. And suppose he should tell, and Katy Malone hear of it!"

But the judge warned him in a friendly spirit: "It is too late now. You have made O'Hanon shudder at the thought of bloodshed, but if he learns you have lied to him he will see red, and you will be his first victim. I understand now that he must never be told."

'Twas something to drive a man distracted to have that always hanging over him, but what could Nolan do? The very next day O'Hanon looked at him strangely. "The rails are laid up to the G. S. W. right of way on both sides," he said. "Only the frog remains to be laid by the quick rush of a fighting gang. If I was one steeped in crime, I would make nothing of Halloran and his guards. But I cannot bear the thought of bloodshed." In fact, the big man looked pale and sick, for headquarters was hounding him by wire, but at that he had nothing in looks on Dan Nolan, who hurried again to Judge Carnes.

"I have granted Halloran an injunction

against the P. D.," said the judge with consolation; "which settles the matter once for all."

But back at the office O'Hanon, with the injunction in his hand, made light of the court. "What is the law to a man already beyond the pale?" he argued. "I tell you, Nolan, the Chicago police will land you anyhow, so what difference will one more charge make? As for me, you have broken me by exhibiting crime in its true colors. I envy you, but I cannot imitate you," he said, pacing up and down grasping his hair.

"His nerves are about to let go entirely," reflected Nolan, "and he will be starting a crossing party, which he will expect me to finish."

"I see I can depend on you," said O'Hanon, stopping before him, and calling in his roadmaster, instructed that all preparations be made for the raid.

"But as an employee of the P. D., I am covered by the injunction," explained Dan with sudden happiness, "and if I lay down the frog the court will order it up again."

O'Hanon nodded, with a wild gleam in his eye. "True; and I am not the man to have your work go for nothing. You are not to have any of the worries of this job at all. You may resign your position—Sunday night will be the Halloran's most unguarded hour. This is Saturday, and your resignation is in effect. And let me say, Mr. Nolan," he added in confidence, "that the crime of putting Halloran down for the count is not beneath any gunman ever born." With that he retired and remained silent, only glancing at Dan significantly as he finished his letters and departed.

"Here I am caught between a jail and a madman," thought Dan, "all along of running a bluff." Little he knew what he was doing, but, forgetting his dinner, wandered the streets and finally stopped at the Malones'. So shocking were the signs of wear and tear on him that the two ladies exchanged glances of joy.

"He is weakening," they thought, and Mrs. Malone seized at once on the opportunity to settle their difference.

"Now, am I one to discourage industry in a son-in-law because I ask you to quit the railroad?" she said, and shook her head. "No, since it is necessary, I will even step out of my own industry to make room for you. The candy shop, and a thriving one it is with the school-children trade, shall be made over to you."

"And you will be safe—think of it," exclaimed Katy, with a kiss.

But Dan Nolan gave a bitter laugh and wandered out again.

"Sure, the superintendent's eye is as wild as Moseby's, the old outlaw," he was thinking, and at this thought he paused, and presently, with more purpose than he had yet shown, started for the jail.

Sheriff Doone had always blamed himself a bit for driving Moseby off the railroad, and now, understanding that the old outlaw's day was done, gave him many privileges. As on other visits with Katy, Dan found him smoking in the jail yard and not a guard in sight.

"Whist—I have great news for you," said Dan, and explained the crossing situation at length. "Everything is ready, but to spike down the frog," he finished. "Ten minutes will gather a gang of Mexican trackmen from the labor settlement at the edge of town." He used all the arguments that O'Hanon had used to himself. "The injunction does not cover you; and if Halloran shows up you can scare him off by saying you already have ten years coming to you and another ten would not make any difference. But if you once get the frog down and a P. D. engine runs across, then the P. D. will apply to the court to restrain the G. S. W. from pulling it up, y'understand. And of course the P. D. will not prosecute you on the old charge."

"Why all the talk?" said Moseby. "Lend me your back." And in spite of his limp he mounted Dan's shoulders and clambered over the wall with the ease of a wild cat. Now, there is a difference between visiting an outlaw in jail, and running at large with him, which Dan had no intention of doing. Instead, he hurried home to lie low until the storm either blew over or blew back upon himself.

Now, once outside the walls, Moseby, who had suffered the delay of the law for six months, was all for action. It does not take long for a man like him to obtain a revolver, and with a couple of drinks from the same source he was not only armed but fortified. 'Twas only then he remembered he had no money with which to hire his track gang.

"Bad scran to Dan Nolan for forgetting it," he said, and, not knowing where else

to search for him, started for Katy Malone's.

He hissed her name and his own and she followed him under the shadow of a lilac bush, where he inquired for Dan.

"He should have been here with money," said Moseby.

"He is going your bail, or must already have done so," smiled Katy and clapped her hands.

"You do well to persuade him to quit the dommed railroad. It will make a man of him."

"I like to think that I will never have to worry about him, safe in the candy shop," smiled Katy. "I have almost won him."

"D'ye say candy shop?" hissed Moseby. "For Nolan? Sure, you must know, Miss Malone, that only one career waits a man who quits railroading—my own, and a noble success he will make of it."

"Do you mean he would turn bandit?"

"What else? Whist, it was Dan put me over the jail wall and should meet me here with means for a job we have on hand. Oh, if you urged him to quit the P. D. expecting him to turn candy man, you will be disappointed; statistics prove that an ex-railroader tests one-hundred-per-cent outlaw by nature." And Moseby did a little jig step.

As the lilac bush was weak support, Katy's trembling knees let her down, and Moseby's strong hand dragged her up again. "Well, I must be on my way," he said, examining his revolver.

"But they will be shooting at Dan!"

"Oh, that is all in the day's work," explained Moseby. "Hark—there is a step on the sidewalk; do not betray us," and he melted into the street shadows.

A few minutes later, Superintendent O'Hanon, a great night worker, looked up from his desk to see an armed man standing within the door.

"Two hundred dollars—I have broke jail and joined the talent again," said Moseby. "Remember, I never kill unless I am kept waiting."

O'Hanon gasped, swore, but under the pointed revolver gave up all he had, some seventy-five dollars. "Now, listen, and make ready to back my play in the G. S. W. yard," said Moseby, and, after giving his program, sent O'Hanon to the ticket office for more money.

"But why did you hold me up?" asked O'Hanon.

"You can swear that you gave me no money and that I do this on my own account in loyalty to the old P. D."

None of the hundred battles of construction had impressed the witnesses like the Halloran Waterloo of an hour before—the big rusty gold star of the crossing frog under a G. S. W. headlight, with the limping Moseby giving a limping jig step thereon in the rejuvenated old age of outlawry. The glimpse of swarthy faces swirling away in the drafty flare of the torches—the rigid, frigid Halloran listening to a bullet over his head. And then the P. D. engine with its dead headlight, creeping from an ambush of dusk; the thump of drivers on the points. Then the South Branch was open. And who was to close it? Not Judge Carnes, who reasoned in equity that two parties with equal pulls have equal rights; having granted one an injunction, 'twas only fair that the other be granted a restraining order. Moseby, sure of release from the old P. D. charge, had escaped back into jail.

The whole town had been roused by the row and the alarm whistles and were still talking it over at midnight, all but O'Hanon, who, unsuspected by any but Dan Nolan, had been fighting off brain fever. To the superintendent, now back shuffling papers at his office desk, the events of the night were only a stage of delirium. He tried to straighten out his mind, but could not then or thereafter recall what the last week had all been about. Only one event he remembered clearly when he came to in the company hospital.

He remembered a young woman bursting into his office demanding to know if Dan Nolan had gone west with outlaw Moseby; he remembered Dan's appearing from the inner office and Katy Malone's seizing him in her arms, and begging him not to resign from the railroad. "It would be too dangerous," she said; "they might shoot you."

"Resign—my secretary!" said O'Hanon. "He can't. I'm all in."

That was all he remembered, but Katy and Dan never forgot the next minute. Then they helped get the boss to the hospital—in siding.

Another Johnston story in the next issue.

The Trail of "Subject Z"

By Robert H. Rohde

Author of "The London Consultant," "The Walled Garden," Etc.

The Great Macumber investigates the possibilities of a new kind of disguise—with beautiful silver handles.

IT is a unique and splendid friendship which exists between young Mr. William Anson Race of the editorial staff of the *Sphere* and the Great Macumber.

