ANOTHER BRILLIANT CHESTERTON STORY

1/- NET

THE STORY-TELLER

for NOVEMBER, 1924

SOME STAR FEATURES

* *Two Long Complete Novels*

* ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

* H. A. VACHELL

* G. K. CHESTERTON

* H. M. TOMLINSON

* WARWICK DEEPING

and many others

On the smooth white skin a tiny "R" had been tattooed in blue, and above it was a crown.

"Princess Unknown," by Marr Murray

CAMPBELL'S

THE STORY-TELLER

Ready-made

By Robert W. Chambers

"He went over, drew her arm from the wall, drew her head against his shoulder. Her face quivered; her lips and breath were hot with tears.

"'You're not to worry.' He looked down at the bowed head. He understood that chance had fashioned something ready-made to satisfy perfectly his taste and need of haste."

TASTE was necessary. He had no time to waste if he were going to cultivate his tastes, and enjoy the great wealth which so suddenly had become his. Whatever he acquired must be ready-made. He couldn't wait to be fitted.

He was forty. Until now he had never had any money.

He had gone to a primary school, worked his way up, worked like a dog all his life; and had lived less comfortably than some dogs. Now, in middle age, money had come to him.

He told all this to Mr. Rawdon; explained that he was forty, and that he hadn't time to indulge in the leisurely pleasures of search, choice and accumulation.

"I like good things," he said. "I didn't inherit any; but it's too late in life to begin to collect. I've got to buy what somebody else has collected."

Mr. Rawdon politely understood.

"It takes years," continued Welling, "to choose and acquire a site for an estate, build a house, fill it with things one likes. It takes years to cultivate taste and knowledge necessary to do this. I've a natural inclination for fine things, but no knowledge concerning them. I can't wait. At forty, Time is an unfriendly devil. By the time I know anything I shall be dead."

"You don't look over thirty," ventured Mr. Rawdon.

"That doesn't help. Age is a fact. I've only a little while left. I've got to acquire everything immediately; surround myself with what I like, and begin to cultivate myself. . . .

"As for a house," he went on, "perhaps one day I'll buy one in town; but I want a country house first. I want one already built. I wish to have a very large one, partly because a great many servants will make it look cheerful—and I've been rather a lonely man, Mr. Rawdon—and partly because I mean to have a great many very beautiful things; and that requires a big house. Do you see?"

Mr. Rawdon saw.

"On our list," he said, "there are a number of large country houses with extensive grounds——"

"Which is the very finest?"

Mr. Rawdon scarcely seemed prepared to answer so important a question. Several estates were very fine. Perhaps Tappen Towers was the most magnificent—all things considered.

"How far is it?"

"Two hours from town by road."

"How much do you want for it?"

Mr. Rawdon moistened his lips, and his voice grew grave with re-

spect for every pound he named as the price of priceless Tappen Towers.

"Could I run down now and look it over?"

Mr. Rawdon said: "There's a caretaker in one of the lodges. I'll telephone her to open the house."

"Isn't anybody in the house?"

"Nobody. Mr. Grandcourt died four years ago. Since his death his widow has lived abroad. All the children are married and have their own homes. There's nobody at Tappen Towers. There's not even a stick of furniture in it. But it's kept in perfect order—water, heat, light——"

He rose. "I'll call up the caretaker, if you'll excuse me."

He went into another room; remained absent for twenty minutes; returned to find his client pacing the floor.

"The lodge-keeper is ill," he explained, "but if you wish to motor down this morning there will be somebody to let you in and show you the place."

Welling said: "No man of forty has any time to fool away."

Welling strode out of the estate office, buttoning his coat; asked his chauffeur whether he knew how to get to Tappen Towers, Fittlehurst, Sussex.

"Mr. Grandcourt's mansion house, sir?"

"Oh," said Welling, "is it a mansion house? Yes; that's it."

He stepped into his car.

It was a bright, boisterous March day. Sunshine flooded the town, and a bitter wind blew from the north.

Welling liked cold air. He lowered the window and watched the sunlit landscape. Out through the suburbs sped the car with no delays; for few motorists cared to drive in the teeth of such an icy gale. Overhead the sky had begun to thicken and clot around the sun. The wind became a gale; squalls of fine snow alternated with gleams of sunshine.

Nearly three hours later the car stopped before a stone gateway barred with gilded wrought iron. The footman jumped out, rang the lodge bell for a while, then returned to report the gate locked and the place deserted.

"There's another lodge and gateway," said Welling.

So they sped on for another mile; and, arriving, found this gate also closed, but not locked. The footman opened it; rang at the lodge; waited; finally opened the door and went in. He came out after a few moments to report the lodge-keeper ill in bed, but said that there would be somebody in charge at the house.

Half a mile farther, over a fine drive that curved through the woods and meadows of a superb estate, brought them to the entrance of an enormous mansion.

Welling got out. "You'd better go to the nearest village and get your lunch," he said to the two men. "Take your time; I'll be here, or walking over the estate, for several hours anyway. Come back about four."

The car rolled away. Welling stood a moment to survey the wooded landscape set with lawns and rolling meadows. There was also a glimmer of water through the trees to the southward where a rapid brook tumbled into a lake. He turned and looked up at the great house. Even now, with all that had come to him—all the resources at his command—he could scarcely realize that *he* might have this house if he desired it. And he knew, already, that he wanted it: that he would acquire it, fill it with beauty ready made, and begin to educate himself as fast as he knew how so that he might know something before he died.

II

He mounted some marble steps, saw that the doors were ajar, and entered.

A great hall with golden tessellated

pavement ran through the centre of the house. In this hall, some distance away, stood a thin, shabby girl, with delicate features under a shock of bobbed bronze-red hair.

It was an odd vision, this dingy, solitary figure all alone in the midst of such magnificence, glimpsed warmly but dimly where, through partly closed blinds, sunlight slanted on wall and floor.

Hearing a footstep on the tessellated floor she turned her head, came towards him with a youthful, angular grace which was not unpleasing.

"Good morning," he said. "I'm John Welling. Are you the caretaker?"

"I am to show you the house," she said.

Now that she drew nearer he could see that she was both dirty and pretty.

There was a smudge of soot on one cheek. Evidently, also, she had been wiping her hands on her apron, but they remained somewhat soiled.

"The furnace was low," she explained in a spiritless voice—yet an agreeable voice, and even sweet.

"You've been shovelling coal," he observed amiably.

She blushed, not understanding his humour.

"Isn't there a man about?" he inquired.

"Not now. My uncle died last year. My aunt and I have done what is to be done. . . . But she is very ill."

"There ought to be a man too," repeated Welling. "Women can't look after a place like this."

"We've been so afraid we'd lose the home. . . . I don't know what is going to happen."

Then began their pilgrimage.

No view of the exterior had conveyed to him any realization of the vastness of this house.

There were music-rooms, billiard-rooms, libraries, smoking-rooms; bronze and glass doors opening on terraces, on gardens, on woods, on lawns.

The house, soundly and perfectly constructed of the best and most expensive materials, had been built in a tasteless era. The decorations were priceless and very dreadful.

Woodwork, wainscoting, flooring were elaborately and stupidly carved out of rarest and most beautiful woods.

Where the flooring was not parquet it was marble or tessellated.

Colour and quality enchanted Welling; the vulgarity of the decoration bewildered and troubled him. He gazed wistfully at frescoes, at carved screens, at lumpy marble columns, not understanding them, not knowing whether an educated mind and cultivated taste ought to find them satisfying.

But all that was coming—education, cultivation, leisure to learn how to appreciate what his instinct always had inclined him to love. And, whatever in this house was not good, he could always alter or replace as soon as his education taught him to discriminate.

This thought reassured him and made him very happy. He followed his shabby guide through the golden gloom, up a very grand staircase to other halls, other *salons*, room after room—great bedchambers stately enough for monarchs—all silent and empty in the sombre light from some ruddy sun-ray filtering through closed blinds.

There was a servants' wing; huge garrets; four tower-rooms in the four turrets.

After he had lingered in the turrets to satisfy his eyes with several matchless views, they descended to the main floor and then to the kitchen level, which, he suggested smilingly, seemed huge enough for some great hotel.

But neither that nor the great cloister-like cellars kept him long.

At last they arrived once more on the main floor, and he, feeling hungry, glanced at his watch.

"Why, it's two o'clock!" he exclaimed. "Is there any place near here where I can go and get a bite to eat?"

"No," she said, "but there is an electric cooker in the pantry, and I brought over something, thinking that perhaps you might have had no lunch."

"Well, that's certainly very kind of you," he said cordially, "but I don't wish to inconvenience you——"

"I'll be very glad to give you what I have."

"Doesn't your aunt need you?"

"No, there's a neighbour with her. They are to telephone me if I'm needed."

"I hope your aunt isn't very ill," he said sympathetically.

"I'm afraid she is. . . . If you'll excuse me a moment I'll bring you a chair from the pantry——"

"Not at all," he said, "I'll sit in the pantry. . . . Really, it is more than I wish to ask of you—to get luncheon for me——"

She said in her pretty, unhappy voice that he was quite welcome.

The pantry was an enormous place. There were two chairs there and a small deal table—the only furniture in the house that he had seen.

Now she went to a basin and washed her slender hands and removed from her face all traces of the coal dust.

From a basket she produced eggs, ham, bread, butter, tea, sugar, a bowl, and a little tin can full of cold soup. Then she turned on the electric range and started operations.

His was a friendly mind; and, besides, there was, to him, something appealing in this pale girl—in her youth and thinness, in her bobbed hair and her delicate features.

"Have you been here long?" he inquired.

"Yes," she answered, setting the soup to heat; "since Mr. Grandcourt died."

"Four years."

"Yes, it's four years. . . . My uncle was head lodge-keeper for Mr. Grandcourt."

"Did you live here?"

"Yes, with my uncle and aunt . . . I helped out by teaching in the little school at Tappen: that's really the nearest village. It's smaller than Fittlehurst, though."

"You must have been rather young to teach school," he said smilingly.

"I was eighteen then. You see, it's only a very little country school."

"Then you are twenty-two now," he remarked.

"Yes. I had been out of secondary school only one week when I began to teach."

"Do you still teach there?"

"No. Since my uncle died my aunt has been ill . . . I don't know exactly what it is," she added; "I think it broke her spirit."

"Your uncle's death?"

"Yes. . . . I think so. . . . I think she is dying of it."

"That's tragic," said Welling.

It was warm in the pantry. He removed his fine fur-lined coat and draped it over his chair. Still standing: "Can't I help you?" he asked.

"No, thank you!"

"Come," he said, "I've fried many an egg for myself—many a rasher of bacon."

He added: "I suppose you think I've always been able to afford fur coats and Tappen Towers."

She seemed embarrassed.

"Well, I haven't," he said. "I've worked for a small salary ever since I left school—until a year ago. . . . Come; have you any potatoes for me to peel?"

At that she looked round at him again.

"There aren't any potatoes," she said; "and there's very little for me to do. . . . I think your soup is hot enough now."

It exhaled a delicious aroma when she set it on the table in a small earthen bowl.

"How about you?" he inquired.

"I can get something later."

"Not at all," he said calmly, pulling up the other chair.

She gave him a distressed look, but he was firm.

"We lunch together," he said, "or I refuse to lunch at all. . . . And I'm *very* hungry."

"Mr. Welling——"

"What is *your* name?"

"Mine?"

"Certainly."

"M-Marguerite Field."

"Well, little Miss Field," he said gaily, "I've invited you to cook for *me*, and now I invite you to help me eat what you've cooked."

She was confused, but a little amused at the suggestion.

"There's only that one bowl for the soup," she pointed out.

"There are *two* spoons!"

"You—you don't mean——"

"Yes, I do. . . . Unless you object. Do you?"

"N-no, but——" It was evident that she considered the suggestion a humorous one. And, as he insisted, she seated herself, smiled in a friendly, bashful way, and accepted the spoon he offered.

He said: "Don't you dare eat faster than I do. Play fair with the soup, now, mind."

This she seemed to think exquisitely funny. Very daintily she ventured to taste her soup. He gravely dipped a spoonful out of the same bowl.

"Wonderful!" he exclaimed. "I have dreamed of such soup, but never believed there could be any in the world."

He was so droll! She had never met so amusing a man. And while she ate her soup in her quaint, fastidious fashion she kept looking up at him out of violet-tinted eyes in which, now, no least trace of unhappiness remained.

"What did you teach the youngsters at school?" he inquired.

She told him. It seemed that she liked teaching. Liked to study, too; but a training college had been out of the question. She had been very young when she lost her parents; and her uncle, a cripple and a Boer War pensioner, had only his very small pension and his wage as lodge-keeper.

When they had finished the soup she fetched the tea, toast, butter, and ham and eggs, but demurred when he waited for her to be seated.

"Come, little Miss Field," he insisted; "I shall not continue this banquet unless you do."

When she consented, he noticed she was quite as hungry as he was. He was beginning to look for the shy, engaging smile evoked by his mild witticisms. He thought the pale oval of her young face under the bronze bobbed hair extraordinarily attractive. The delicate movements of her hands, too, he thought agreeable. She was an unusually agreeable personality to him; she could be so very still at moments; and her voice was so charmingly attuned to the sort of sounds he found grateful to his ear.

"Do you play the piano?" he asked—it having long been one of his ideas of luxury to have somebody play the piano for him whenever he desired it.

She said she had taught a little music, too; but that pupils who could afford to learn had failed her.

After a silence:

"What are your ideas concerning money?" he asked abruptly.

She looked up startled.

"I mean," he explained, "what would you do with plenty of it? You're only twenty-two. You have all life before you. Suppose you suddenly found you had unlimited means at your disposal?"

She rested one elbow on the bare deal table and considered that.

"What's the very first thing you would do?" he demanded.

After a moment: "I'd buy clothes," she decided.

"And then?" he asked gravely.

"Take lessons."

"What kind?"