In the one case, Macumber detests baseball, abhors the opera, shuns prize fights, has no relatives seeking political preferment and is sufficiently well known to the argus-eyed Mr. Dexter Fellowes to have pass-gate privileges at Madison Square Garden on his own account when he is moved to look in on the circus. Thus his rapprochement with Billy Race has suffered none of the strains that commonly blight the development of intimacies between persons of the fourth estate and the laity.

The Great One makes no demands. Indifferent alike to the attractions of the press box at the Polo Grounds and the thrill to be extracted from sitting alongside the magistrate in night court, he has no yearning to claim a share in the perquisites and prerogatives of the journalist who is his friend.

Young Mr. Race, for his own part, recognizes and highly prizes Macumber as a source of news not to be found in police-station blotters or court records. In return for "scoops" that have made talk along Newspaper Row, he has given a deal of valuable publicity to the Great One in the columns of the *Sphere*. But more than that, he is everlastingly on the lookout for such queer fish and curious occurrences as Macumber is wont to divert himself with when the humdrum routine of the magician's art palls.

It was Billy, for example, who brought to the Great One's attention the singular—and as it turned out significant—circumstance of the two left-hand gloves in the Martinelli murder case. Billy, again, who lifted that first slender thread which Macumber subsequently wove into a hangman's rope of evidence against "Bluebeard" Bondy. Billy who brought the clew that led to the ransoming of the Laughing Lady. Billy who made possible the experiment of the third light and the blood bowl in a certain other memorable matter with which readers of the *Sphere* should be familiar.

And it was this same indefatigable Billy who turned up finally at the Rawley one evening with his face stiffened into preternatural lines of solemnity and Mr. Elmer Mumford in tow.

"Professor," said he impressively, "I want you to meet a friend who is—well, in your line."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Great One. "A fellow magician, eh? Really, I'm——"

Mr. Mumford appeared embarrassed by the hasty assumption. With a pudgy hand he made a gesture of deprecation. Billy Race plunged to his rescue.

"Not that. Not that, at all, professor. Mr. Mumford is a—a criminologist, so to speak."

Under the direct gaze of the Great One's kindling eye Mr. Race's convoy colored.

"Well, well!" said Macumber. "Not the Mumford who accomplished such wonders in the service of Scotland Yard during the 'eighties? But of course not! *You'll* be only a year or two past forty, Mr. Mumford. A son, perhaps?"

"More likely a distant cousin," said Mr. Mumford, who seemed both impressed and gratified by the reference to Scotland Yard and the other Mumford who had shone bright among its stars. "I must trace back the connection. It's very interesting, I'm sure. My own father——"

Billy lowered an eyelid and interrupted: "Mr. Mumford's father chose another profession. And Mr. Mumford himself followed in his footsteps, feeling that the work must go on. Indeed it's a work that only the millennium will see at end, professor. Until recently criminology has been no more than a hobby with Mr. Elmer Mumford—as with yourself. You've been actively engaged on your present case only about two weeks, haven't you, Mr. Mumford?"

"It will be two weeks come Saturday," nodded the stout little sleuth. He sighed. "But what weeks!"

Billy Race read a question in Macumber's swift glance.

"Mr. Mumford and I aren't exactly old friends—but we've got to know each other pretty well on short acquaintance." He beamed on his companion. "Wasn't more than a couple of hours ago that we first got to talking, down in the rotunda of the Billingslea Building. I'd been in and out a number of times in the course of the day, and noticed that Mumford seemed to be having a long wait for somebody. Got to saying to myself, 'I wonder if that sharp-eyed chap's a detective.' And then—just how it happened I'm stumped if I know—I found myself in conversation with him."

"You asked me for a match," prompted Mumford, and the Great One smiled broadly.

"A request typical of William Race," said he. He nodded toward Billy, who was helping himself from the cigarette tin lying open on the table. "Look at him now! It's written in the reporter's creed that matches, tobacco and money are community property, I believe. So you're engaged on a case, Mr. Mumford? I envy you, sir, the joy of the chase."

Mr. Mumford nodded gravely.

"And an extraordinary case it is, professor," supplied William Anson Race, again with that all but imperceptible flutter of the eyelid. "I took the liberty of suggesting that it might pay Mr. Mumford to consult *you*."

"Dear me, William," deplored the Great One; "I'm sure that he'll be the man to cope with his problem without calling on the assistance of such a tyro as myself." And then he turned to Mumford and diffidently remarked: "Perhaps if I were informed as to the nature of the problem you're wrestling with I might have a useful thought. Two heads, you know——"

The plump criminologist scrutinized an edge of starched white cuff which projected a full inch below the lusterless black of his coat sleeve. One might have imagined he expected to find there sundry notations out of which to construct a reply. But since the cuff was immaculate I could only believe that Elmer Mumford was inclined to temporize.

"Now, Mr. Macumber," said he, without lifting his gaze, "I'd like to have you understand that it's not a question of not having confidence in you, or anything like that. I'd known you well by reputation before Mr. Race brought me here—long before he first mentioned your name this evening. So don't think I'm giving you a short answer when I say I can't tell you what the problem is."

The Great One, suddenly preoccupied with the stoking of his pipe, frowned ever so slightly.

"He means——" began Billy; but his companion now was for being his own spokesman.

"I mean," said he, "that after eleven days of the most astonishing adventures that I've ever dreamed of going through, I'm still guessing myself. It's a big case I'm on—a

case that's going to hit some people in high places before I'm through with it—but so far I haven't been intrusted with the inside facts. What the idea is, or the problem, as you say, *I* can't tell you because I don't exactly know."

Macumber looked up so quickly that little Mr. Mumford took an involuntary step backward; for an adventurer it was patent he possessed an uncomfortable superabundance of nerves. But the Great One's expression was far from menacing. He smiled.

"At the moment," he said amiably, "I find your assertion incomprehensible. But on that account it is, if anything, the more interesting. I've known many a detective in the same boat, Mr. Mumford—but none so frank. So you're not working single-handed, I gather."

"Oh, no!" cried the other earnestly. "I'm a small cog in a great machine, as it were. And I dare say that if Mr. McGuffy believed that the case was going to develop into one of such importance he'd have put a more experienced man on the end that's been left to me."

"Mr. McGuffy?" queried Macumber. "Who is he?"

To Elmer Mumford the question seemed astonishing. For a moment he stared at the Great One.

"Why, James McGuffy!" exclaimed Billy Race's new find. *"The* McGuffy! McGuffy of the McGuffy International Detective Agency, to be sure!"

Macumber snapped his fingers—and made the act eloquent of self-deprecatory chagrin.

"Of course," he murmured. "Stupid of me! And so you're connected with the McGuffy International, Mr. Mumford?"

The other nodded.

"For the present; and I hope permanently. Luck has surely been with me during my trial period. Thus far, I'm pleased to be able to say, I've made good. For that I have Mr. McGuffy's own word. He has promised that when this case has been disposed of I'll be added to the regular staff. And after that I'll be working out of the main office."

"You don't report at the office now?"

"Never. I'm what is called an 'undercover' man. My reports are made direct to Mr. McGuffy, and not even his chief assistants know that I'm working for the agency. Mr. McGuffy visits me every night at my place of business, and there we confer on happenings of the day."

The Great One avoided the mirthful and triumphant gaze of Billy Race.

"A clever stratagem," said he. "But—*your* place of business, you say? Mr. McGuffy comes there?"

"That's it. Later on I may sell out, but until I know that I'm going to be reasonably successful in the new field I don't intend to let the firm of E. Mumford & Son pass into other hands. The neighborhood's not what it used to be, Mr. Macumber, but there'll be a good living in it for a Mumford these many years to come."

"Which should be a comforting thought," said the Great One. "By the by, what *is* the business—or, as I believe William suggested, the profession?"

"It is both business and profession," said Elmer Mumford with a touch of honest pride, and he presented to Macumber a card drawn deftly from an inner pocket of his rusty coat:

E. MUMFORD & SON
MORTICIANS
"SERVICE WITH SYMPATHY"—DAY AND NIGHT

In smaller type the card bore a telephone number and an address in the old Chelsea section, I saw.

"The fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the family enterprise is not far distant," continued Mr. Mumford. "It has become an institution. One inheriting it might well look upon it as a sacred trust. But the undertaking profession, Mr. Macumber, requires in the practitioner a certain philosophic tranquillity of mind—a monumental patience in the awaiting of the inevitable—that I sometimes fear I do not possess. Since my poor father went to join that silent army which he had served so well, I've come to realize I'm not the man *he* was. For two years now I have been without the inspiration of his companionship; and frankly I welcomed a change. When Mr. McGuffy was good enough——"

Suddenly the eyes of the small mortician had widened. Macumber had been holding the professional card of E. Mumford & Son between the thumb and forefinger of an extended hand. He had breathed on it—and the card had vanished!

"Mere legerdemain, that, Mr. Mumford,"

said the Great One. "Yet one might read the parable in it. So at the breath of the Supreme Puzzle Maker we all must shrivel and be gone. But I dare say you've done enough of moralizing yourself. It was Mr. McGuffy, you were telling us, who——"

"Mr. McGuffy, himself," said Elmer Mumford, "gave me my chance."

"Ah, I see. A friend of yours."

"Not precisely, but a good friend of a neighbor of mine. If I find myself making satisfactory headway in another and more congenial calling, my first thanks are due to Mr. Henry Parker. It was through him that I met Mr. McGuffy."

Billy Race showed his appreciation of my taste by making a new raid on the cigarette tin. Now, with a gracious hospitality, he offered his companion one of the Egyptians.

"Queer how opportunity will come to a man," he ruminated. "Yes, sir; sometimes it's astonishing the way things break. Tell the professor about it, Mumford."

The surviving partner of the firm of E. Mumford & Son waved away the cigarette.

"Don't smoke 'em. I'm like Mr. Macumber; a pipe does me." He threw one fat leg over the other and settled back in his chair. "Well, I don't mind telling an old story again if you don't mind listening to it, Mr. Race. The fact is, gentlemen, that I can figure myself a pretty lucky man to be where I am to-day."

"And I fancy," interjected the Great One with a smile, "that Mr. McGuffy thinks himself in luck, too. A promising recruit is more valuable to a detective agency in these times than a profitable client, I mean to say."

Mr. Mumford looked his gratitude.

"If you'd met me at any time prior to a couple of weeks ago, Mr. Macumber," said he, "you'd have found me something of a dreamer. Even as a boy I had known an ambition to become a detective when I arrived at manhood's estate. But that was not to be. Instead it was my father's ambitions for me that were fulfilled. In his own youth he had been denied the advantages of a technical education. He was a self-made man in the profession; but he saw to it that I had the benefit of the course and the broadening influence of the association offered by the famous Pethwaite Institute of Embalming in Toledo.

"Yet while at the institute I took little part in undergraduate activities. My hours of freedom were spent in reading stories of the doings of detectives, which I found not only entertaining but instructive. It was my delight to follow the course of criminal mysteries through the news of the day, constructing my own theories early and checking them against the facts brought out by the police."

"Aye," murmured Macumber. "'Tis a delight of my own. We are in sympathy."

Mr. Mumford had filled his pipe from the Great One's tobacco jar a minute or two before. Now, unobtrusively, he emptied the bowl into the ash tray at his elbow and brought forth a pouch of his own containing, certainly, some far less formidable mixture. He seemed to have suffered.

"My taste in literature has never changed," he went on. "For years my father commented upon it—often sarcastically. And so, indeed, did Mr. Henry Parker on that day of his very first call at the Mumford parlors. He had dropped in casually to ask the location of Sunset Cemetery, and found me at my reading. As it proved, we had a taste in common. In fact, on a subsequent visit Mr. Parker disclosed that he had been associated with the McGuffy International Agency for many years. Then, as if he had read my unspoken thought, he was pleased to suggest that a connection with the agency might be made for me.

"A stupendous suggestion it was, Mr. Macumber. And yet, on consideration, I found it less impracticable than it may sound to you. Particularly after I had talked with Mr. James McGuffy and, having taken my measure, he had told me that while making up his mind whether I was the sort of man he was looking for he would be willing to compensate me for my time at the rate of twenty dollars a day."

"A handsome emolument!" ejaculated the Great One.

"So I thought," nodded Mr. McGuffy's acquisition. "It meant more than the trebling of my net income for a time, at least; and also the opportunity of engaging in what I had regarded all my life as the most fascinating of pursuits. Even if I should fail to show myself suitable for the work, my horizon would be widened and I would be money ahead."

"But how about——"

"The business of E. Mumford & Son,

most fortunately, would hardly be affected by my absence during the hours I'd be needed by the agency."

"Oh, you've assistants?"

"I hadn't then, but it's sufficient that some one be on hand to answer the telephone. Mr. Parker volunteered to look after day calls for me, and would accept only a nominal remuneration. A splendid type of man, Mr. Macumber. He's as anxious to have me make a go of the new connection as if he were my own brother."

"Parker has no other demands on his time?"

"Just now he hasn't. A few months ago he was wounded by a desperate criminal, and Mr. McGuffy is continuing his salary during his convalescence. Until his strength has been completely recovered his time is his own. He remains at the store—as father always *would* call the Mumford parlors—until my return in the evening. Thus far, as a matter of fact, he has not had a single call to report. As I've said, the neighborhood is changing. Once it was altogether a residential section; now warehouses and factories are crowding our people out. In the last year or two I've averaged rather under a funeral a month. I'd planned on engaging a man temporarily in the event there should be a call for the services of E. Mumford & Son while I'm working with Mr. McGuffy."

"That sounds a feasible plan," assented Macumber. "After all, the name's everything, isn't it? But I'm little acquainted with the methods of the great detective agencies, Mr. Mumford. What, for example, are the duties of an 'under-cover' man?"

"Why—ah—I can speak only for my own case. Since last week I've been shadowing a mysterious young man who is as yet known to me only as 'Subject Z.' From the time he leaves his home in the morning until his return at evening, barring several occasions when he has managed to elude me, I have been continuously at his heels."

"He's eluded you now and again, eh? He knows you're on his trail?"

"I don't think so. No, I'm sure he doesn't suspect me. I have made frequent changes in my appearance."

"Good Lord!" cried the Great One. "You're using disguises so early in the game?"

Mr. Elmer Mumford reached for the black felt hat he had worn on his entrance.

"A fedora now, you see!" He gave it a poke and a prod and a pat. "Now a telescope. Now a high-crowned effect with dimples—and the wearer might be a visiting stockman from the West. Or a Southerner. Again, I put on these black-rimmed glasses. Don't look like the same man, do I? Yet I have another change. Watch!" Mr. Mumford rolled up the accommodating hat and stuffed it into a pocket. From another pocket he produced a wrinkled cap of faintly checkered pattern, which he pulled low over his eyes. "Suppose the man with the fedora and the spectacles had sat opposite you in the subway train, and then an hour or so later you'd noticed the man in the cap loitering near you. Would you think for a moment—would it even occur to you—the two were one?"

Macumber did not make a direct reply; but the man of many identities found his glance of admiration enough.

"Bravo, Mumford!" he exclaimed. "Upon my soul, one would think you'd been at the business all your life! And you've actually gathered no idea as to the identity of this Subject Z?"

"Not the slightest. But of course that's neither here nor there. I have made no attempt to satisfy my private curiosity. Indeed, Mr. McGuffy cautioned me to keep away from the man's office and his home—and in no circumstance to disclose my identity and mission to the police, regardless of what I thought my subject should be about to do. It is required of me only to keep track of his movements during each day, and to make note of the people he meets. Descriptions of these people are sufficient where it would be awkward getting names. But there's one name I've cottoned to, Mr. Macumber. I give it to you in a whisper." And suitably lowering his voice, Elmer Mumford muttered the awesome title: *"Senator Sands!"*

The Great One's astonishment was unquestionably genuine.

"The deuce you say, Mumford! It's Sands, the rampaging radical of the plains, that you mean?"

"That's the one."

"Your Subject Z has had a meeting with him?"

"They've met more than once. And if I'm any judge of a man's looks and actions, the senator's in deadly fear of Subject Z. I could almost swear to it, Mr. Macumber!"

"How do you make that out?" demanded the Great One sharply.

A thick notebook bound in leather as black as the coat in which it had been carried came into view. The corpulent shadow, moistening the tip of a stumpy thumb, began rapidly to turn the leaves.

"This used to be a sort of diary," said he, "only I didn't use to have much to put in it. Now I find it handy for writing up my reports. Let's see. Here's Monday of last week. That's where it all begins. If you want, I'll start way back there, and you can pick up the trail of Subject Z where I did."

"It would be a privilege to hear you quote from your notes," said the Great One with enthusiasm. "I'm singularly interested."