"Music, languages. . . . I'm interested in other things, too; every kind of thing."

"Housekeeping?"

"Yes, I'd love to keep house."

"In town?"

She was uncertain whether she preferred London to the country.

"But you could have two houses if you were wealthy," he pointed out.

The mere idea of such affluence silenced her.

They had finished their luncheon. He lighted a cigarette. She watched him do it, then sat with remote gaze, her clasped hands resting on the table's edge. Now and then he glanced at her unconscious face, wondering what such young girls thought about.

Sunshine flooded the pantry, slanting across wall and linoleum, and fell athwart her shabby gown and bobbed hair.

As he looked at her again he suddenly recollected that he was forty. Why that thought came into his head at this moment he did not know. It was not an agreeable one.

But another and grotesque idea followed: suppose he suddenly told this girl that he had no money—not a penny—and that he was forty years old. Old and poor. Would her eyes glimmer with that shy smile when he ventured to jest with her? Would there remain any animation, any interest in those delicate features?

Could a middle-aged man represent anything of any slightest interest to any girl of her age—even to a girl of her drab and narrow life with all its penury and privation?

As he sat there regarding her with a sort of restless apprehension, her absent gaze reverted to him. As her eyes encountered his she smiled and blushed slightly. That instinctive recognition of the sex status between them most charmingly seemed to refute the unpleasant ideas he had been harbouring.

At the age of forty he was not yet outside of feminine recognition—not *hors concours*—but, like any younger man, still to be reckoned with.

"Do you know how old I am?" he asked, so abruptly that she gave him an astonished look.

"Forty," he said. . . . "I wonder whether that seems very old to Twenty-two. Does it?"

The warm colour began to invade her face again, but she smiled.

"That's such a funny thing to say to me," she ventured.

"Do you think forty is old, little Miss Field?" he insisted.

"It's rather old," she admitted "Not that you *seem* old. . . . I don't know much about men's ages——"

"Do I seem to you about like other men?"

"Yes—just like other men—excepting old ones." She gave him a shy smile: "I don't consider you old."

He laughed: "I didn't know," he said. "I've often wondered what girls of your age think about a man of forty."

She rose and began to collect the dishes. He carried some of them to the sink, and, despite her protestations, insisted on aiding her to wash and dry them.

Several times he had glanced at a faded coat hanging on a peg. Finally: "Is that yours?" he asked.

She nodded.

"Suppose," he said, "you take me for a walk about the estate, and show me everything. Do you mind?"

She said she would be very glad to do so.

III

They had been tramping over the estate for an hour. The wind was high; so was the girl's colour, now. It turned out that she cared a great deal for this great estate; knew every meadow, every grove, every path and road.

She piloted him down through the heavier woods to the brook where silvery water poured into foaming pools; where miniature falls sparkled over a pebbly bed into long, still, limpid reaches bordered by elderberry and hazel.

Pheasants roamed through withered bracken and along the edges of

naked thickets. On the small lake hundreds of wild duck floated or squatted on the sedgy shores—mallard, black duck, and widgeon.

"It's been a bird sanctuary so long," she explained, "that all sorts of wild birds come and breed here, knowing they are quite safe."

He pointed out the remains of a mallard lying in the sedge.

"Yes," she said, "hawks and owls come in, too. My uncle used to shoot the big hawks. But he was quite lame and could not walk far."

"I'm wondering," he said, "what you are going to do if your aunt should not recover."

The haunted look came into her eyes again.

"Would you like to remain here if I buy the place?" he asked.

She said she would be very glad to if he thought her competent to keep the gate lodge.

They were standing on a rustic bridge, the wind whipping them with flurries of finest snow, while, just beyond, pale sunshine waxed and waned over a dull green meadow, and, overhead, grey clouds raced across blue spaces in the sky.

"This is the most beautiful place I ever have seen," he murmured, partly to himself.

She ventured to say that it was enchanting in spring.

After a moment: "Well, little Miss Field," he said, "will you and your aunt be willing to remain if I double your salary?"

She was gazing out through the leafless woods. Presently, when the sun fell across her face, he noticed that her eyes were brilliant with tears.

"You are troubled about your aunt?"

She nodded.

"Perhaps you had better go back to the lodge," he said gravely.

"If you are sure there is nothing more I can do for you——"

"Oh! I'm sorry. I didn't realize that I was keeping you."

"It's all right. . . . One of our neighbours from Fittlehurst is with her. The doctor is coming back, too. . . . But if you have seen enough of the estate——"

"Certainly," he said. "I'll walk over to the lodge with you."

"Because," she explained, "my aunt really is very ill."

It seemed that she had to return to the house, first, stoke up the furnace, carry out the remains of their luncheon, and lock up.

Breasting another tiny snowfall, they set out together for the distant mansion.

In spite of the girl's troubled mind her face remained delicately aglow, and she moved with that awkwardly youthful grace that, from the first, he had considered so attractive.

After they had been walking for a while: "I am going to buy the place," he remarked.

"I am so glad," she exclaimed, the warmth of friendly interest lighting her face.

"Oh! Do you think I'll make a good neighbour, little Miss Field?"

Shy again for a few moments, then, frankly interested, she ventured to wonder how soon he meant to return and assume possession.

"You speak," he said humorously, "as though you would really like to have me return. Wouldn't it bore you to have to talk to me every day?"

She thought that very funny.

"Do you really believe you'll like to talk to me?" he persisted.

She was walking with head inclined before the wind. He thought she had not heard, and repeated his question.

She gave him one of those direct, questioning looks of a child:

"I do like you," she said. "I should think everybody would."

So artless an endorsement, and so charmingly blunt, made him redden with sheer pleasure.

"Well—well, now!" he exclaimed, "that's quite wonderful that I should have made a friend of you so quickly. . . . I don't know much about girls. I—wasn't sure—they

could be interested in a friendship with a man of my age——"

"You're exactly like other men," she declared, "only much more amusing."

"You mean companionable?"

"I'll tell you," she said with a sudden confidence that enchanted him: "many girls don't care for *very* young men. They're not usually interesting."

"I thought youth always sought youth."

"It does." She laughed in a suddenly care-free and engaging way; "and that is why I have enjoyed *your* coming here," she added. "I've had such a delightful walk."

To believe that this girl considered him young and delightful gave him the pleasantest sensation he had ever experienced.

They were nearing the house now. He looked about for his car, but it had not yet arrived.

Together they went into the golden-dim hall, traversed it with echoing footsteps, entered the servants' quarters.

When they came to the kitchen the telephone in the pantry was ringing.

The girl gave him a frightened look: "It's for me! They are ringing for me!"

"Perhaps it's my chauffeur calling," he suggested.

"No, it's the lodge——" her voice broke childishly.

"Let me answer it," he began; but she hurried past him into the pantry, and he turned on his heel and walked back towards the great dining-room.

There he began to pace the parquet floor with quick, nervous steps, his brain confused and excited, his thoughts in pleasant disorder.

He seemed to be aware of what had begun to happen to him—what had so suddenly and amazingly upset his ordered mind and started this mental turmoil.

And if it were a fact!—but already he realized it *was* a fact that he had come swiftly into collision with something unforeseen, and was now just beginning to collect his senses after the shock of impact.

Returning mental animation became exhilaration; exhilaration was turning into excitement.

He was forty; he had no time to lose. Already, in one day, he had found a ready-made house and estate. . . . But it seemed incredible that he could have found a ready-made human being, too, a person so fitted to his taste and liking.

Was it merely his need of haste that now was deceiving him into seeing in this young girl every quality, apparent and latent, that particularly appealed to him? Was it his loneliness, of which he had been so long conscious, that suddenly demanded radical treatment?

But how astounding to discover a remedy for loneliness in this house—here—in the shape of this delicate, shabby girl——

He walked back to the kitchen, listened, heard no sound from the pantry, went to the door and looked in.

She was leaning against the wall beside the telephone, her forehead resting against one arm.

"What is the trouble?" he asked in quick concern.

She tried to answer: "The doctor ——" shook her head slightly.

"Is it bad news?" he said.

"She—died . . . while we were out—in the grounds——"

He went over, drew her arm from the wall, drew her head against his shoulder. Her face quivered; her lips and breath were hot with tears.

"You're not to worry." He looked down at the bowed head. He understood that chance had fashioned something ready-made to satisfy perfectly his taste and need of haste.

Presently he heard himself saying in an unnatural voice: "If you—are willing—to try to like me—because I'm falling in love with you——"

The unstirring stillness of her checked him. For a long while neither moved. Then finally she began to cry again; and again he

felt her face and breath hot against his breast.

He bent down and kissed her bobbed hair.

After she had been sobbing for a while she dried her face on her apron, lifted her head and returned his kiss like a child.

Then she put both arms around his neck; her tears beginning to flow again, set her lips quivering.

She spoke presently and with touching candour; she said she liked him—wished to be loved by him; was ignorant concerning love. . . . Said she thought it likely that love would come to her because it seemed to come to everybody. Wondered whether that was what she ought to say to him, it was difficult.

"Are you sure," he said, "that I am not too old?"

"Oh, no," she said, "I like you. I like you more than anybody."

"And, if I kiss you——"

"I want you to," she said faintly.

"Then—you *are* beginning to—to like me a very little?"

"I think I am—beginning——"

She looked up out of tear-brilliant eyes; lifted her delicate, untaught mouth.

Everything about her seemed ready-made for a middle-aged man who had no time to lose. . . .

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS.

The Look

By Alice Gates

"Sometimes, when there was some great reception at Largementer House, he would watch her out of the corner of his eye as she stood there receiving her guests. And a picture, another picture, would float through his mind, of Miriam polishing glasses behind the bar, out there in the wilds, and serving out drinks and jokes to a score of miners like himself."

OLD SAM GOLDENBERG sat in his study, or library, or whatever one may choose to call it. He called it his "place," because it was his one refuge in all this vast labyrinth of stone and marble that had developed, fungus-like, about him.

He sat at his desk, and stared—stared intently, yet vacantly, before him. He seemed to be looking into space, at something that nobody else could see.

For there was no suggestion of space at Largementer House. Before him at the moment only rows and rows of unread books, gorgeously bound, and the general air of suffocation peculiar to a library that exists for purposes purely decorative. It was like a museum crammed with mummies—bodies that once had lived—now lifeless and inert.

The curtains were of heavy dull gold substance, they hung thick and opulent by the tall window.

On the mantelpiece a clock ticked, the only sound at the moment in the room.

And old Sam Goldenberg stared—stared at something that he alone could see.

His face was a fighting one, in spite of the folds and creases that a life of ease had produced in it. It had not altered the set of his chin, nor the steely glint of his eye. And his hands—those great, strong, capable hands—still looked as if they could wield a pick-axe, as they had done in the days gone by when Sam Goldenberg had worked like the navvy he was, out there—years ago—in Africa.

Perhaps it was the memory of that time that had brought the look of abstraction into his eyes.

For things were different now; very, very different.

Sir Samuel and Lady Goldenberg were important people, people to be reckoned with, in Society.

Why, only last week he had been forced to attend an At Home that his wife was giving, whereat his son Geoffrey had read aloud the poems that he had written himself to an enthusiastic and admiring audience.

Geoffrey, with a fair share of his mother's good looks, and his hair worn just a shade too long, was a romantic-looking figure. Old Sam had to sit it out to the end, and endure those whines and whinnyings about "the purple splendour of the evening sun." Instinctively his great hands had fumbled for the pick-axe that would have swiftly put an end to all this high-falutin', dam-fool nonsense.

But in the end he had had to hand Lady Tresmane her tea in a Sèvres tea-cup, that threatened to shatter like eggshell in his grasp.

"Isn't dear Geoffrey *too* wonderful?" she had whispered.

And deep down in the depth of his soul he had agreed with her. Dear Geoffrey *was*, that was just exactly what was wrong with him, too wonderful.

Then there was his daughter Lalage. She was going to marry, in three weeks' time, Lord Prenterfleet.

Every time that his eyes dwelt on his prospective son-in-law, he found himself wondering anew how in the name of all that was reasonable a daughter of his could have chosen this frail, effete member of the aristocracy, when there was a whole world of men—*men*, mind you, to choose from.

Of course he had a wonderful amount to offer her. A place in the country, and a house in Park Lane. But she could have had all that without the degradation. . . .

Old Goldenberg pulled himself up short. It didn't do to let oneself get thinking. Anyhow, she was pleased—Miriam—his wife. But she had changed quite a good deal, it seemed to Sam, since the days when he had first married her.

Women were more adaptable, he supposed.

Sometimes, when there was some great reception at Largementer House, he would watch her out of the corner of his eye as she stood there receiving her guests. And a picture, another picture, would float through his mind, of Miriam polishing glasses behind the bar, out there in the wilds, and serving out drinks and jokes, both of them undiluted, to a score of miners like himself.

The same woman . . . yes, look at it how you will, women were very adaptable.

He heard a step outside in the hall.

Instinctively he took up a cigar and lit it.

Possibly it might help him to act the part more suitably.

The door opened, and his son came in—his elder son—Jim.

He was tall and rather thick-set, good-looking in a dark, vivid sort of way too. He might have been Sam Goldenberg when Sam was a young man.

"Hallo, dad!"

His father looked at him sternly.

"You've been at it again," he said; "so your mother tells me."

And he scowled and sucked his pungent cigar.

Jim Goldenberg smiled.

"If by 'at it' you mean debts, dad," he said, "yes, then I have. Somehow this rotten life with nothing—nothing real to do—makes you do things you wouldn't do—if you follow me?"

The old man spoke irritably.

"Don't *you* start talking clever," he said fiercely. "If you're in a mess, say you're in a mess, and be done with it. Don't try to explain. Besides, I hear you've been mixing yourself up with some woman in a little public-house off the Tottenham Court Road. Women are the devil; leave 'em alone."

Jim Goldenberg interrupted.

"It's not mixing myself up, dad," he said. "We're married. I married her this morning."