Mr. Elmer Mumford refreshed his memory from the written page.

"Well, early on that Monday morning," he said, "Mr. McGuffy came to the store. We'd had a long talk on Sunday, and I was ready to start out. By subway we traveled over to Brooklyn, and then there was a wait of maybe ten minutes on a station platform out in Flatbush. Finally Mr. McGuffy nudged me and pointed out a young fellow with a sharp kind of nose standing by himself at the front end of the platform. He wore spats and had his hat cocked over to one side and carried a crook-handled walking stick.

" 'There's your man,' says Mr. McGuffy. 'It will be enough for you to know him as Subject Z. Don't let him lose you.' "

"But he did lose you, eh?" chuckled Macumber.

"Not that day. I followed him onto a city-bound train, and was right behind him when he got off at Chambers Street. From the subway he walked over to Broadway and then north to the Billingslea Building. He rode up in an elevator, and I waited below. In maybe half an hour he came out, swinging his cane and whistling as if his conscience was as clear as yours or mine. A while later I knew I was trailing a high flyer. He went straight to the Hotel St. Swithin, and sat around there the rest of the morning like he owned the place."

"He met no one there?"

"No; guess he got his dates mixed. Kept walking over to the desk every little while, and made three or four phone calls. It was Senator Sands he was after, all right."

"How do you know?"

"Because that was where he met Sands the next day. He'd been sitting in the lobby, just as on Monday, and all of a sudden up he jumped. He made straight for a tall man with a wide hat and a long coat who'd just come in—and later I found out that this was Senator Sands.

"Sands saw him coming. From fifty feet away I could see him freezing up. My man spoke to him, and in a little while had him edged off in a corner. Seemed to me he was showing a little less respect than the average citizen would for a United States senator. I got as close to them as I dared, but by the time I was near enough to hear anything Sands was walking away. I just caught his last words. 'You're up the wrong tree,' he said, stopping for a second. 'Take that word back to 'em!' "

"Then what happened?"

"The senator appeared to be stopping at the hotel. He went upstairs. Subject Z went back to the Billingslea Building. Didn't come out again until late in the afternoon. Then he headed for Flatbush. I'd learned from following him the day before that he lived in an apartment a couple of blocks from the Newkirk Avenue station. He landed there and stayed out of sight. At seven o'clock I started back for the city. I don't have to watch him nights, you see. Mr. McGuffy has some other way of keeping track of him after seven."

"A considerate arrangement," remarked Macumber. "I'd like to hear more, Mr. Mumford—about Senator Sands, in particular."

For the first time the man of two professions displayed symptoms of hesitation.

"I wonder," he said, "if Mr. McGuffy would like me to do so much talking about the case. I'm afraid it might mean the loss of my connection, if it got to his ears."

The Great One hastily reassured him.

"It won't," said he. "You can be certain of it—and also that I'll leave the pursuit of Subject Z to the McGuffy International Detective Agency."

Mr. Mumford rose and stepped soberly to Macumber's side.

"Shake hands on that—goes better with me than a Bible oath. Good enough, Mr. Macumber. I've trusted you so far, and I guess I can go the rest of the way. The senator? Oh, yes. He met Subject Z again yesterday at the St. Swithin. Seemed pretty

shaky, from all I could see. But that wasn't much. They got into the elevator together, and it was an hour later when my man came down. He was alone. Wore a grim sort of look. Just outside the hotel he met another young fellow and told him: 'Sands should be coming out within the next half hour. Keep him in sight. This may be the day.'"

"So there's another shadow at work!" exclaimed the Great One.

"That's what."

Macumber rubbed his hands.

"Excellent! Excellent! Now tell me, Mumford, what had your friend been doing between these two forgatherings with the senator?"

Mr. Mumford again had recourse to his notes.

"Monday and Tuesday of last week you know about," said he. "Then Wednesday. Yes, that was the day he called on his pal. Seems that Subject Z has a friend who's in trouble."

"What kind of trouble?"

"You've got me there. But anyhow it's something bad enough to have fetched him up in the Tombs. My man went to visit him and stayed a couple of hours. Didn't seem to be worried much, though. When he came out he went to a billiard room not far away and played a string with the proprietor. Queer how shady characters will stick by those games of billiards and pool!"

"It is, Mumford. And on Thursday?"

"That was one of the days my man got away from me. The way he did it is almost incredible. Yes, sir; he just up and flew away from me!"

"Flew?"

"That's exactly what I mean. He went to some sort of aviation field on Long Island. While I watched from cover quarter of a mile away he was up and off in an airplane—the oddest-looking airship I've ever seen. A contraption with three wings on each side. I waited until dark, but Subject Z didn't come back, and neither did the plane."

"By Cæsar!" said Macumber. "There's something to ponder over, for a fact."

The eager light in the eyes of Mr. Mumford became more intense.

"I was on hand, though, in time to see Subject Z come out of the house in Flatbush Friday morning. He looked as if he'd been in a fracas. Had court-plaster on his chin, and another strip pasted alongside his nose. But he didn't seem to think that ought to keep him from moving in fine society. As cool as you please, he mixed himself in with the guests at Miss Edith Abernathy's wedding that same afternoon. Picking their pockets, maybe, while he strutted around. Best I could do was stand in the crowd outside the church."

The Great One grinned.

"Pockets at the Abernathy wedding *would* have been fat picking. Say on, Mumford!"

The rising star of the McGuffy International Detective Agency folded his short arms across his chest.

"Well, sir," said he, "I could spend the rest of the night telling you of the strange doings of Subject Z; but I can't do that because I'm due to meet Mr. McGuffy in just twenty-five minutes. To-day's the first time that my man hasn't——"

Mumford glanced toward Billy Race, who put in:

"Yes, it was an off day in the life of the mystery man that gave me the pleasure of making Mr. Mumford's acquaintance. He stayed in his hide-out in the Billingslea Building until five o'clock this afternoon, and went directly to the place in Flatbush. On the trip he had two shadows instead of one, for Mumford was kind enough to let me accompany him."

The Great One scowled at the interruption.

"I'd much rather listen to Mr. Mumford, if you please, Billy," said he brusquely. "His time's limited, as he has pointed out."

William Anson Race bit his lip and subsided. I thought he displayed a far deeper distress than the rebuke warranted, for tilts much more acrimonious had been frequent in his intercourse with Macumber. Elmer Mumford was already on his feet, and shaping the educated hat into the fedora effect which he evidently favored in his private character.

"I'll have to run, Mr. Macumber," said he. "Didn't realize how the time was flying. But I won't go without letting you in on one more point. It may give you a hunch. Now listen! You read about the theft of those diamonds from Blizzard & Co.'s shop—stuff worth more than a hundred thousand, as the papers said? Well, do you remember what day that was?"

"Monday of this week," replied the Great One promptly. "What about it?"

"The police called it an inside job, didn't they?"

"That seemed to be their opinion."

Mr. Mumford puffed strenuously at his pipe for a moment, as often I've seen Macumber do while formulating some startling disclosure.

"An inside job, eh?" he murmured presently. "Maybe it was—and maybe it wasn't. All *I* can say is that I spent a whole hour across the street one day while Mr. Subject Z was hobnobbing around in Blizzard & Co.'s. And *that* was the day, Mr. Macumber, that the diamonds were stolen!"

II.

Again there was a ceremonious clasping of hands before Elmer Mumford left us. But now the compact was of Macumber's suggestion. Mr. Mumford, though holding firm in his allegiance to Mr. James McGuffy and the McGuffy International Detective Agency, was to regard us as secret allies in the prosecution of his first case. Nightly, he promised, he would keep us informed of the movements of the provocative Subject Z. How the Great One purposed to aid him I could not see, but Mumford didn't raise the question. Evidently the mere prospect of having an audience less official and perhaps more appreciative than the principal of the McGuffy International intrigued him in itself.

When Mr. Mumford had bounded springily from our presence on a pair of noiseless rubber heels which I perceived to have been attached quite recently to his glossy shoes, Billy Race and the Great One stood for a time staring at each other.

"Can you beat it?" demanded Billy at length.

"A fool question," retorted Macumber. "It *can't* be beaten in this sober world. You're a treasure, William!" He turned to me. "What do you say, lad?"

"I say," I replied, "that Mr. Elmer Mumford has been turned loose on a job many sizes too big for him. The whole thing is tragically ridiculous."

"Aye," said the Great One; "and delicious."

He caught Race's eye again, and though Macumber's face was serious the reporter laughed gustily.

"Imagine it!" he chortled. "Imagine him telling this McGuffy person that he'd stood by making notes while Blizzard's was looted! Oh, the blessed dear lunatic!"

There have been times when I've disapproved of William Anson Race. A clever man at his trade, he is the victim of a light-mindedness that I cannot always abide.

"If there's a lunatic involved in this business," I told him, "it's McGuffy. Were the man possessed of an atom of sense, he'd never have employed the ingenuous Mr. Mumford. To have kept him blundering along after it had become apparent that his Subject Z was a man worth watching seems to me an astounding piece of stupidity."

I spoke with spirit, and Billy's jaw dropped.

"Ho-lee smoke!" he began. "You——"

The Great One cut him short.

"Hold your tongue, William," he said curtly. "And you, lad, pick up your hat and be after Mumford. If you waste no more time you'll catch him before he's out of the hotel."

"Yes?" said I. "And if I catch him? What's the message?"

Macumber urged me toward the door.

"Good Lord, I don't want you to talk to him! Don't even let him see you. Follow him at a distance. If he takes a surface car, as probably he will, you hail a cab. And watch out most particularly for any one else who may be watching our Elmer. I'd like to be sure he wasn't shadowed himself when Billy brought him here!"

Two hours had elapsed before I returned to the Rawley, and Race in the meantime had taken his departure.

"If Mumford was followed by anybody but me it must have been an expert shadow," I reported. "*I* saw nothing of him, anyhow."

"Where did the little man go?"

"Just where he said he was going—to his festive 'store.' Two men were waiting for him there. McGuffy and Parker, I judged. They came out together about fifteen minutes after Mumford arrived."

"And Mumford?"

"He seems to have some sort of bachelor diggings over the undertaking parlors. When the others had gone a light showed for a while on the floor above. I waited until it had been put out, and decided Mumford had turned in."

"Very good, lad," said the Great One,

dropping a hand onto my shoulder. "You put him to bed, eh? Ah, I can trust you to be thorough."

My brain had not been idle, you may be sure, during the time I followed the funereal Mumford and stood watch in the shadows opposite the gloomy establishment of E. Mumford & Son.

"What a misfortune it is," I exclaimed, "that an inexperienced and impractical fellow like our little fat friend should be pitted against so accomplished a rascal as this Subject Z must be! A man who evades pursuit by having casual recourse to an airplane, who takes his toll at a society wedding, who between conferences with a United States senator lifts a fortune out of the display in Fifth Avenue's smartest jewelry shop! What the devil can be wrong with McGuffy?"

"There's something wrong with Mumford's employer, and that's certain," said Macumber. "Aye, 'twould have been a treat to have watched the man's face as he listened to his shadow's reports. But I dare say he could give us an excellent reason for keeping Mumford on the trail of the so-called Subject Z. I'd not be surprised if he were satisfied that Elmer's earning his money—and altogether pleased, indeed, with his showing."

"Do you really expect to hear from Mumford again?" I asked him.

"Haven't the slightest doubt that he'll call to-morrow evening, bursting with pride and information."

I shook my head.

"I can't imagine you committed to inactivity, maestro. Small profit and less pleasure you'll be getting out of this business from a seat on the side lines."

"I'm not so sure of that," said the Great One slowly. He glanced at the clock. "Midnight, lad. And we're to be at the booking offices at nine sharp, remember."

In the morning we kept our engagement on the dot; and when we descended into Times Square shortly before ten o'clock Macumber had in his pocket a copy of a contract that would open the eyes of the blasé individual who holds that the vaudeville public has lost its enthusiasm for magic.

The Great One suggested a walk, but he headed neither for the park nor for the Avenue. Instead he turned west; and when he made another turn to the south we were in a thoroughfare lined by small and weather-beaten shops, in which a high percentage of the other promenaders we met were women who wheeled baby carriages ahead of them. When we left this avenue of the endless baby parade, Macumber's way again led west. Now we were in a street flanked by red-brick houses, as like one to its neighbor as teeth in a comb.

In the block beyond red brick had been vanquished by the cement and stone of a later utilitarian era. On our southerly hand two wide buildings given over to various small manufactures shouldered against a high and narrow warehouse. It climbed several stories farther toward the sky than its square neighbors, seeming to have been squeezed upward by their leaning bulk.

The enameled street sign at the corner caught my eye. I directed the Great One's attention to it.

"See where we are! In Mumford's neighborhood!"

"So we are," said Macumber, blinking at the sign. "Yes; his place will be in the block below. Would you have a look at it by daylight, lad?"

Around the corner was the establishment for whose direction the departed E. Mumford had educated his son. A chaste casket with handles of silver lay in state in the show window against a background of somber drapes which hid the interior.

As we passed along the opposite sidewalk a tall man with a heavy black mustache came to the door, looked up the street and down, and disappeared again.

"Must be Parker," said I. "Last night I had him down for McGuffy."

The Great One gripped my arm.

"Look, lad!" he whispered. "Business would appear to be picking up for the house of Mumford."

A sable motor hearse had come into the street. It drew to the curb in front of the window containing the silver-handled casket. Macumber drew me into a convenient doorway as the driver of the hearse climbed from behind the steering wheel. At the same moment the man Parker appeared again. From the interior of the hearse he and the driver pulled a big black box similar to the one on display. One at either end, they carried it into the shop.

Two or three minutes passed. Then the door opened once more. It framed the figure of Parker. He stood with his back to

us. Walking backward, he came onto the sidewalk, with the pilot of the hearse following him at a distance of a couple of yards. Again they bore a burden—another black box. The hearse doors closed on it, and the ebon chariot rolled away.

"Great Scott!" I exclaimed. "What's the meaning of that?"

The Great One didn't answer until Parker had retreated indoors and it was safe for us to resume our stroll.

"It's our solution, lad," said he complacently as we walked on, "to the puzzle of Subject Z!"

III.

But I had small chance to judge of the validity of Macumber's complacence. Within a couple of minutes after we had passed from the street in which E. Mumford & Son's window display urged the passer-by to reflections on the morrow, he halted.

"I leave you here, lad," said he. "It's an interesting neighborhood, and I've a mind to linger in it. Go on to the Rawley. And if you should happen to see Mumford or hear from him before I do, be sure you say nothing to him of what we've observed this morning."

At the hotel I had luncheon alone, and spent the afternoon in solitude. From Macumber I heard nothing, but shortly before six o'clock I had a telephone call from the scrupulous Mumford. His voice was trembling

"I won't be able to see Mr. Macumber to-night," he said. "The McGuffy Agency will be needing every man. Don't expect to get a wink of sleep myself."

"What's up?" I asked.

"I've got to the bottom of it. I know now what my man is into. It's a murder plot."

My thoughts flew back to that scene of the forenoon at E. Mumford & Son's—that sinister switching of caskets, the swift departure of the hearse with its new freight.

"Who's been killed?" I demanded. "How?"

But the connection wasn't there.

"Nobody—yet," replied Mumford. "It's set for to-morrow."

"Who's to die?"

"Senator Sands! Luck's with me still. Overheard part of a conversation between Subject Z and the man he had trailing the senator. Just caught a few words. My man said, 'Everything's set. Sands has signed his own death warrant. The old man's passed the word. To-morrow he goes to the grave.' Yes, I *heard* it. Don't know who the higher-up is—the 'old man.' But the McGuffy Agency'll ferret him out fast enough, I guess. Tell Mr. Macumber, please. Can't lose any more time getting to the chief!"

And within the hour I was telling Macumber. He heard the news with an expression of curious intensity, his lips drawn tight and an extraordinary brightness in his eyes.

"If the McGuffy International Detective Agency and Mr. Elmer Mumford can't protect the senator, I'm sure we can't," he said when I had finished. "At any rate, he'll be warned."

"Would you call Mumford a lunatic *now?*" I challenged.

"Never said he was," replied the Great One. "But for all his brilliant work of to-day, he's none the less an ass."

Then, with a wintry smile, he broke off to ask me if there had been any other calls for him.

"Queer," he said. "Golden was to ring me here before seven this evening. Usually he's on the dot, or a bit ahead of it. Well, he's three minutes left."

"Golden?" I queried.

"Izzy Golden," explained Macumber. "The eminent prohibition sleuth. You've heard of him, surely."