He met his father's eyes levelly.

Old Sam opened his lips to speak, and shut them again. Then:

"*Married!*" he said, "to a barmaid?"

And even as he said the words he knew very well the hypocritical sham that they were. After all, why not?

"Disgracing the family," he muttered; "ruining us . . ."

After all, the proprieties must be maintained.

"Hardly that," said Jim Goldenberg. "We love each other, and she's a perfect dear."

For one moment the steely glint in old Goldenberg's eyes seemed to soften. Here was no talk of the purple splendour of the sunset, yet somehow, subtly, the old man was aware that here he was up against, just for the moment, the real thing.

There was silence.

That far-away, distant look came into his eyes again. Then:

"Your mother and I have come to the decision," he said slowly, "that you've got to be packed off abroad. It isn't fair to your brother and

sister, let alone your mother, to keep getting into these scrapes in England. I'll give you something to make a start with, and you and this girl you married—your mother, I suppose, doesn't know *that* part of it—eh?"

"No, dad. We were only married this morning."

"Eh! Well, you must go out and see if you can make good as I did—before you. There's always a chance for a man that'll work—out there. There's room for men out in Africa. That's what your mother's decided—see?"

"Yes, dad. I'll have a shot. Now I've got Lucy along with me it'll make all the difference."

Old Samuel Goldenberg grunted.

"'M—well—we shall see."

He pulled his cheque-book out of his pocket and wrote hastily in his big, sprawling hand.

Then he folded it up and put it in an envelope and handed it to his son.

"That'll start you," he said.

Jim took it, and stood looking down at his father for a moment.

"Sorry, dad," he said, "I'm afraid I've made rather a muck of things, all except Lucy. Sort of black sheep of the family, rather——"

The old man pushed back his chair.

"That's got to be proved," he said, "out there."

When he was left alone he sat staring before him.

That look crept into his eyes again, that distant, almost vacant-brooding expression.

The door opened and his wife came in, resplendently dressed for the opera. She stood there for a moment, triumphant in all her splendour.

"How do you like my dress, Sam? Lady Tresmane is sharing our box to-night. You'd better get dressed——"

He looked at her, but his eyes did not take in what he saw. He mumbled approval, and she swept out of the room. His cigar had gone out, and it tasted like ashes as he sucked it.

He still stared at the empty doorway.

He saw his son standing there, as he had stood for a moment, as he went out, to say good-bye. His son, the black sheep, the failure of the family, the one flaw in all this gigantic monument of success that he had built about him.

Jim was going out to Africa, quit of England, quit of home, quit of everything, to start life all over again as his father had done before him; to rough it, to live like a navvy, to work, and sweat, and live—the black sheep.

His eyes held that look, that look that seemed to see into a far, far distance.

Yet the library door was shut.

"Gawd!" he muttered. "'Ow I envy him."

ALICE GATES.

Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted

By Horace Annesley Vachell

"'We has *our* preserves,' said Uncle.
"'Are you alluding to jam?' asked Sir Giles, wondering whether his visitor was perfectly sober. Uncle replied portentously:
"'I speak semaphorically, Sir Giles, allers likin' a figure o' speech. Call it jam. A bit o' reel jam do, seemin'ly, describe Sally Owbridge.'"

HABAKKUK MUCKLOW was much disturbed. A young kinsman of his, Peter John Brockley, had got into serious trouble. Old Mrs. Brockley, sorely crippled by sciatica, had asked her son to fill up the woodshed. Poor foresters are allowed to pick up fallen wood. At the same time, picking up fallen wood, unless you happen to live some distance from the villages, is a tedious job. Probably this occurred to Peter John. However, to his mother's satisfaction and pride, Peter John, who was out of a regular job, filled up the woodshed in three days.

Unhappily, this nice lot of fuel had been gleaned, not in the Forest of Ys, but out of a wood belonging to Sir Giles Mottisfont, of Hernshaw Magna. Sir Giles might have dealt leniently and privately with a first offence. As a verderer he was much respected. He protected, even against the Crown, the commoners' rights—and his own. But this wood pilfering was not a first offence. Before the war Peter John had been caught with a hare in his pocket. The Bench at Puddenhurst imposed a fine. Now he had been summoned to appear before the august tribunal for the second time, and upon a more serious charge. Sir Giles said openly that "an example" must be made. The gaffers in the alehouses shook their hoary heads; and Habakkuk, better known all over the forest as "Uncle," had an uneasy presentiment that some of his sins might be visited upon the curly head of Peter John. Large signs upon Sir Giles's property informed all and sundry that trespassers would be prosecuted. Uncle, sly old sinner, laughed at such injunctions

"They notices," he said to his cronies at the Pomfret Arms, over a tankard, "bain't worth a-settin' up. For why? I'll tell 'ee what a lawyer feller tole me when I was carryin' golf clubs for 'un. A K.C., too, whatever that means. He druv four balls out o' bounds an' into Sir Giles's field, he did. Well, he sends me into field to pick up balls, an' he gives he three coppers. Now comes along climax."

"Climax? Be that the name o' Sir Giles's ginger-yedded keeper?"

"Climax," replied Uncle, expectorating disdainfully, "be summat which ignerunce may butt up against wi'out onderstandin'. You bide in your carner, Master Gilbert, an' finish your ale. I sees Sir Giles in field, reckonin' up chances for a good hay crop; but, mind 'ee, grass were no higher 'n a tomtit. I says to the K.C. chap: 'I shall be downscrambled by Sir Giles.' He laughs, he do, an' says: 'Fine! 'Twill be a test case,' says he. 'Now, look 'ee here, my man, if that be Sir Giles hisself, an' if he kicks up a rumpus and orders you off his land, you pick up my balls. Take very careful note o' what languidge the

ole gen'leman uses. When you has the balls, give 'un threepence for damage done, an' my card.'"

Uncle paused to moisten his lips. He had the attention of every man in the snug bar. He continued:

"Well, I marches bold as brass into field and picks up they balls. Sir Giles stumps up so red as any turkey cock, an' 'twas a treat to listen to 'un. I hands over the coppers first. 'What be this?' says he. ''Tis for damage done,' says I. 'An' this be the gen'leman's card.' Sir Giles up and looks at card, an' then at me. 'I knows you, Habakkuk Mucklow,' he says, 'an' you knows me. You ain't heard the last o' this.' I 'lows I'd ought to have left it at that, but I allers have carried a high yed, so I answers back: 'I hopes, sir,' I says, 'that I has heard the last o' this, 'cause the fust of it don't bear repeatin', do it?'"

The memory of this incident made Uncle unhappy when he thought of Peter John coming up before the Bench. Otherwise, being a bold man and popular with the quality, he might have gone to Sir Giles and pleaded for his kinsman.

It happened to be the time of year when Uncle made good money by carrying clubs and by instructing young ladies in the arts and crafts of playing golf at Hernshaw Magna. Generally he would stroll home to Nether-Applewhite through the forest.

About the middle of May he was passing a pond where moorhens and dabchicks nested. Uncle duly noted that the nests were nearer the water than usual, justifying his prediction that the season would be abnormally dry. Very little rain had fallen either in April or May.

"Be-utiful weather, to be sure," reflected Uncle.

Standing still, staring at the nestlings, his alert eye detected two figures amongst the rhododendrons across the pond. Uncle slipped behind a big fir. As he moved, his feet sank softly into the carpet of pine needles. Across the pond, delicately sublimated, floated a girl's voice:

"Don't 'ee now, don't!"

Uncle had recognized the voice, but the voice that replied, a man's voice, was low and inarticulate. Uncle peered through the branches. He could see the rhododendrons, nothing else. Sinking upon his hands and knees, he began to crawl round the pond, finding at last safe harbourage in a clump of willows. From this coign of vantage he could see plainly a man and a maid, and he could see quite as plainly that the man was not having his way with the maid. Presently the man laughed and walked off. The maid sat down.

"He'll come back," thought Uncle.

Presently Uncle heard a soft whistle. The girl looked up, smiling.

"The li'l' baggage," murmured Uncle. He had recognized the man. However, his muscles relaxed as he noted the general behaviour of the young woman, who seemed quite able to take care of herself. Uncle began to grin, as a happy thought invaded his remarkable head. He lay low till the man marched off again, after attempting, not successfully, to kiss the girl. Uncle waited. The girl sat down again. Uncle knew her well. She lived in a tiny hamlet between Nether-Applewhite and Hernshaw Magna, not far from the Brockley cottage. Uncle respected her because she was a forester. Her "granfer" had kept pigs in the forest. Towards the end of the war she went into service, and was now at home on a holiday.

Uncle left his harbourage and advanced noiselessly. Then he whistled, reproducing the exact note of the young man. The girl jumped up.

"Be-utiful evenin'," said Uncle.

The girl blushed.

"I seen him an' you," said Uncle. "Now, me maid, I can mind me own business, I can."

"Can you?" she asked roguishly.

Uncle laughed, being quick at the

uptake. His business was that of a thatcher, a craft at which he was an expert. Ordinary thatching of ricks, let us say, he despised. Ornamental thatching, as an industry, is moribund. Uncle preferred to earn a good living by the exercise of his lively wits. In the hunting season he ran with hounds and pocketed innumerable shillings and half-crowns because followers easily lose hounds and Uncle somehow—you must ask him how he did it—was invariably at hand bursting with information that, as a rule, could be depended on. He had a spaniel that paid for more than its keep by finding golf balls in whin and heather. He could play a fair round of golf and, in the absence of a "pro," could and did mend clubs and give lessons. He liked odd jobs at odd hours which brought him into fellowship with rich and poor. Really, as he admitted with disarming candour, it was the minding of business essentially not his own that brought grist to his mill. Apparently, this saucy maid knew this.

"What be you a-doin' here in they rosydandrons wi' a young gen'leman?"

"Is that your business, Uncle?"

"I makes everything my business, Sally. And I knows what I knows."

"I wonders what you do know, Uncle, 'bout me an' him?"

Uncle attended his parish church, and was fervent in response. He inflated a deep chest and uplifted a large and nobly formed nose.

"You be playin' wi' fire, Sally. I give 'ee fair warnin'. 'Tis resky work. A very lively young spark he be."

"I ain't burned my fingers, Uncle. If I could trust 'ee——"

She paused, glancing at him. Woman's intuition told her that Uncle could be trusted—up to a point.

"'Tis all along o' my Peter John."

"Your Peter John——? He be of kin to me."

"Aye—you learned Peter John some of his tricks, too. 'Twas your doing, as I sees it, that he got catched in Sir Giles's woods."

"What a tale!"

"Anyways, Peter John be in trouble. Dad says more'n likely 'twill land him in gaol. Folks are throwing that up to me."

She tossed her head angrily. Uncle stroked his ample chin, peering alertly at flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes. Deep down in his sinful old heart he was reflecting that the young captain must not be dealt with too drastically. If this "li'l' baggage" had held up an alluring finger——? He spoke pleasantly:

"Don't 'ee get miffed! I wants to help Peter John, but Sir Giles be tarr'bly set agen me. Gittin' catched was none o' my teachin'. I allers says, speakin' as a forester, that if you makes no noise you won't be heard; and if you keeps out o' sight you won't be seen."

He chuckled whimsically, feeling in an ample pocket for a rabbit that wasn't there. Sally clutched his arm.

"I ain't a bad girl, Uncle. I loves Peter John, honest I do."

The face upturned to his was so free from guile and so distressed that Uncle kissed it, paternally.

"There, there! I be cocky-sure o' that. But this yere mumbudgettin' wi' captains, this meetin' on the sly, is a silly sart o' game, to my notions, onless——"

"Unless——?"

"Onless ther be something in it more'n meets my eye."

"Perhaps there is."

"Then out wi' it, and I'll help 'ee wi' my ripe wisdom."

Thus adjured pretty Sally did out with the truth. Possibly, she had discovered that all of us are dependent on others. And intimate knowledge of her lover may have made her realize that he, in his trouble, was incapable of saving a not altogether hopeless situation. Foresters are peculiar in many ways. Living in the great woods, children of sun and rain, getting a precari-

ous living in a simple primitive fashion, they share with savages a strange fatalism. Because life, in a sense, is easy, they shrink from obstacles, travelling slowly along lines of least resistance. You see a gipsy taking the beaten track across a moor, not the short cut which might lead him into a bog. Peter John, after the summons had been served, sat down and grinned philosophically. Sally's plan was this. She had lured a young gentleman into the rhododendrons because she beheld in him a lever wherewith a very obstinate, cross-grained old gentleman might be budged from an almost impregnable position. Uncle nodded. He approved the design; he questioned the treatment.

"You be a peart maid, but too timoresome. I'll wager now that you hasn't talked to young captain 'bout Peter John."

"Not yet. He—he wanted to talk about hisself. See?"

"He tried to kiss 'ee."

"And I come nigh smackin' his face, I did."

"Ah-h-h! 'Twas God A'mighty's savin' grace you didn't. That 'ud ha' maddened him. You be right, Sally, in your main plan. This young gen'leman has the ear o' Sir Giles. I makes no doubt that a word from him 'ud do the trick. But 'tis ticklish work, me girl. You was minded just now to smack his face; I was minded to punch his head, old as I be. But, Lard love 'ee! Looking at your pretty eyes, I can't blame 'un. And this be May. I minds me when I ran loose in sap time, and, seemin'ly, our bracken do grow high a-purpose to hide lovers. When it grows yaller, it serves to bed down the beasts o' the field. But I be ramblin' in the pleasant ways o' my youth. So you smiled at 'un, did 'ee, wi' thoughts o' Peter John in your heart?"

"Yes; I did."

"I called 'ee a timoresome maid, but you was takin' chances, Sally, meetin' a man in this lonely part o' Forest."

"He be a gen'leman, Uncle."

"Ah-h-h! I must smoke a pipe over this."