"Oh, yes," said I. "The low-comedy fellow who's always making himself up in trick whiskers and hired dress suits, and all that——"

"Don't delude yourself in regard to Golden, lad," warned the Great One. "People laugh at his methods, but he gets results. If he's humorless, he's also fearless."

The telephone bell began ringing. Macumber lifted the receiver.

"Hello. Yes, Izzy. Where are you? Very well. I'll be right over. What? Oh, I'll let you have the details when I see you. I've a suggestion to make. One you'll appreciate, I'm certain. A new disguise!"

What business the Great One transacted with Izzy Golden he did not choose to tell me on his return to the Rawley.

"Wait until to-morrow, lad," he yawned. " 'Twill be a day of revelation for you at least, if not of action."

"Senator Sands——" I began.

"Tush, youngster. Leave the man to his fate. Good night!"

In the morning, as we were rising from our usual leisurely breakfast in the Rawley grill, Macumber was called to the telephone. I regarded him eagerly as he came from the booth, for intuitively I had felt the early call was related in some way to the adventures of Elmer Mumford. But my scrutiny of the Great One's bland countenance revealed nothing.

"How about a bit of a walk, lad?" he asked; and when I unenthusiastically assented it was to the west once more that he set his face.

Not more than a half mile from the hotel we came upon a street in which a considerable crowd had gathered. Three or four uniformed policemen were in evidence, but so far as I could see the center of interest was nothing more exciting than a commonplace motor truck. It was being loaded with bags brought from a big garage.

"Did you ever see such a city for idle curiosity?" I remarked. "What do you suppose holds the audience?"

"I don't have to suppose. I know."

"A raid?"

"Just that. A raid starring Mr. Izzy Golden in person. Costume by Macumber. And very good stuff of its kind it is that the bags yonder hold. It should be. It was stolen from a bonded warehouse."

"So?" said I. "And may I ask where you get your information?"

The Great One chuckled.

"I fear you didn't use your eyes to good advantage yesterday, youngster. In Twenty-first Street, directly behind the Mumford establishment, is a government warehouse —chockablock with whisky to be released only on permit. Permits are hard to get, and the liquor is costly. To get the rye out the front way would necessitate many official papers and much cash. But there was a back way, from the warehouse cellar to the Mumford cellar. With inside connivance—and Mumford's absence insured—the two extremely capable gentlemen who called themselves Parker and McGuffy saw themselves on the road to fortune. Elmer's devotion to the lighter literature of criminology gave Parker a brilliant idea when he called on a fishing expedition. And it was quite logical that so resourceful a pair should have hit on the scheme of packing their booty in caskets and transporting it in hearses. Bags, cases and barrels wouldn't have had a proper look coming out of the place, would they? Yet it was a scheme, lad, that offered possibilities to me."

I swallowed hard.

"I presume you intend to tell me how?"

"Indeed, youngster," said the Great One warmly. "I'd hold nothing secret from you. Izzy Golden and I paid a visit to Mumford last night. We found that a casket had been packed with bottles in readiness for the first trip this morning. We removed the bottles, stowing them cannily away, and at a suitable hour Izzy took their place. So he went to *this* raid, you see, disguised as a corpse. Novel, eh?"

"Novel enough," said I. "But what about Senator Sands? Was Mumford dreaming all those exploits of his as a detective?"

"Lord, no! It has come to pass exactly as was predicted. Sands *is* dead to-day—politically dead. Have a look!"

From his pocket the Great One whipped an early edition of the *Evening Banner* and unfolded it before my eyes. Across the front page ran a line of clamorous types proclaiming:

SENATOR SANDS TOOK MULTIPLEX FEE.

Admits Receiving $100,000 Retainer from Machinery Trust Lobbyist.

"But," I demanded wildly, "what about the Blizzard robbery? What about——"

"Worry no more about Subject Z, lad. He met Sands in the line of duty. He went to Blizzard's in the line of duty. He attended the Abernathy wedding in the line of duty, visited the Tombs in the line of duty —even fell with the Tillinghast triplane and got his face scratched in the line of duty."

"Duty!" I cried. "What the devil duty could——"

"Certainly," smiled Macumber. "The self-styled McGuffy, you see, merely picked out a likely looking man in a crowd for his apprentice hand to practice on—a perfect stranger to himself. And Mumford had been shadowing a reporter!"

Mr. Rohde will have another story in the next issue.

A Chat With You

IT is hot, damp and stuffy. New York during a humid spell has all the exhausting quality of the tropics. If the way we feel at the present moment is a guide, by rights we ought to have one or two dark-skinned natives fanning us with punkahs and another mixing iced sherbets for us.

People come into this office from all over the world. Some from Australia, some from Africa, some from Honduras and South America, some from China and India. We have just parted from a gentleman who has been in Merida in Yucatan and wants to write stories about it.

To every visitor from equatorial regions, at some time or other in the conversation we invariably put the same question. We always say:

"Isn't it terribly hot down there?"

The answer is always the same. The visitor takes out his handkerchief and mops his brow, he loosens up his collar and fans himself with a newspaper. Then he says, with an appearance of great earnestness and sincerity:

"Let me tell you that I have suffered more from the heat in New York than any place in the world."

We have sometimes had a dream that Lucifer, the Lord of the Nether World, would call in here some day. He will appear in the guise of a polite and rather ineffectual gentleman. He will suggest that he might become a contributor and write stories for us. He will say that many of his stories have been well received in polite society, that he has a lot of wonderful local color and most astounding plots, that his stuff is full of action and that he has a big public following.

It goes without saying that we will tactfully refuse the offer of his services. He will explain that he has been going to and fro in the earth and walking up and down in it and has collected a wonderful lot of fiction. We will tell him that clever as many of his stories undoubtedly are, they are not our kind, that we go in for a different sort of stuff altogether and that our readers would not like it if we offered them diabolical inventions. Then just by way of changing the subject, we will ask, as politely as possible, the inevitable question:

"Down there—where you come from, you know—isn't it awfully hot?"

And Lucifer will reply: "Upon my word as a gentleman, I have felt the heat more here than I ever have in my own home."

* * * *

AND yet when we are out of town and talk to people about the summer climate of New York, they generally remark that it is a wonderful summer resort and that you are always sure of getting a refreshing breeze from the sea.

After all, whether it is hot or cold is a good deal a matter of opinion, no matter what the thermometer says. The human body is provided with a sort of thermostat that keeps it, when one is well, always at

the same temperature. Whether the frost is tingling in your fingers or the perspiration is running down your face, your body always registers the same degree of heat.

* * * *

THE surest way to beat the hot spell is to forget it. It is true that you can go somewhere on a train, but the train is hotter than ever, and even a motor car may stir up a disagreeable sirocco. We are going to escape this hot spell at once. Watch us while we do it. We have a magic carpet that will whisk us to whatever place we choose in an instant. Where shall it be? The South Seas. We are there already.

Yes, it is hot in the blazing sunlight, but deliciously cool in the shade. The steady trade wind fans us and stirs the palm trees. The white foam is crisp and cool across the face of the blue lagoon. A bronzed young man stands on the edge of the reef. Clipped by its forty-mile ring of coral, the great pond of the lagoon at which he gazes is a sea in itself, a sea of storm in heavy winds, a lake of azure in light airs. Do you recognize the place? It is Karolin, where the events narrated in "The Blue Lagoon" and "The Garden of God" took place. This new story by Stacpoole, "The Gates of Morning" is the best yet. It carries on the history of Dick Lestrange. It starts in the next issue of THE POPULAR.

SOMEHOW it does not feel so hot now as it did a few minutes ago. The airs of the blue lagoon have cooled us. It all depends on what you are thinking of and how much you are interested. Now, for a change, there is a complete novel about the air service in the next issue, "The Hoodoo Kiwi," by Kenneth Latour. No one ever suffers from the heat while he is up in a plane. Then too there is the story of Alaska, "Mute Tongues," by Theodore Seixas Solomons.

Cool enough for any one. Also there are Western stories by William Winter and Marsh that will make any one forget the heat. There is a prize-ring story by William McGeehan, a race-horse story by Jack O'Donnell, a mystery story by Rohde and a lot of other good stories.

* * * *

IF the heat bothers you it is largely a matter of your imagination. A clinical thermometer will register just the same under your tongue as it did last January. The trouble with you is that you may be bored. Any one who is bored feels heat, cold, damp—all sorts of discomforts. The best prescription for boredom is the next issue of THE POPULAR. We are perfectly serious in saying that it is one of the best issues we have ever sent to press. We respectfully suggest that it might be well to order it from your news dealer in advance.

YOU WIN!

Even before the final contest in which thousands of readers participated, we bet on you as readers of the advertisements in the Street & Smith publications.

We are happy to announce the following as the May 7th. prize winners:—

First Prize,	$15.00,	Mrs. Mamie Folsom Wynne, 711 N. Peak St., Dallas, Texas. *For letter submitted on Hupmobile.*
Second Prize,	5.00,	Franklin G. Nickerson, Richardson Ave., Attleboro, Mass. *For letter submitted on Topkis Athletic Underwear.*
Third Prize,	3.00,	Glenn N. Cowardin, 323 W. Hazeldine, Albuquerque, N. M. *For letter submitted on Prest-O-Lite Battery.*
Fourth Prize,	2.00,	Leonard A. Simmons, Box 8525, Lancaster, Nebr. *For letter submitted on Burlington Watch.*

June 7th winners will be announced in September 7th Popular

THE FINAL CONTEST

It will be practically impossible for us to continue the ad contest on account of the flood of mail that has risen each month. Nevertheless, we are grateful to our readers for their response. We believed it would be hearty, but it has long since surpassed our most liberal calculations.

With greatest thanks to all our appreciative and responsive readers, we are,

ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT
STREET & SMITH CORPORATION
79 Seventh Avenue **New York City**

This makes a *fine* supper

Airy grains of deliciousness

to entice the appetite

Imagine, if you can, fairy grains of rice, steam exploded to 8 times their natural size and with the rich flavor of nut-meats!

You float them in bowls of milk or cream, crisp and toasty grains that melt in your mouth with the smoothness of a confection.

It's a rare delight for the appetite. A supper dish and a breakfast dainty that millions now enjoy.

Ask your grocer today for Quaker Puffed Rice. Serve tonight for a change from the usual supper.

Serve, too, in many ways for the children. They revel in the lusciousness of ***whole grains***—the minerals and calciums doctors say they need—given thus in a delightful way. *Food that children need in a form they love!*

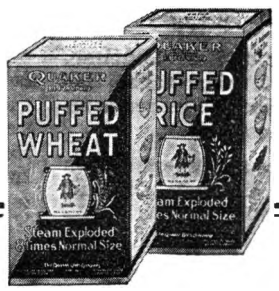
Puffed Wheat, too

Quaker Puffed Wheat is another cereal delight—grains of wheat exploded like the rice. Most folks get a package both of the Puffed Wheat and the Puffed Rice. And thus supply variety.

Professor Anderson's Invention

Quaker Puffed Wheat and Puffed Rice are the famous invention of Professor Anderson, formerly of Columbia University. Food shot from guns—grain foods thoroughly cooked.

Quaker Puffed Wheat



Quaker Puffed Rice

"*Our home is in Shanghai, China.* There, our eight-year-old Billy began having severe outbreaks of boils. The doctor's treatment there gave relief for a short time only. Then came a stay in America where we began a course of Fleischmann's Yeast, sandwiching the daily cake between layers of sugar cookies. Then did Fleischmann's prove itself, for the boils disappeared and after two years have never returned."

(Mrs. Julia W. Stafford of Shanghai, China)

"*I had four children to provide for.* My work was laborious and one year's untiring efforts found me very much run-down. It was difficult for me to keep on my feet for more than an hour at a time. I was more than willing to do my utmost to provide for my loved ones, but my health interfered.

"I saw an advertisement about Fleischmann's Yeast. Eagerly, enthusiastically, I tried it. I religiously continued the treatment and soon began to feel strong. I am now in perfect health with the bloom of youth in my face. Fleischmann's Yeast has done all this for me."

(A letter from Mrs. H. Crookhorn of New York City)

"*Born with an appetite* for fats and sweets, at 40 I was constipated and headachey. I had long since adopted the pill habit as a temporary relief from the ills and discomforts that come with constipation. I was ordered to Hot Springs for baths and rigid diet when a casual hotel acquaintance advised that I take Fleischmann's Yeast. Today constipation and headaches are gone—vanished. I enjoy my food—my eyes are clear and my color good. I have greater zest for work—play—life itself."

(Mr. E. R. Henderson of Hot Springs, Ark.)

Concentrated Energy in this fresh food

Billions of tiny living plants revitalize your system—banish Constipation, Skin, and Stomach Troubles

THESE remarkable reports are typical of thousands of similar tributes to Fleischmann's Yeast.

There is nothing mysterious about its action. It is not a "cure-all," not a medicine in any sense. But when the body is choked with the poisons of constipation—or when its vitality is low so that skin, stomach, and general health are affected—this simple, natural food achieves literally amazing results.

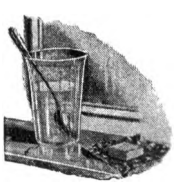
Concentrated in every cake of Fleischmann's Yeast are billions of tiny yeast-plants, alive and active. At once they go to work—invigorating the whole system, clearing the skin, aiding digestion, strengthening the intestinal muscles and making them healthy and active. *Health* is yours once more.

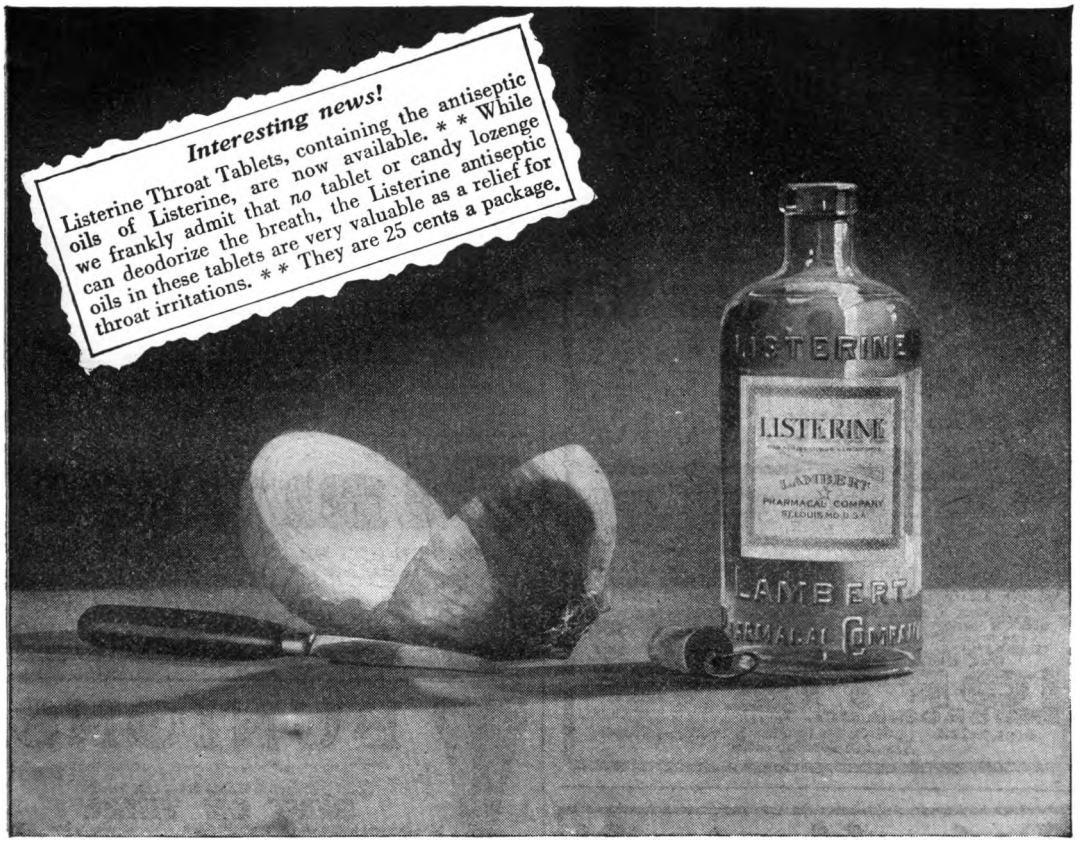
Dissolve one cake in a glass of water (just hot enough to drink)

—before breakfast and at bedtime. Fleischmann's Yeast, when taken this way, is especially effective in overcoming or preventing constipation.

Or eat 2 or 3 cakes a day—spread on bread or crackers—dissolved in fruit juices or milk—or eat it plain.