He filled an old briar very carefully, coaxing the tobacco into the bowl. Uncle boasted amongst the gaffers that he could keep one pipe going for a full hour and a half. But now he smoked carelessly, expelling vast volumes of smoke. And as he smoked, he scratched his head. Sally sat still, with her hands folded upon her lap, watching a squirrel peering at Uncle from behind a branch. Finally, Uncle broke the silence.

"Honesty be the policy o' wisdom. You must own up, Sally. I leaves ways to your 'ooman's owdacious wits. You coaxed 'un here; you must coax 'un agen. And then, I says; out wi' the truth. Ax a sportsman to help 'ee. I bain't sartain sure in my mind that he be a sportsman. I ain't never seen 'un at top o' the hunt, but he be one of us, barn and bred i' the Forest. If you has tears on tap, let 'em flow. Ax him to be a friend. Give 'un your li'l' hand, not your lips. You be a sweet maid, and if he's a man, he'll help 'ee. Now, I must tramp homealong.

II

Peter John, as has been said, was doing nothing till haying began. And Sally was home on holiday. But ever since he had strayed within reach of the Law, Sally had puzzled him, as well she might. Such an offence as his was deemed negligible by the Brockleys and their neighbours. In far off Georgian days, many Foresters had been smugglers. Most of them today were poachers upon a small scale. The king's venison rarely tickled their palates simply because the king's keepers were alert if not unduly active. None the less, it was, as Peter John admitted to himself, a shameful thing to be "catched." It would be a still more

shameful thing to be sent to gaol. Sally, probably, shared the common view about that.

To make matters worse, he and Sally were not actually engaged. There had been no formal plighting of troth. Each had set, perhaps, an inordinate value upon independence, so dear to all Foresters. He had "courted" her for years. He had been sure that sooner or later they would settle down in some cottage, very hard to come by in post-war days. Marriage, in rural districts, is far less exciting than courtship. To the women it means service without wages; to the men it means harder service with the wages handed over to the woman on Saturday night.

Ultimately, Peter John ambled to the conclusion that his Sally was waiting to see what would happen when he was haled before the Bench. Sir Giles, as prosecutor, would not sit upon it. But the other magistrates would be influenced by him. And Peter John was aware that gentlemen, accustomed to live at ease before the war, had become, as he put it, "wonnerful peevish" under the yoke of tax and supertax. By them, at any rate, he was regarded as a thief, a rascal who had stolen something quite as valuable as coal. The village constable said lugubriously:

"'Tis more than petty larceny, my man."

Peter John did not take in at once the full meaning of this cryptic statement. When it dawned upon him that his offence might be deemed so heinous that it lay beyond the jurisdiction of the Bench, his soul sickened within him. If Sally knew that—— !

Sally, of course, had she been the heroine of a popular film play, would have hastened to her lover, embraced him tenderly, and assured him, in a passion of tears, that she was his for eternity even if hanging were his portion. Being a Forester, she was more concerned in pulling strings that might lead to the summons being withdrawn. Also, she knew her Peter John would not countenance any tampering with captains. Sally, therefore, was constrained to work "on her own," and, fortified by the sage counsel of Uncle, she went her way joyously.

Peter John was not of a suspicious nature, but Sally's charms of mind and person obsessed and distressed him. Many likely young fellows had fluttered about this honey-pot. Their activities noticeably diminished when Peter John loomed into sight, squaring his broad shoulders. It was understood that "taking up" with Sally meant "taking on" young Brockley, not a "cushy" job. Accordingly, Sally had never excited much more than flutterings. It was hardly safe to dance with her more than twice if Peter John happened to be present.

Mazed and dazed by the bludgeonings of fortune, Peter John worked in his mother's small garden. Friends of his own sex were sympathetic, when Peter John paid for their ale, but not optimistic. To his mother alone he confided his greatest trouble.

"Sally," he said, "be keepin' herself to herself."

Mrs. Brockley smiled sourly. Mothers with stout sons who contribute to their support rarely display undue warmth of affection for putative daughters-in-law. Sally, in Mrs. Brockley's considered judgment, was extravagant. To put your wages into a hat and then get photographed in it did not commend itself to her.

"Bit of a besom," she suggested.

"If you wasn't my mother, I'd call you a liar," said Peter John.

He bounced out of the kitchen, and hoed vigorously, attacking weeds with astonishing rancour. As he worked a missel-thrush sang to him, and—so Peter John believed—*at* him.

"Damned storm-cock," he growled. He threw a stone at the bird and missed it. The bird sang on lustily. Foresters affirm that the louder song

of the missel-thrush heralds rain. Peter John accepted the song metaphorically. A storm was coming up for him. But his mind dwelt upon Sally, who was keeping herself to herself. For why? Uncle could have answered that devastating question. Uncle could have told an unhappy kinsman that Sally was working out his salvation according to plan, a plan that justified a temporary coldness. How could Sally sport with captains in the shade if Peter John insisted on doing the sporting himself? To keep an ardent lover at a discreet distance became absolutely necessary.

The missel-thrush, innocent bird, sang louder than ever.

At this moment conviction stole upon Peter John. Sally had found somebody else. Women understood women. A bit of a besom——! He envisaged a broom daintily fashioned out of sweet-smelling heather sweeping up somebody else. Probably his mother knew all about it, but he was too proud to ask for details. Those he would sweep up for himself. He would play the besom. And he wouldn't be "catched." He threw down the hoe, pulled on his old coat, cocked his cap at an aggressive angle, and sauntered down the high road. It was the hour when swains released from durance vile seek their sweethearts. Sally's cottage lay at the farther end of the hamlet. Peter John matured his plans as he strode along. He intended to seek cover in some gorse bushes opposite to Sally's cottage. After tea she would slip out, if—if she were a besom——!

After tea she did slip out, carrying a letter in her hand. It was not necessary to follow her, except with a sharp pair of eyes. She walked demurely as far as the letter-box—the hamlet had no post office—popped in her letter, and went back to the cottage. Peter John hoped that the letter was for him. It wasn't. Jealousy consumed him, gnawed at his vitals. To whom could Sally be writing?

Next day, at the same hour, he stood for an hour in the gorse, but Sally, obviously, was "helping mother." He could see her flitting to and fro, carrying linen nicely bleached by the sun. He was tempted to present himself, but pride choked him.

Upon the evening of the third day, patience was rewarded. Sally appeared, not in her Sunday best, but in a white skirt and sports coat, which became her slender figure admirably. Peter John had given her the sports coat, of Saxe blue, made of Silko. Where was she taking it?

He followed her.

She moved lightly and so did he, but his heart grew heavier with every step, as she left the outlying cottages behind her. Still she might be on her way to Nether-Applewhite. There is constant intermarriage between the older families in and about the Forest of Ys. Peter John hoped that Sally might be merely "a-visitin'." But on such formal occasions, the visitor takes a gift, some honey, a pat of butter, a pot of jam. Sally carried nothing.

Presently she turned into the Forest. More, before she did so, she glanced quickly backwards. The long road stretched behind and before her. Nobody was in sight.

"She be a besom," he thought.

However, Sally stuck to a track, winding through bracken and beech trees. If she hadn't looked back, hope might have lingered in Peter John's breast. The track led to a keeper's cottage. Sly Sally skirted this, and when she executed the flanking movement a Saxe blue sports coat turned to red in the eyes of the man who was gliding after her.

Presently she reached the pond, and sat down upon the trunk of a fallen tree. Peter John hid himself in the rhododendrons.

III

THE captain rode to the trysting-place. He had received a letter from

Sally which puzzled him. Also, being young and optimistic, he placed upon this artless epistle an interpretation which inflamed, perhaps, his vanity more than anything else. The girl had repulsed him; now she whistled him back. He had known her ever since she wore pinafores and sucked a not too clean thumb. At the last annual flower show he had danced with Sally, who was no mean performer. Such slight attentions were paid by sprigs of quality to pretty villagers *coram populo* and signified nothing. And then, only a week previously, he had met Sally, who smiled sweetly at him. That, too, might mean nothing or anything. He stopped to exchange a few bantering words. Sally wanted to ask a favour, but she didn't know how to do it. She blushed, poor child, and stammered. The bold captain unhesitatingly drew the wrong conclusion from these signals of distress. And he, too, was conscious of prying eyes, for the pair had met in the middle of Hernshaw Magna. Swiftly, he proposed a meeting elsewhere; falteringly Sally consented.

And now she had asked for another meeting!

A hundred yards from the pond, he tied his cob to a swinging branch, lit a cigarette, assumed the smile of a conqueror, and swaggered past the clump of rhododendrons where Peter John was hiding.

Then he whistled.

Sally stood up, aflame with nervousness and blushes. Village maidens, even before they leave school, have little to learn about men. Their mothers attend to that, using very plain speech. Sally, therefore, blushed crimson because she knew well enough that the captain had been lured to the pond under false pretences. When he discovered that, probably he would be very angry, not in a mood to grant favours. Uncle, nevertheless, was right. His ripe wisdom percolated through Sally's brain cells. She must appeal, forthwith, to the chivalry of a gentleman. But the situation was intolerably difficult.

The captain, it must be admitted, was something of a fool; but he could see, plainly enough, that the pretty girl in front of him was quivering with emotion. The spot chosen was secluded; the sun shone in azure skies; soft breezes ruffled the surface of the pool. And haste is abhorrent to all who dwell in the Forest of Ys. Accordingly, he greeted the quivering maid courteously and sat down beside her on the tree trunk, taking a limp hand in his. Sally left it there for the moment, as Peter John duly noted.

"I got your dear little letter," began the captain. "And I've chucked a very important engagement to come here. What do you say to that, my little Sally?"

Sally had nothing to say. She accepted the statement for what it appeared to be worth—to her. Gentlemen did have very important engagements. Her pulses fluttered; her hand trembled. She tried to withdraw it, but the captain held it prisoner.

"You did not write much, Sally, but you made it plain that you wanted to see me again—*here.*"

He emphasized the word. The selection of such a trysting-place aroused all the pleasures of anticipation. He was reflecting that Adam must have met Eve in just such another enchanted glade, beside a pool upon which lilies floated, beneath primeval trees, the sentries of Time, with nothing to disturb the exquisite silence save the drowsy hum of insects and the soft whispering of the leaves.

"I—I did, sir. 'Tis true. I—I had a reason, sir, for wanting to see you quite alone."

"Tell me the reason," he whispered.

"I be 'mazed an' dazed as near was," faltered Sally.

The captain pressed her hand, moving closer to her. Peter John was not near enough to hear the duologue, but a patron of the

"movies" was quick to interpret actions.

"Soft stuff," he murmured, as he stirred restlessly.

With a tremendous effort he restrained action. He was watching, fascinated, the familiar development, the protagonists of a hundred films, the villain and the maid.

"He be a trespasser," he thought.

Resentment, as yet, had not obliterated elemental common sense. Had the man in front of him been of his own class, he would have slunk away, grievously mortified, but recognizing the right of any young woman not definitely engaged to change her mind. More, realizing miserably that his Sally was a "besom," the preconceived idea, inculcated by films of the baser sort, asserted itself. He could behold Sally as the village maid in the toils of the titled blackguard.

Sally continued, breathlessly:

"I be fair desperate."

"Tell me, you dear little thing, tell me! Don't be afraid!"

He told himself, with an inward chuckle, that he was sipping delightfully the rarest vintage brewed by Cupid. Encouraged, Sally went on:

"I just feels that I would do anything, anything—for somebody."

The captain said admiringly:

"By Jove! I believe you would."

At another time, in another place, Sally, when speaking to the quality, would have expressed herself mincingly, avoiding the Doric of the forest. But she was far too moved to pick her phrases or mind her grammar. Suddenly she tried a fresh tack, sailing boldly into the wind.

"You were allers nice to me."

"Was I?"

"Ay—allers a pleasant word and a smile. An' that do embolden me; yes it do. An' you'll go on bein' nice to me, won't you?"

She lifted a pleading face to his.

"You needn't worry about that, Sally."

"I wants you to do something for me."

"Carry on!"

"You knows Peter John Brockley who lives t'other end of our village?" The captain nodded. We can hardly blame him for not making four out of two and two, because as yet he had never seen Peter John and Sally together as a pair. Sally, wound up to full explanation, hurried on: "Him as was summonsed for pickin' up wood belongin' to Sir Giles. Constable says 'tis more'n petty larceny. It may mean Assizes. An' Sir Giles be fair set on makin' a sample o' Peter John. 'Twill kill old Mrs. Brockley."

"What is it you want me to do?"

"If so be as you'd speak a word for Peter John to Sir Giles. I knows 'tis a gert favour, but gaol—oh, dear!"

Tears filled her eyes and trickled down her cheeks. The captain, not insensible to beauty in distress, pulled a handkerchief from his sleeve, and dabbed gently Sally's eyes.

"Young Brockley won't go to gaol. A fine will be imposed, nothing more."

"Constable says 'tis assizes for Peter John, if summons bain't withdrawn, 'cause—'cause, afore the war, he was had up for poachin'. They found a hare on him. Peter John said he didn't know how it comed there. He allers was free wi' his jokes. Anyways, he got off wi' a fine. Now, look 'ee, he can't plead first offence, an' there be a conviction against 'un."

The captain whistled. He was not a Justice of the Peace, and he knew nothing of the majesty of the Law, but he divined that young Brockley was in a tight place. Probably Sally and the constable stated a fact. If the summons were not withdrawn, Peter John might find himself in the dock at Melchester. Possibly, so he reflected, Peter John might be of kin to Sally, which would account for her interest in him.

"Are you a cousin of his?"

"No."

"Then why do you plead for him so—so eloquently?"

She answered with belated directness:

"'Cause I love him."

The captain jumped up.

Allowances may be made for him, except by the unco guid. He felt and looked like a fool. But he might have swallowed a bitter dose without grimacing. Futile wrath glowered in eyes set too close together.

"You damned little humbug!"

Sally winced, covering her face with trembling fingers. She had shot her bolt. Apparently, it had missed the mark. Very miserably she told herself that the crushing indictment was true. She had humbugged the captain. And he looked a fool even to her.

"Do forgive me," she wailed.

Peter John, in the rhododendrons, wondered what had happened. Obviously a pair of lovers had quarrelled. Not an illuminating word had reached him. He could see Sally sobbing piteously, and the captain, tall and erect, glaring down at her.

The captain's expression changed as Sally looked up at him, beseechingly. Certainly she was distractingly pretty. And she had asked him to be "nice" to her. More, it looked as if she were terribly distressed because he had sworn at her.

"Sally——"

"Yes, sir?"

"If I promise to say a word for young Brockley, will you give me a kiss?"

Sally hesitated. Unfortunately she blushed. To save Peter John she would have kissed an orang-outang. She jumped up.

"If I give 'ee a kiss, just a li'l' 'un, you'll speak up for 'un?"

"That is understood."

Gallantly she approached him. A Du Guesclin, had he asked for such a kiss, would have accepted it in the spirit with which it was proffered. The captain was no perfect knight. Possibly he had not been kicked hard enough at Eton. He seized Sally in his arms, and kissed her violently.

Peter John slipped out of the rhododendrons.

IV

SALLY was the first to see him, as he strode across the glade. Instantly she yelped. The verb is used to describe the cry of an animal. Sally yelped because she was frightened. The captain had frightened her. In another moment, half choked by the pressure of his arms, she might have screamed. The yelp indicated dismay quite as much as fear.

The captain released her and confronted a Peter John still hypnotized, so to speak, by the preconceived idea. In picture plays, the hero always advances upon the villain and smites him. That was Peter John's idea. To smite——!

Nor did he invite the captain, in the chaste language of the novelette, to "put up his hands." The captain did that instinctively. Peter John smote. The captain, no novice, countered him full on the nose. Peter John staggered back. Sally stared at the men in horror. Peter John advanced more warily. He was really a fighter, whereas the captain, at best, was a second-rate boxer. Young Brockley could take punishment—to use the language of the ring—like a glutton. Regardless of consequences, he intended to knock-out the captain. He accomplished this fairly easy task in less than two minutes. Having knocked out his antagonist, he bent down, lifted up an almost unconscious body, and dropped it into the pond!

At this interesting moment, Uncle appeared on the scene. The long arm of coincidence had not wrenched him from the Pomfret Arms. Before he parted from Sally upon the afternoon when his ripe wisdom had inundated that young woman, he

learnt from her that she meant to write to the captain. He had, indeed, urged her to ask her favour in that letter. Wisely or otherwise, Sally distrusted her spelling. Uncle never argued with an obstinate female. He contented himself with finding out when and where the contemplated meeting would take place, and he decided, not being sure of the captain, that he would assist if, haply, assistance were needed.

His honest face indicated pleasure. He had enjoyed the fight, but he knew that the pond was deep and full of weeds.

"Lard love 'ee," said he to Peter John, "that was an upliftin' scrap, but can the young gen'leman swim?"

"I hopes not," replied Peter John.

The captain was floundering amongst the lilies.

"He be drowndin'," exclaimed Sally.

"He be caught i' the weeds," declared Uncle. "We must fish 'un out."

The captain was fished out, a bedraggled and exhausted object. Peter John said to Sally:

"You can kiss 'un now, if you've a mind to."

"I done it for you, Pete."

"What you say?"

Sally explained. Uncle was rendering first aid to the captain, but he could hear what passed between the lovers. He scraped mud and weeds from the young gentleman and propped him up with his back against the tree trunk. The captain gasped and groaned, hardly conscious of Uncle's ministrations.

"You be a dodgasted fool," said Uncle, turning from the villain to the hero. "Me an' Sally was minded to help 'ee. Your bacon fat be fairly i' the fire—an' sizzlin'."

He held up a large hand and ticked off with a minatory finger the "counts" against his kinsman.

"Fustly—poachin'. Foolish to be catched at that! Secondly—grand larceny—foolisher still to be catched twice. Thirdly an' lastly—assault an' battery! Six months, for that, me lad, wi'out the option of a fine."

Peter John glanced at Sally. He, too, was not an agreeable object for a woman's eye to rest upon. But she gazed at him adoringly. He was her man. He had proved himself to be a man.

"I don't care a damn," he replied cheerfully.

"But I does," whispered Sally.

Uncle filled his pipe. He was reflecting that truly great men, like himself and the Duke of Wellington, rose to heights under the pressure of emergency. He knew that he must act immediately, if a lamentable situation were to be saved. He puffed at his pipe, before he delivered an ultimatum.

"You've nearly killed 'un," he said solemnly. "I leaves it to 'ee, both of 'ee, to help clean 'un. Mortial man couldn't face his brother sinners lookin' as he do this instant minute."

"He rode here," said Sally.

"Did he now? When he comes to hisself, an' reason mounts her throne, you tell 'un to ride his horse into a bog. 'Tisn't many in the Forest 'ud ha' thought o' that, an' it's happened to better men than he be. But I reckons he won't sit any horse for two hours yet. Anyways, I leaves 'un in your tender care."

"Where be you goin', Uncle?"

"I be going, hot foot, to Sir Giles Mottisfont."

V

Sir Giles was sitting in his library when an aged butler told him that Habakkuk Mucklow wished to see him on a matter of business.

"I can't see that old rascal. Business? What business?"

"Habakkuk did say, Sir Giles, that the business was none of his. He refused to state what it was to me."

Sir Giles nodded. As a Verderer

he had to listen to complaints lodged by Commoners, and—to his credit let it be added—he never shirked his duties.

"Show him in."

Uncle made a dignified entrance, but was not invited to take a chair. He respected Sir Giles because he was a Mottisfont and head of an ancient family. Sir Giles could trace filiation from John de la Mothe, Knight of the Shire in the reign of Henry III, to George Mott, who appears to have obtained a deed of gift to a field near Hernshaw Magna in which bubbled a fine spring, spoken of in still existing charters as Mott Hys Fonte, or Fontaine. Hence we arrive by an easy transition to Gilles de Mottysfonte who married an heiress of the Pundle family and held a lucrative appointment under the Crown during the reign of Elizabeth. Ever since the days of George Mott the family seems to have justified its motto, *Probus et Tenax*, by acquiring as much land as possible and refusing under any circumstances to part with an acre of it.

"What can I do for you, Habakkuk?"

In his own house, Sir Giles treated everybody with courtesy.

"Be—utiful weather, to be sure, Sir Giles."

"You didn't come here to talk .bout the weather."

"No, Sir Giles, I come to 'ee to ask for advice. You be a good friend to all Commoners, and a magistrate. I might ha' gone straight to Police Station in Puddenhurst, but I takes the notion to see you fust. Sir Giles, I says, never did hold wi' trespassin'."

Sir Giles eyed Uncle with mild amusement.

"We has *our* preserves," said Uncle.

"Are you alluding to jam?" asked Sir Giles, wondering whether his visitor was perfectly sober. Uncle replied portentously:

"I speak semaphorically, Sir Giles, allers likin' a figure o' speech. Call it jam. A bit o' reel jam do, seemin'ly, describe Sally Owbridge."

"Sally Owbridge?"

"Ay. This afternoon, as never was, a young gen'leman met Sally Owbridge in they rosydandrons close to pond where we killed that notable buck sixteen year ago. I mind me you had a slot, Sir Giles."

But Sir Giles was not thinking of slots. He understood instantly what Uncle meant by trespassing and preserves.

"Do you come to me as a magistrate? Have you a charge to make? What is it?"

He spoke testily. There were moments when Sir Giles told himself that he had lived too long, that he could no longer cope with changed conditions. It exasperated him beyond measure to hear that a young gentleman had been meeting pretty Sally Owbridge at all. Indeed, he was hardly thinking of Uncle, when he heard that great man's ingratiating tones.

"You was allers one to respect your own rights, Sir Giles, and the rights o' others."

"Perfectly true."

"You be down on trespassers."

Sir Giles smiled grimly. Uncle went on, feeling his way cautiously, sensible that Sir Giles was waxing impatient and irritable.

"But you fights for us poor folk. 'Cause o' that I've made bold to come to 'ee this evenin'. A very dirty bit o' work was done down to pond not two hours ago. I lay sixpence you've kissed a pretty girl in your time, Sir Giles?"

"For the Lord's sake, man, get on with it."

"I'll lay a crown," continued Uncle imperturbably, "that you never kissed a girl against her will. I calls that trespassin'."

"And so it is," rapped out Sir Giles. "If little Sally Owbridge has been assaulted, I'll make the matter my business, and thank you for coming to me instead of going to the police-station. Mrs. Owbridge is one of my tenants."

"An' so be Mrs. Brockley."

"What on earth has she got to do with this?"

"I be gittin' old," murmured Uncle, "an' I has to tell my tale my own way, Sir Giles. There was two assaults down by pond this afternoon."

"Bless my soul! Two?"

"Ay. When lil Sally was strugglin' wi' the young gen'leman, her own boy happened along. What, I axes you, would you ha' done, Sir Giles?"

"Knocked him down," declared Sir Giles, bristling with indignation.

"You be the right sart, Sir Giles. I'll lay a guinea you'd ha' done it, too. Sally's boy manhandled 'un to rights, he did. And then he pitched 'un into pond."

"Capital. Sally's boy is a good boy. You tell him so from me. So he pitched him into the pond, did he?"

"I helped to fish 'un out. Now, Sir Giles, Sally feels, an' I feels, that the young gen'leman got his deserts. Sally's boy fit like a tiger in the Great War, an' he fit like a wild cat down by old pond."

"I'm almost sorry I wasn't there," declared Sir Giles. "Perhaps, under the circumstances, justice has been done. It may be expedient not to press the matter further."

"I knowed you'd say that," exclaimed Uncle, with enthusiasm. "An' Sally's boy, Sir Giles, knows enough to keep his mouth shut. Wi' your permission, may I speak a word for—*him?*

"I don't know who he is, but I'd like to shake his hand."

"Ah-h-h! You knows me, Sir Giles, an' I knows you. Sally's boy be in sore trouble. He was convicted years ago, for snarin' a hare, an' he not much more'n a leveret, too. Now, a summons is out agen him for fillin' up his old mother's shed wi' wood."

"Um!" said Sir Giles.

"Wi' your wood, Sir Giles. I be speakin' of an' for Peter John Brockley. What he ha' done to-day may make you, Sir Giles, go easy wi' 'un. We knows you didn't grudge the fallen wood. We knows you respects property. But is Peter John Brockley to go to gaol an' this young sprig o' quality to go free?"

Sir Giles stared hard at Uncle's whimsical, weather-beaten countenance.

"Sally's boy stole my wood, you say?"

"He did help hisself," murmured Uncle.

"I had forgotten the first conviction. A hare of mine was found in his pocket?"

"A sad mishap, Sir Giles."

The Verderer who pressed the claims of the Commoners even against the Crown leant his head upon his hand.

"I shall see to it," he said crisply, "that the summons is withdrawn."

"I knowed you'd say that," exclaimed Uncle for the third time. "An', speakin' as man to man, I'd sooner ha' your word than the bond of the Deputy Surveyor hisself. I takes my leave o' 'ee, Sir Giles, wi' my humble respects. May be—I axes it as a favour—Sir Giles Mottisfont 'll allow Habakkuk Mucklow to tell a poor man that a rich man bain't a-goin' to prosecute."

"You can tell him that, Habakkuk."

Uncle moved majestically towards the door.

"One moment. Between ourselves—the matter shall go no farther—tell me the name of this young—a—gentleman."

"I'd like to spare 'ee, Sir Giles."

"Spare me? What the devil do you mean?"

"The young gen'leman," said Uncle slowly, edging towards the door, "be your youngest son, Captain Mottisfont."

Uncle vanished.

HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL.

Diamonds in Duplicate

By Samuel Cummings

"He was startled by a scream from his wife's room. Running to the door, he saw Edith and her maid hysterically tossing chairs right and left and groping under tables.

"'My necklace, Morty!' she wailed. 'My necklace has gone—lost—help me to find it.'"

MORTIMER HASTINGS, promoter of mining interests, fairly well known in "the street," and accounted "comfortably fixed," paused an instant, looked quickly up and down Regent Street, and hurriedly entered a shop, the windows of which were filled with imitation gems of every description.

Necklaces, sunbursts, and tiaras, arranged against backgrounds of appropriate colours, glittered in the electric light and dazzled the eyes of those who stopped to admire. A window card bore the announcement that the stones were from the "famous Bolivia mines," and could not be told from the genuine. The prices were low.

Hastings made his way to the rear of the shop, as far as possible from the observation of any customers who might prove to be chance acquaintances. As a clerk came forward the promoter drew from his inside pocket a leather case, from which he took a necklace of diamonds and emeralds that, by comparison, made the imitation jewels in the store look like cut glass.

"Can you duplicate this for me?" he asked, passing the necklace to the clerk. "In the imitation stones, I mean. It must be exact in the tiniest particular."

The clerk handled the string of gems with considerable reverence for their worth. "That's a beautiful necklace, sir," he ventured. "Must be worth all of——"

"Yes, I know," interrupted Hastings impatiently, "but the question I asked was, can you give me an exact duplicate in the artificial stones?" Then, as if ashamed of his show of temper, he added somewhat lamely, "I want to play a joke on my wife. She's fearfully careless about her jewellery, and I just want to teach her a lesson."

The clerk had heard the old story many times before, but concealed his smile, examined the necklace more closely, and soon announced that the string could be duplicated easily, and the replica could not be told from the original unless the two were placed side by side.

The necessary details attended to and the added injunction, "rush," written across the order form, Hastings left the shop and was soon lost in the throng that crowded the thoroughfare. There was a little twinge of conscience hovering in his mind, but he soon dismissed the feeling by saying, half aloud: "It's only a matter of a few days, and then everything will be all right."