Fleischmann's Yeast for Health comes only in the tinfoil package—it cannot be purchased in tablet form. ***All grocers have it.*** Start eating it today! You can order several cakes at a time, for yeast will keep fresh in a cool, dry place for two or three days. Write us for further information or let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Address: Health Research Dept. Z-7, The Fleischmann Company, 701 Washington St., New York.





Maybe you don't believe this

—*then try it yourself*

As a perspiration deodorant simply douse on clear Listerine with a towel or washcloth. It evaporates quickly and does what you desire.

YOU have doubtless read a great many advertisements recommending the use of Listerine as a deodorant—as for instance, Listerine for halitosis (the medical term for unpleasant breath).

But do you really appreciate just how unusual Listerine's deodorizing properties are? Make this test yourself:

Rub a bit of fresh onion on your hand. Douse on a little Listerine. The onion odor immediately disappears.

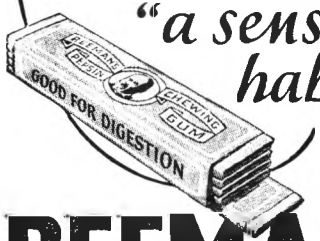
It will be a revelation to you. And then you will appreciate all the more why Listerine enjoys so widespread a popularity as a deodorant.

Women lately have developed a new use for Listerine. They wanted a perspiration deodorant—one absolutely safe, non-irritating, and one that would not stain garments.

They found it in Listerine—which is, after all, the ideal deodorant. Thousands of men and women will be grateful to us for passing this suggestion along. Try Listerine this way some day when you don't have time for a tub or shower. See how clean and refreshed it makes you feel.—*Lambert Pharmacal Company, Saint Louis, U. S. A.* * * * * *Makers also of Listerine Tooth Paste and Listerine Throat Tablets.*

LISTERINE  *—The safe antiseptic*

Let the children have all the Beeman's they want— it's healthful and tasty— its use is *"a sensible habit"*



BEEMAN'S

Pepsin Gum

AMERICAN CHICLE CO.

New SPREDTOP RING
MAKES DIAMONDS LOOK LARGER

WHY spend $500 for a solitaire? This new scientifically constructed Spredtop 7-Diamond Cluster has same appearance. Send for this Spredtop, examine it, be convinced of its value, then pay

ONLY $5.00 DOWN

Satisfaction or Money Refunded

FREE Latest Diamond and Jewelry catalog, three thousand illustrations, greatest values.

$1.25 A WEEK
Pay by the Month
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AUTHORIZED CAPITAL $1,000,000.

L·W·SWEET INC.

Dept. 184N 1660 BROADWAY, NEW YORK

Cuticura Talcum
Unadulterated
Exquisitely Scented

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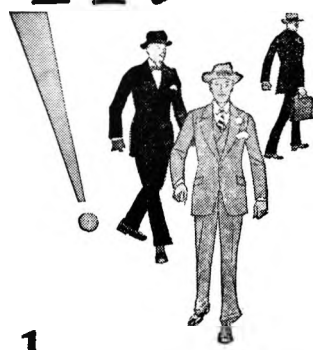
happy legs



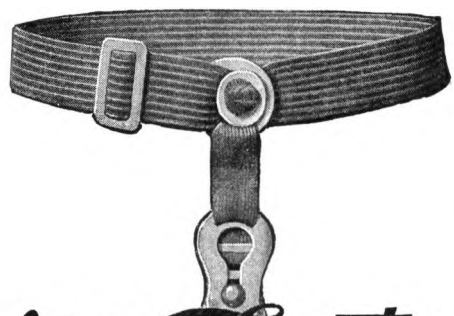
always cool and comfortable - unburdened with pads or metal clasps

IVORY Garters are light and cool—just lively elastic and clean, white clasps.

Because they don't have to protect your skin from metal, Ivories don't need thick, lifeless, sweaty pads. There is no fixed angle at which to wear them. They fit any leg—comfortably, without binding.

Go to any men's store and insist on Ivories. They come in wide or standard web, with single or double grip. 25c up. You'll never know garter comfort till you own them.

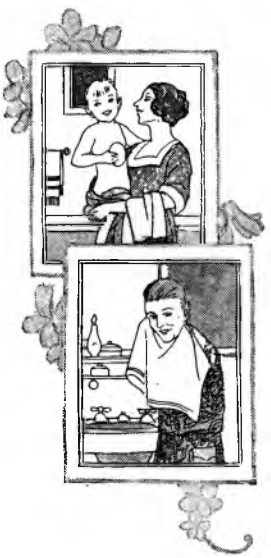
IVORY GARTER COMPANY
New Orleans, La.



Ivory Garter


"What a whale of a difference just a few cents make!"
—all the difference
between just an ordinary cigarette and—FATIMA, the most skillful blend in cigarette history.

The Charm of a healthy skin— follow the Fairy way!



A normal, healthy, vigorous skin has a charm no cosmetic can hope to rival! And first of all, skin health means cleanliness.

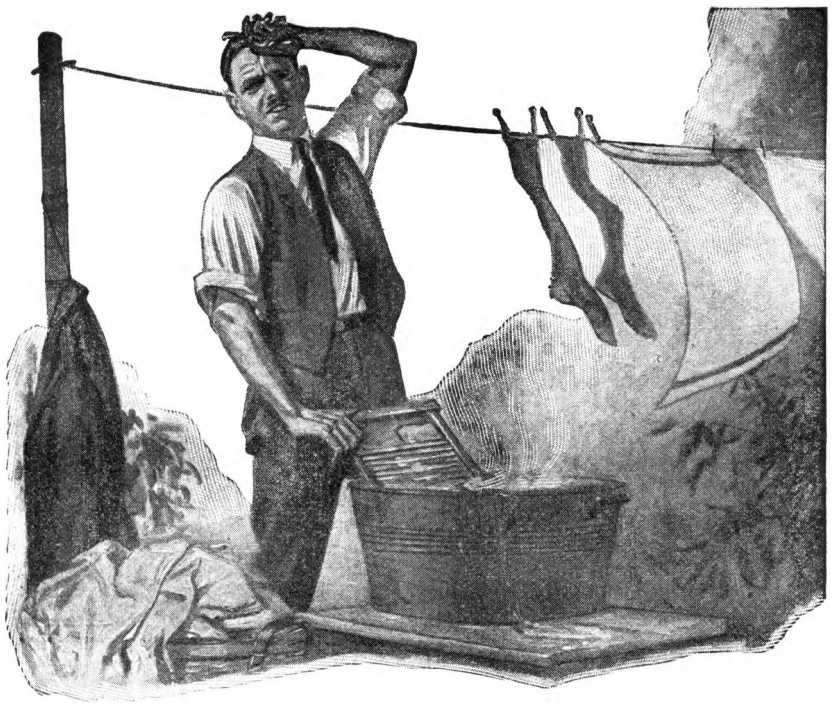
Keep clean the Fairy way! See how simple and easy it is to retain that youthful, velvety skin by using a pure white soap!

Fairy Soap is the world's whitest soap. Of course it's perfectly pure. And it really clears the pores, leaving the skin fresh and invigorated.

Fairy Soap cleanses with delicacy. Makes a smooth, gently soothing lather that's balm to sensitive skins. The handy oval cake for toilet or bath. Lasts longer than ordinary soaps because it wears to a thin wafer.

It's white! It's pure! It floats!

FAIRY SOAP



If father did the washing just once!

If every father did the family washing next Monday there would be an electric washing machine in every home before next Saturday night.

For fathers are used to figuring costs. They'd say: "The electricity for a week's washing costs less than a cake of soap. Human time and strength are too precious for work which a machine can do so cheaply and well."

You will find this monogram of the General Electric Company on many devices that take the drudgery out of housework. Look at it closely and remember the letters G-E. They are a symbol of service —the initials of a friend.

GENERAL ELECTRIC

Let Kodak Keep the Story

What a chance for a picture! Yes, and your Kodak will make the most of it.

Vacation's fun is Kodak's opportunity.

Autographic Kodaks *$6.50 up*

Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N.Y., *The Kodak City*

100 cigarettes 15 cts

GENUINE

BULL DURHAM

Settle the cigarette question by rolling your own from BULL. You get more flavor, more tobacco taste, more enjoyment—and <u>much more</u> for your money—

2 bags for 15c

Guaranteed by

The American Tobacco Co.

INCORPORATED