Hastings' visit to the dealer in artificial gems had been the result of a sudden idea—an inspiration, he might have termed it—which had come to him the night before as he sat alone in the den of his handsome apartment, turning over in his mind a serious financial problem. He was in urgent need of a few thousand pounds to carry him along for a month, perhaps more, until a big mining scheme he was engineering should become an accomplished fact.

There was no danger of the deal falling through. All that it lacked were the signatures of two fossilized

directors who wanted to be convinced of every little detail before affixing their names.

So confident was Hastings of the outcome that he had put his entire private fortune into stocks of the companies. The natural rise that would follow when the scheme was made public, combined with the commission he would receive for his services as promoter, would treble his own outlay, and put him practically in "easy street" for the rest of his life.

Meantime, in the vernacular of "the street," he was "broke to the world." He had received, only a few days before, a polite note from the bank that his account was overdrawn. This had been followed by a call from his broker for more margin on a stock which he had taken a flying shot at a few weeks earlier.

There were men in Throgmorton Street from whom he could borrow almost any amount of money, with no more security than his personal note, but as every one of them had been induced to invest in the mining venture on his assurance that there was absolutely no risk, he felt that an application from him for a loan just at this time might start a rumour that there was something wrong with the promotion scheme. If such a rumour got to the ears of the two hesitating directors, the scheme might be put off indefinitely.

It was while seeking a way out of this financial dilemma that Hastings' mind had reverted to the necklace he had given his wife a little more than a year before. The necklace at that moment lay in the little wall safe in the flat, Mrs. Hastings being in the Highlands on a visit to her mother.

Hastings knew the necklace would easily stand as collateral for a loan of one thousand pounds, but he knew also that should Edith return before the trinket was redeemed there would be a domestic explosion which no explanation could avoid. In all probability she would flatly refuse to wear the necklace again if she knew it had passed through the hands of a money-lender.

Hastings turned the matter over in his mind a little longer, but finally laid it aside with a wistful sigh at the thought of how easily it would help him out of his fix.

He picked up the evening paper and started to read in an abstracted fashion. Almost the first article on which his eye rested was a paragraph asserting that many women of the aristocracy known to possess jewels of great value were wearing false gems in their place, while the originals were in the hands of jewellers who did a money-lending business as a side line. It was represented to be quite a common practice in the trade.

The way out of his dilemma came to Hastings in a flash, the utter simplicity of it humbling him that he had not been able to think of it before. He had only to get a duplicate of Edith's necklace, deposit it in the safe, and raise the needed money on the real jewels. If Edith returned before the scheme went through, the bogus necklace would easily pass muster until Hastings could redeem the original.

A few days after Hastings' visit to the Regent Street shop the two necklaces were delivered in his office, and though he winced at the price charged for the changeling, he consoled himself with the reflection that he soon would be in a position to laugh at the expense. That afternoon he visited the office of Herman Altschul, a dealer in precious stones, who had the reputation of doing a "side line" in negotiable securities. Before three o'clock a cheque for one thousand pounds was deposited in his bank, and his broker's clamour for more margin was satisfied for the time.

II

MRS. HASTINGS had been home almost a week before she thought to ask for the necklace. Her husband was present when she went to the

tiny wall safe, and his heart beat a trifle faster as she lifted the bogus gems from their case. Assurance of their safety was all she wished, however, and she laid them back again, unaware of the deception.

As the days passed Hastings chafed more and more over the delay in bringing the mining business to completion. He had explained in a desultory way to his wife how a big business deal was impending which would make them both comfortable for life, and Edith took his word that it could not fail.

The second test of the bogus necklace came a few days later when Edith wore it at Mrs. Wharton's bridge party. Hastings himself declined to go, saying bridge was not to his liking, and adding, half in jest, half in earnest, that he "did enough gambling on 'Change to satisfy his passion in that line." His fears were groundless, however, and again the fake jewels passed the inspection successfully.

Then things brightened a bit for the mining promoter. The stock at which he had taken the "flying shot" turned out well, and he closed the deal with a hundred pounds profit. Better still, one of the obdurate directors in the scheme had capitulated, and the other's signature was expected when he returned from a country trip, which would be in less than a week.

Hastings celebrated the double occasion for rejoicing by taking Edith to the opera. She wore the bogus necklace again, and Hastings wondered, as his eyes glanced over the "diamond horseshoe" of the opera house, how many of the women present, like his wife, were in blissful ignorance of the value of the gems they wore.

A little dinner followed the play. Then Hastings called a cab and was driven home, Edith talking happily the while over the wonderful singing and her splendidly enjoyable evening.

Hastings was going to his den for a night-cap smoke when he was startled by a scream from his wife's room. Running to the door, he saw Edith and her maid hysterically tossing chairs right and left and groping under tables.

"My necklace, Morty!" she wailed. "My necklace has gone—lost—help me find it."

Confusion followed in the little room. Edith would not be satisfied until Hastings had searched every nook and cranny in the apartment, and had ransacked every fold and crease in her opera cloak, without result, and a search of the front steps and the kerbstone outside brought no trace of the missing necklace.

"You must have dropped it in the cab," said Hastings finally, doing his best to comfort his wife, who had remained in her room sobbing. "I haven't the cabman's number, and I don't remember what he looked like; but I'll advertise in the morning, and he'll probably turn up with it. Or he may be honest enough to come here without waiting to look for an advertisement."

"Oh, Morty, please don't take any chances!" cried Edith between sobs. "Advertise the first thing tomorrow, won't you? And offer two hundred pounds reward. That's the very least you can offer. I'll never get over it if you put the reward so low that the fellow thinks he can sell the necklace for more."

Like a dutiful husband, Hastings promised, although he could scarce keep from smiling as he thought of the immensity of the reward as compared with the real value of the bogus trinket. However, he reflected, he could easily bluff his way out of paying the money for the return of the necklace by protesting that the cabman was imposing on him.

Any jeweller, he knew, would back his statement that the necklace was not worth two hundred. Then, while the search was being carried on the scheme would be just as rapidly nearing completion. That accomplished, he would redeem from

old Altschul the genuine necklace, and restore it to Edith with a metaphorical flourish of trumpets. No matter how the thing went, he felt sure the risk of having the jewel substitution discovered by his wife was reduced to a minimum.

III

On the day following the appearance of the advertisement the office boy rapped at Hastings' door and told him a man waited outside who wished to see him about a lost necklace. Hastings had taken the precaution to give his business address in the advertisement, so he smiled securely, and asked the fellow in.

"Beg pardon, sir," began the man, who bore a greater resemblance to a butler than to a cab-driver, and spoke with an unmistakably "upper servant" accent. "I called, sir, in reference to the necklace you advertised for. I——"

"All right," interrupted Hastings. "Have you got it? Pass it over, and let me see if it's the one."

"No, sir, I haven't—leastways, not with me, sir. But I know where it is. In fact, sir, I'm acting for James — James Haggerty, sir. We're old friends, James and me. He drives a hack; I waits in a restaurant; and we rooms together. He comes home the other night, sir, and wakes me up to show me a necklace of diamonds and emeralds. Havin' had some experience with precious stones in my early days—I was apprentice to a lapidary once, sir—I sees at once it was a very valuable affair."

Was the man making fun of him? Hastings asked himself. Yet, he could not tell, for the fellow's face appeared absolutely devoid of expression.

"James, sir, was struck all of a heap when I told him what I thought the necklace was worth," resumed the restaurant waiter.

"'An' to think, Dobbs,' says he —Dobbs is my name, sir—'for the life of me I can't remember the address where I drove that lady and gentleman last night. Pore soul,' says James with tears in his eyes, 'she must be a frettin' of her life out.'

"When we sees the advertisement this morning, sir, James was nearly wild with joy. Not because of the reward, sir, for James ain't that kind, but because he had the chance to bring joy to a grievin' woman by restoring such a valuable treasure."

It may have been imagination, but Hastings thought he detected added emphasis on the word "valuable." Still, the man's feelings were masked, and he could detect no sign of a smile.

"Cut out the story," said Hastings: "Produce the necklace and we'll talk business."

"I'm coming to that, sir. You see, after we'd talked it over a bit, James gets a bright idea. 'Dobbs,' says he, 'let's look up Mrs. Hastings's home address in the directory, and while I take the necklace 'round to that pore wife you go down to her husband's office and tell him the good news.'"

"What's that?" almost yelled Hastings, leaping from his chair. "Do you mean to tell me——"

"That was James's good heart, sir," answered the apologetic Dobbs. "He wanted to relieve Mrs. Hastings's anxiety, and let her know the necklace was safe. 'You can arrange matters with Mr. Hastings,' he says to me. 'I ain't got no head for business,' he says. 'But the sentimental part is what appeals to me. I'll be there sharp at noon,' he says; 'and after I've made the pore woman happy I'll ask her to call up her husband and tell him her necklace has been restored, and if you should happen to be in Mr. Hastings's office at the time, Dobbs, you can take any trifle that Mr. Hastings sees fit to offer.'"

"Do you think you can skin me out of two hundred pounds with such a wild yarn as that?" roared the now thoroughly angered Has-

tings. "Get out of this office before I have you thrown out."

"Gently, Mr. Hastings, sir," said Dobbs, waving his hand deprecatingly as the irate mining promoter advanced. "James and me figured on just this trouble, too, sir. And James says to me: 'In that case, Dobbs, I'll have done my duty and made the lady happy by a sight of her treasure. Then, for fear there might be some mistake, I'll deposit it in the hands of the police. There's always a lot of newspaper men around the police station,' says James, 'and maybe some of them can put a valuation on the jewels, and explain how it comes that Mr. Hastings says the necklace don't belong to his wife and she says it does.'"

This poser checked Hastings' wrath temporarily. Before he could frame a reply the telephone bell rang.

"Oh, Morty," almost screamed his wife's voice, "what do you think? My necklace is found. The cabman is here with it now. He sent his friend down to collect the reward. Have you seen him? He was to be there about now."

"Yes, he's here," answered Hastings grimly; "but I'm not altogether satisfied, Edith. The story he tells is——"

"Bother the story, Morty. The necklace is here and there's no doubt whatever that it's mine. I couldn't mistake it in a thousand. The cabman says if the reward isn't paid he'll take the necklace to the police station, and then there'll be a lot of red tape and trouble before we can get it. And we'll have to pay the reward, anyway."

Hastings thought for a minute. "I'll call you up in five minutes, dear," he said, and cut short further expostulations by hanging up the receiver.

"Now, confound you," he said, turning to the placid Dobbs, "what do you and your precious pal expect to get out of this? Do you think for a minute I'm going to pay two hundred pounds for the return of a necklace that isn't worth one-tenth that figure?"

"Pardon me, sir, if I differ with you," was Dobbs' reply. "My experience with precious stones, sir, leads me to believe the necklace is worth much more than two hundred pounds. But if you wish, sir, we can refer the matter to Mr. Altschul, of Hatton Garden."

Hastings started. How much did this fellow know, anyway? It appeared much safer to fence a minute.

But Dobbs appeared perfectly capable of keeping up his end of any argument, and Hastings soon stopped talking, and tried to think of some way out. He might evade the palpable blackmail by confessing to his wife, and meriting her scorn for the trick he had played on her.

On the other hand, by defying Dobbs and his friend James he would run the risk of being held up to public ridicule in the newspapers as a man who had advertised a large reward for a spurious article, thus putting himself in the position of being either a huge bluffer or a man easily imposed upon. In view of the approaching mine venture he could not risk exposing himself to either view.

The upshot of his mental chaos was that he finally turned to his desk and reached for his chequebook. The slip of paper authorising the bank to pay to "bearer" two hundred pounds was hardly signed when the telephone rang again.

"Morty," came his wife's impatient voice, "haven't you paid the reward yet? The cabman says he must go to fill a call, and I know I'll never see my necklace again if he takes it away. Please, dear, do fix it."

"Call the cabman to the 'phone," answered Hastings shortly. Then, turning to Dobbs: "Tell your friend the reward has been paid, and order him to give up the necklace."

Dobbs tucked the cheque carefully in his pocket, picked up the receiver, and said:

"It's all right, James. Mr. Hastings has given me the cheque, and I'm going over to the bank to cash it. But you stay there until I call you up again, 'cause sometimes banks won't cash cheques; and if this one won't, we'll have to go back to your plan of turning the bloomin' necklace over to the police. Good-bye."

"You see, sir," said Dobbs to Hastings, as he backed to the door, "I've known banks to refuse payment of cheques 'cause the parties as signed them was sorry afterward and telephoned the bank people not to cash them. But, of course, it ain't likely to happen in this case. Oh, dear, no! Thank you very kindly, sir." And Dobbs bowed his way out before the angry Hastings had quite made up his mind whether to kick him out or throw a paper-weight after him.

IV

"But there really was no great hurry about it, dear," gurgled Mrs. Wharton, nevertheless counting very carefully the roll of notes Mrs. Hastings had handed her. "Dear me, but bridge is an expensive game, isn't it?" she moralized. "This one hundred and fifty pounds you've paid me will just about square my debts to Mrs. Haynes and Helen Forsythe. Then there's twelve pounds due to Mrs. Tansil, and about ten to Mrs. Goodwin. But, tell me, dear, though I don't want to be impertinently inquisitive, how did you raise the money? Has that big scheme of Morty's gone through at last?"

Mrs. Hastings smiled and shook her head. "No, that's still hanging," she said. "I got the money through my necklace."

"Pawned it?" gasped Mrs. Wharton in horror.

"Oh dear no!" said Mrs. Hastings. "It was much easier and less humiliating. While I was away last month Morty took my necklace, being pinched for ready money at the time, had a duplicate made, and then pledged the real necklace.

"I don't know how much he got on it; but it angered me then to think he would deceive me so, and I decided to punish him. I pretended to lose the spurious necklace in a cab, and persuaded him to offer two hundred pounds' reward for its return. My dressmaker's husband used to be butler for my father, and I got him to go to Morty's office to collect the reward. We had a lot of trouble, too; but Morty had to pay or confess. And I don't think he'd be quite willing to do that. Anyway, it served him right."

"But how did you discover the necklace had been changed?" asked Mrs. Wharton.

"H'mph!" returned Mrs. Hastings. "I first tried to raise money on it myself."

Samuel Cummings.

Princess Unknown

By Marr Murray

"'You are the man of honour,' he answered. 'I have not the doubt that you will win, that I shall have the honour to give you the promised reward. But for the treachery, for the thoughtless word divulging the secret, there would be another reward. Yes. A reward that would be swift—and unpleasant.'"

FOR more than an hour that afternoon Tim, otherwise the Honourable Timothy Torrance, had been sitting alone at a table outside the Café de la Paix. Obviously he was deep in thought. His *bière* stood flat and neglected on the table before him. The cigarette between his fingers had long since gone out. The smartest frock, the daintiest ankles and the prettiest face in the passing throng failed to attract his attention. With knitted brows he sat gazing abstractedly into space.

The truth was that Tim had reached a crisis in his career. The previous day he was to be found in his rooms in Jermyn Street as usual. He had had no cares or worries other than those inseparable from chronic penury, and nothing had been farther from his mind than a trip to Paris. Then, at six o'clock, the following telegram had arrived:

"Come at once. Room booked at Hôtel Lutetia. Most urgent.—Aunt Marion."

To fall in with the wishes of Aunt Marion was one of Tim's invariable rules. This was due not so much to love and respect as to the instinct of self-preservation. Aunt Marion, being the widow of a shipping magnate, was the one member of the Torrance family who possessed an ample supply of money. Her allowance formed the greater part of Tim's inadequate income. He had every reason to believe that her will would in due course prove to be a very satisfactory document.

But as he sat there in the Café de la Paix, Tim was coming to the conclusion that the limit had been reached.

He had caught the night boat and had duly arrived at the Hôtel Lutetia in the early hours of the morning. At ten o'clock he had been wakened with the news that Aunt Marion was anxiously awaiting him. Within half an hour he was listening to the glad tidings.

Matrimony was the urgent business on which Aunt Marion had summoned him to Paris. She believed that the time had come for Tim to settle down, and in Gertrude Dutton she had found what she considered to be an ideal wife.

She was enormously wealthy; she was "old enough to be sensible"; she was not what some people would call pretty, but she had "a very sweet disposition"; she possessed several academic degrees and a mind far above such frivolities as dancing and night clubs; in fact, Gertrude was exactly the sort of girl of whom Aunt Marion would wholeheartedly approve. Tim and his prospective bride were to meet for the first time that evening at dinner.

Hence the earnest cogitation at the Café de la Paix.

Gertrude was the limit. With the solitary exception that she was enormously wealthy, she completely failed to conform with his ideals of perfect womanhood. He might be poor, but he still had a conscience.

Under no circumstances would he marry Gertrude.

And failure to marry her would undoubtedly result in Aunt Marion stopping his allowance and cutting him out of her will.

The question was: What was to be done? Should he tell Aunt Marion boldly that under no circumstances would he marry a frump like Gertrude Dutton? Should he go to the dinner party? Should he——

"M'sieur!"

The waiter's voice roused Tim from his bitter reverie.

"Hallo?"

The waiter energetically flicked some imaginary dust from Tim's table.

"I have been asked to inform m'sieur that in ze right-hand pocket m'sieur will find ze note of ze great importance. It has been in ze pocket of m'sieur for half ze hour, but m'sieur observe it not. I have to request that m'sieur will give ze note ze grandest consideration. And m'sieur will understand that ze secrecy is very necessary."

The waiter hurried away, leaving Tim staring after him.

Having lit a fresh cigarette, Tim took the mysterious note from his pocket and read it. The missive was written in a scrawling, obviously disguised hand:

"If adventure the well paid has attraction for you call at the Room 76 at the Hôtel Lutetia at the five hours to-day. Destroy this at once."

Tim blinked at the note as he read it again and again. A thousand unanswerable questions presented themselves. Who had written the note? Why was secrecy so essential? Was he awake or dreaming? What was this mysterious adventure? What was the meaning of the expression "well paid"? Why had he been selected by the writer? Who——

It might be a practical joke. It might be a swindle. There might be robbery, murder even, at the back of that note.

But it might be that the offer was genuine. It might be that here was a chance of bidding defiance to Aunt Marion and Gertrude Dutton. It might be that fortune was about to bestow upon him a long overdue smile.

As he tore the note into shreds Tim decided that it was useless to worry over what might and might not be. The only thing to be done was to hope for the best and call at Room 76 at five o'clock.

II

It was not until he reached the Lutetia that Tim realized that Room 76 was immediately opposite his own. In order to keep his mysterious appointment he had merely to step across the corridor.

Promptly at five o'clock Tim opened the door of his own room and glanced innocently up and down the corridor. Satisfied that he was not being observed, he stepped across to the room opposite, knocked and walked in, closing the door after him.

The room was empty.

Frowning, Tim gazed round about him. He had assumed that the other party would at any rate be there to receive him.

The minutes passed and with every one of them Tim became more and more certain that he was the victim of a sinister plot. He told himself that he was a first-class fool to have paid any attention to an anonymous note. The obvious thing to do was to return to his own room while there was yet time.

Going over to the door, he gently turned the handle and gave it a cautious pull. The door remained fast. A violent tug met with no better result. The door was locked and Tim was trapped.

It was half-past five when at last a key turned in the lock and the door opened.

An elderly man came into the room. He was tall and cadaverous,

with hawk-like features and a bushy, square cut beard. He was quite obviously a foreigner of distinction.

Having closed the door, the stranger turned and bowed.

"It is the honour to greet the Honourable Torrance!" he said.

"Good afternoon," answered Tim.

"I regret the impossibility to be here to receive the Honourable Torrance. Yes. But you will understand the secrecy, yes, the need to elude the spies. The spies are everywhere. I slip the note in the pocket of the Honourable Torrance. I leave the door open. I know that the Honourable Torrance is the Englishman, the man of sport, of adventure. Yes. I know that he will keep the appointment. The spies they follow me. They see me return to the Hôtel Lutetia at the five hours and a half. They see me unlock the door of the room. They see me enter alone. They have not the idea that within the room is the Honourable Torrance waiting. No. Presently I leave, alone. The spies they follow me. Yes. They know not of the Honourable Torrance. When I am gone and the spies after me, you slip across to your own room. The spies know nothing. No. They are outwitted. Yes."

Tim nodded and remained silent. He was thinking that at any rate the note's promise of adventure looked like being fulfilled. If the "well paid" proved to be equally justified he would have no cause for complaint.

"Allow me," continued the stranger, "to introduce myself. Yes. I am the Count Alexis Bubarski, Chancellor to His late Majesty King Nicolas the Ninth of Bulmania, on whose soul be peace!"

Tim bowed. He was no student of European politics, but he knew that, a couple of years ago, there had been a revolution in Bulmania with the result that a republic had been proclaimed and King Nicolas exiled. He also knew that the King had died in Switzerland a few weeks ago.

"And now," went on Count Bubarski, "permit me the honour to explain. Yes. I tell you why I slip the note in the pocket. You listen. Yes."

Striding up and down the room and pulling continuously at his beard, the Count told his story.

It was generally believed that with King Nicolas the Royal House of Bulmania had come to an end. This, however, was a mistake. The Princess Natalie, the late King's daughter, was alive and, according to the royalists, the rightful ruler of Bulmania. But the Princess had disappeared more than fifteen years ago, during a former revolution, when she had been a child of five. Only Count Bubarski knew where the Princess was to be found and the proof of her identity.

Now, maintained the Count, was the time for Her Royal Highness to step forward and make a bid for the throne. Everything was in her favour. Her beauty and her romantic story would win all hearts. Bulmania was groaning under the corrupt rule of the republican government. It needed only the appearance of the Princess to kindle that blaze of enthusiasm which would make the glorious revolution an assured success.

But the republican government was as cunning and as unscrupulous as it was corrupt. It was aware of the fact that Count Bubarski alone knew the secret of the Princess's hiding-place. It knew that, as a patriotic Bulmanian, he was determined to do everything in his power to urge forward the revolution which would place the Princess Natalie on the throne. It knew that he was planning to bring her forward. Therefore, its spies were shadowing the Count night and day. It was within their power to strike him down at any moment. But the republicans were after bigger game. They wanted to discover the Princess so that they could strike her

down as well as the Count, and thus smash once and for all the royalist aspirations.

"So it is to you, the Honourable Torrance, that I come for help," exclaimed the Count. "I give you the secret of the hiding-place of the Princess Natalie. You find her. Yes. You take her and the proofs of the identity to the mountains of Bulmania. We outwit the spies. The glorious revolution is proclaimed. Yes. Her Majesty Queen Natalie is crowned in the cathedral at Zagratz! Bulmania is free once more!"

For some moments Tim remained silent. It was somewhat startling to be suddenly transported from the world of Aunt Marion and Gertrude Dutton into the realms of Bulmanian revolutions.

"But why have you chosen me for the job?" he demanded at length. "I mean to say, you don't know me from Adam!"

The Count smilingly shrugged his shoulders.

"Because you are the Englishman," he explained. "Because you are the man of sport and of adventure. Because you occupy the room opposite here in the Hôtel Lutetia. Because you are the complete stranger. Yes. Because, as you say, I know you not from the Adam. No. Because the spies of the republic will have not the reason for suspecting you."

Tim nodded. The explanation was credible enough. By allowing chance to select his helper the Count would completely baffle his enemies.

"The Honourable Torrance," said the Count earnestly, "if you undertake the task, yes, I offer you all expenses and the reward of ten thousand of your English pounds."

Tim blinked. No man had fewer objections to receiving ten thousand pounds. Such a sum represented, at any rate, a period of independence. It would put off for at least a year the necessity of dying of starvation as a result of Aunt Marion's discovery of the ideal bride for him. And in return he had merely to take a Princess from somewhere to somewhere else. There would be a few spies to dodge, but thanks to the Count's well laid scheme there was little trouble to be anticipated in that direction. In any case, the task had a sporting aspect which was decidedly attractive. And Tim was interested in Natalie, the Princess who had been hidden for fifteen years. Natalie struck him as being a singularly attractive name. In short, there was every reason for accepting the offer.

"Right you are!" said Tim. "All expenses and ten thousand of the best when I deliver the goods! I'm ready to start as soon as you like!"

The Count bowed.

"The Honourable Torrance is the true friend of Bulmania. Yes."

For some moments the Count plucked at his beard and gazed at Tim in a meditative way.

"I am to tell you," he said quietly, "a secret which is known to only two people in the whole world. Yes. It is a secret which has been kept for more than fifteen years. Yes. Even the Princess Natalie herself knows not of her identity. No. It will be well for you to remember these things."

"You mean——"

The Count shrugged his shoulders.

"You are the man of honour," he answered. "There is no need to mention things. No. It is the formality. Yes. I have not the doubt that you will win, that I shall have the honour to give you the promised reward. But for the treachery, for the thoughtless word divulging the secret, there would be another reward. Yes. A reward that would be swift—and unpleasant."

Tim remained silent. He was wondering what it felt like to have a knife plunged between the shoulders.

"You are the man of honour," continued the Count. "The true friend of Bulmania. Yes. There is not the need to mention these

things. No. Therefore I tell you the great secret."

For the past fifteen years the Princess Natalie had been living, unconscious of her true identity, as one of the daughters of the Countess Strelowitz. The widowed Countess and her family occupied a villa in a remote spot near Cannes. In order that there should be no doubt a small "N" surmounted by a crown had been tattooed upon the right shoulder of the Princess. The Countess had in her possession a casket containing documentary proof of the Princess's identity and also the famous Diamond of Saint Boris from the crown jewels, upon which gem, according to the ancient legends, the fortunes of Bulmania depended.

Tim's task was to conduct the Princess with the casket from Cannes to Kriletz, a village in the mountains to the north of Zagratz, the capital of Bulmania.

"I will give you the month," said the Count. "To-morrow I go to London. The spies of the republican dogs will follow me. Yes. In one month from to-day I will be at Kriletz. If I find you there with the Princess and the casket, I will hand you the ten thousand pounds in the notes of your Bank of England. Yes. And now I give you the letter of explanation for the Countess Strelowitz and the forty thousand francs for the expenses. Yes. There is everything you understand? Yes? No? There is not the doubt?"

"Everything's O.K.," answered Tim with smiling confidence. "In one month from now you'll find me at Kriletz with the Princess Natalie and the casket."

"It is well. Yes."

III

THE following morning Tim caught the express for Cannes.

He was feeling very well pleased with himself and with life in general. Everything was progressing splendidly. He had duly dined with Aunt Marion the previous evening and had been duly introduced to the ideal bride. Gertrude Dutton had fulfilled all his worst fears, and he would most certainly have preferred starvation to matrimony with Gertrude. However, as the intervention of Count Bubarski had deferred the starvation for a time, and as he was leaving for Cannes and adventure in the morning, he had come to the conclusion that there was no harm in making himself affable. He had accordingly chatted brightly about cats' homes and missionary endeavour. He had assisted intelligently in the task of winding Aunt Marion's wool. He had even gone so far as to express a guarded admiration of Miss Dutton and the hope that they would meet again. In fact, he had proved such a dutiful nephew that Aunt Marion had insisted upon giving him a cheque for a hundred pounds, "just as a little present."

Having cashed the cheque and taken his ticket for Cannes, Tim dismissed Aunt Marion and Gertrude Dutton from his mind. The old lady would doubtless be worried at his disappearance, but that could not be helped. It was obviously impossible to explain to her about Count Bubarski and the Princess Natalie. There would be time enough for that when Tim returned with ten thousand pounds in his pocket after having placed the young Princess upon the Bulmanian throne. In the meantime he had far more important matters with which to occupy his mind.

So far as he could see, this affair was going to prove a triumphant success. In his pockets he had nearly fifty thousand francs. Sewn to the inside of his vest—for safety—was the explanatory letter from Count Bubarski to the Countess Strelowitz. The only possible chance of failure lay in the machinations of the spies in the service of the republican government.

It was a hundred to one that the Count's elaborate scheme which had resulted in Tim undertaking the task had completely outwitted the spies. They had no reason to believe that Tim was even aware of the fact that the royalist leader had occupied the room opposite his at the Lutetia. They had doubtless all gone off to London after the Count. And yet it was impossible to be quite sure. The utmost caution was necessary. The Count's parting advice had been: "Believe that every stranger is a spy of the republican dogs, yes." And Tim intended to follow it. He was going to trust nobody. At present, however, there was none to charming, and most certainly pretty. to himself.

As the train rattled and roared on its journey southwards, Tim gazed abstractedly at the newspaper and browsed on the subject of the Princess Natalie. All he knew about her was that she was twenty years old and had the letter "N" and a crown tattooed on her shoulder. But he had a theory that providence always arranged matters so that everybody received a suitable name. For instance, was it possible for a girl with a name like Gertrude Dutton to be anything other than Aunt Marion's ideal wife? Tim could detect a distressingly stodgy and highbrow ring about it. Natalie, on the other hand, struck him as being distinctly promising. A Natalie ought to be dainty and petite and charming, and most certainly pretty. In fact, she ought to be an ideal companion for a journey from Cannes to Kriletz or anywhere else. If only the republicans and their emissaries had been safely dodged, Tim could see himself thoroughly enjoying this adventure.

But, of course, he would not forget that Natalie was a royal Princess destined in a few weeks to be a Queen. He had no pretensions to being a saint, but—well, he was not an out-and-out blackguard. The Princess would be quite safe in his care.

But there was no harm in hoping that she would prove to be as pretty as her name.

His thoughts wandered to the haphazard way in which things happened. The chance that Aunt Marion had met Gertrude Dutton in Paris and had come to the conclusion that it was time that Tim should settle down had brought him to the Hôtel Lutetia. The mere chance that he happened to occupy the opposite room had led to Count Bubarski selecting him for this mission. It just proved that men are the slaves of circumstance. Twenty-four hours ago Bulmania had been of no more interest to him than Jugo-Slavia or China. And now he was busy making Bulmanian history, altering the map of Europe and doing all sorts of portentous things. It was all rather amazing, especially as nothing out of the ordinary had ever happened to him before.

And it was certainly very interesting—especially the prospective ten thousand pounds. He had never been so hard up as he had been during the past six months, and, in his opinion, nothing was more boring than chronic penury. That was why he was so determined to carry this affair through to a successful conclusion. He would never forgive himself if he missed this ten thousand pounds. He was going to concentrate wholly upon the task before him. He was not going to incur the slightest risk. He was going to do as Count Bubarski had advised and trust nobody. He——

"Les billets! S'il vous plait! Les billets!"

The voice of the ticket inspector roused Tim from his reverie.

It also drew his attention to the fact that since the train had started a fellow traveller had come down the corridor and taken a seat in his compartment.

The new-comer was a girl, and she was certainly pretty in a demure, appealing sort of way. Her eyes were especially attractive. They

were large and blue and innocently wistful.

"*Le billet, m'sieur!*" exclaimed the ticket inspector impatiently.

Tim dragged his eyes off the girl and duly produced his ticket.

The girl, meanwhile, was hunting with growing consternation through the contents of her handbag.

"I—I'm afraid I've lost it!" she gasped at length.

"If mam'selle has not ze ticket, mam'selle must pay," said the ticket inspector sternly. "It is ze regulation!"

Another anxious hunt through the handbag.

"But—but I haven't enough money!"

Those big blue eyes were bright with tears.

"Mam'selle——" began the ticket inspector with a sternness worthy of a judge.

"Look here!" intervened Tim. "I'll pay!"

The girl gazed at him with troubled gratitude and blushed.

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed agitatedly. "I couldn't dream of——"

"That's quite all right," Tim assured her as he took a handful of notes from his pocket. "I mean, I'm English, like yourself, and—well, I insist!"

"It's awfully good of you!" murmured the girl. "Of course, I'll repay you as soon as ever I possibly can!"

The ticket inspector having made out his receipt and departed, Tim applied himself to the task of assuring his fair companion that there was no need for her to worry and that he was only too glad to have been able to extricate her from her unfortunate predicament. At first she was pitifully distraught, but gradually she grew calmer.

It appeared that she was a Miss Jennings and that she was travelling to Cannes in order to take up a post as governess.

Naturally Tim invited her to join him at lunch. Naturally she refused. And naturally he insisted on her accompanying him to the dining-car.

When at length they returned to their compartment Tim was feeling at peace with the whole world. He smiled complacently at the thought of the neat way in which the Bulmanian republicans and their emissaries had been spoofed. This, he mused, was the ideal life—adventure—romance——

"At any rate," said Miss Jennings shyly, "I can offer you something in return for all your kindness! A cigarette!"

She produced from her handbag a rather battered cigarette case and held it out to him.

"Thanks very much," said Tim.

Miss Jennings having also selected a cigarette, he produced a box of matches. Their cigarettes alight, they sat silent, puffing contentedly. Miss Jennings seemed to have recovered completely from her agitation following the loss of her ticket. She did not seem so shy. A smile was playing around the corners of her mouth.

Suddenly Tim realized that he was feeling extraordinarily sleepy. Never had he felt so sleepy in all his life. An irresistible force seemed to be dragging at his eyelids. His head lolled absurdly. His brain felt torpid.

He fought against it. What would Miss Jennings think of him? But it was useless. It was impossible to keep his eyes open. He must sleep—just for a few moments—he—must—sleep——

The next thing of which Tim was conscious was the fact that his head was aching and buzzing. His neck, too, was ricked. The jolting of the train was torturing his brain.

Pressing his hands to his head, he opened his eyes and sat up.

Miss Jennings had disappeared, and he was alone in the compartment.

For some time he sat staring blankly out of the window, thinking that he had never felt more wretched and wondering what was

the cause of it all. Then he chanced to put his hand into his pocket.

It was empty. All his pockets were empty.

A look of blank amazement came into his eyes. Then gradually it changed into one of consternation.

He had been robbed of the forty thousand francs which Count Bubarski had given him for his expenses, of the hundred pounds Aunt Marion had given him, of everything he possessed. Even his ticket was missing.

The cigarette had been drugged! Demure little Miss Jennings was a crook—or a spy in the service of the Bulmanian government!

He clutched at his chest. Acting on Count Bubarski's advice, he had sewn the letter of introduction to the Countess Strelowitz inside his vest.

Thank Heaven the letter was still there! The one solitary possession left to him!

IV

The train continued to rattle and roar on its way southwards.

For some time Tim sat with his hands thrust deep in his empty pockets, staring gloomily out of the window. He remembered his determination to trust nobody, cursed himself for the biggest fool alive, and wondered by what miracle of luck and ingenuity he was going to convey the Princess Natalie from Cannes to Kriletz without a penny in his pocket. The future, so radiant but an hour ago, now looked just about as dismal as his head was feeling. The only course left to him was to tramp back to Paris and marry Gertrude Dutton. Such a fool as he deserved no better fate.

Then gradually this mood of blank despair passed. A grim, battling look came into his eyes. He realized that there was still room for hope. He had the explanatory letter from the Count Bubarski to the Countess Strelowitz. Having obtained the Princess and the casket, he would beg, borrow, or steal, somehow or other he would find the means of reaching Kriletz. He would win through in spite of his disastrous start! He must!

And most certainly he would trust nobody—especially any demure-looking girl who had lost her railway ticket!

The first point to be decided was whether "Miss Jennings" was a spy in the pay of Bulmanian republicans or merely an ordinary thief. The fact that the letter to the Countess Strelowitz was his one remaining possession pointed to the latter. But Tim had learnt his lesson. He was not going to trust a soul. It might be that he still had the letter, for the simple reason that "Miss Jennings" had failed to find it. Perhaps she had been disturbed, perhaps some streak of modesty in her character had prevented her from searching the interior of his vest.

In any case, decided Tim, he was going to act on the assumption that she was a spy in the pay of the Princess's enemies. He was taking no more risks. Miss Jennings and her fellow emissaries were doubtless intent upon tracking him to the villa of the Countess Strelowitz and so discovering the Princess. On reaching Cannes they would shadow him relentlessly.

The first necessity was to evade the spies. Obviously, it would not be an easy task. He could be sure of nothing. It might be that he was worrying himself unnecessarily and that all the spies were busy shadowing Count Bubarski in London. It might be that a horde of them was on the train. He had no means of finding the truth. He could only assume the worst and hope for the best.

He thought of moving down to another part of the train. But of course he would be observed the moment he set foot in the corridor. He wondered whether it would be possible to make a sudden dash on reaching Cannes—perhaps if he got

out on the wrong side of the train—— But these stratagems seemed more likely to involve him in trouble with the railway officials than to enable him to dodge the spies.

Perhaps it was because his head was still aching and buzzing as a result of the drugged cigarette. Perhaps it was because of the shock of discovering that he had been robbed of all the wealth that had been thrust upon him. In any case, his brain seemed numb. He felt helpless and bewildered. He could only sit there and tell himself that he was going to win through, that somehow or other he must earn that ten thousand pounds.

It was not until the train was nearing Cannes that the first practical idea came to him.

He believed that there were spies on the train determined at all costs to smash the schemes of Count Bubarski and to discover the hiding-place of the Princess Natalie. The spies knew of his mission in spite of the precautions taken by Count Bubarski. On his arrival at Cannes they would inevitably shadow him. They would follow him to the villa of the Countess Strelowitz. They would learn that the "daughter" with the "N" on her shoulder was in reality the Princess. The Princess would be murdered, and probably Tim also.

Obviously, decided Tim, the thing to do was to give them the slip before Cannes was reached. And there was only one way in which that could be done.

Rising to his feet, Tim made sure that he was not being watched from the corridor. He then returned to the door of the carriage.

The train was running, comparatively slowly, along an embankment the sides of which sloped gently down to a field. He could not wish for a better opportunity.

He opened the carriage door, realized that the train was travelling at a greater speed than he had thought, wondered if a broken neck was a painful death, and jumped.

Like a ball he rolled down the embankment amidst a small avalanche of stones and earth. So great was his momentum that he rolled a dozen yards into the field before coming to rest in a cart-rut.

For some moments he lay wondering how many bones he had broken. Then, realizing that he was suffering from nothing more serious than bruises, he scrambled to his feet and gazed anxiously around him.

The train had disappeared from view round a bend and nobody apparently had followed his example. His leap from the train had not been observed. Having brushed the dirt from his clothes, he set off across the field towards the lane.

Five hours later Tim reached the Villa Azure, the residence of the Countess Strelowitz and her daughters. He was feeling footsore and thirsty. But on the whole he was feeling rather pleased with himself. He could imagine the bewilderment of "Miss Jennings" and her fellow spies on finding that he had disappeared.

Tim's own plans were perfectly simple. He was going to hand the explanatory letter from Count Bubarski to the Countess Strelowitz. He was going to tell her about the way in which he had been robbed of every penny. He was going to borrow sufficient to enable him to take the Princess and the casket to Kriletz, and in return he was going to give her a post-dated cheque which would be met out of the ten thousand pounds which he was to receive from Count Bubarski.

Having placed the all important letter in his pocket and smartened his appearance as much as possible, Tim approached the Villa Azure. One thing at any rate was certain: this was the Villa Azure which Count Bubarski had described to him. Approached by a narrow lane, it stood high up in the hills, about a couple of miles from the town and overlooking the bay. All around were dense woods, and the grounds were surrounded with a tall, im-

penetrable hedge which ensured the strictest privacy for the occupants of the villa.

Tim paused for a moment to glance around upon the scene and to make sure that he was not being followed or watched, and passing through the entrance gate, made his way down the hedge-lined path towards the front door.

The door was opened by an old woman.

"Hein?" she muttered, surveying Tim with scowling suspicion.

"Good evening," said Tim with smiling affability. "I wish to see the Countess Strelowitz on the most important and urgent business. I have a letter for her from the Count Bubarski."

The mention of the Count's name and the sight of the letter dispelled the woman's suspicions.

"Come, m'sieur," said the woman.

A few moments later Tim found himself in what was apparently the drawing-room of the villa.

"If m'sieur will wait I will inform the Countess," said the woman.

Tim had no objection to being left alone in the drawing-room, and there was no need for the Countess to hurry on his account. The room was provided with French windows, and these windows looked out upon a lawn. On that lawn four girls were playing tennis. And Tim had suddenly realized that tennis was quite a fascinating game to watch.

The youngest girl was about fifteen, the eldest twenty-five perhaps. The other two might have been nineteen, twenty or twenty-one; it was difficult to decide who was the elder. But one of those two was appreciably nearer to perfection than any of the others. There was a hint of red in her gleaming curls. Her nose was tiptilted in a teasing sort of way. Her mouth was of that tantalizing, pouting kind which seems to have been made solely for the purpose of kissing. In short, Tim was sure that never before had he seen and never again would he see anything so delightful. And he felt equally sure that she was the Princess.

The ball chanced to glance off a racquet and come bouncing towards the window. Hitting against it, the ball came to rest on the path outside. *The* girl came running to retrieve it. She stooped and picked it up, her hair tumbling about her ears. Then, as she was on the point of turning away, she caught sight of Tim standing by the window.

Evidently it was unusual for a young man to visit the Villa Azure, for she stood gazing at him in blank astonishment. Tim smiled—he was rather famous for his engaging smile. The girl blushed divinely. Tim's beam broadened.

"*Bon jour, m'sieur.*"

The chill voice of the Countess Strelowitz recalled Tim to reality.

She was tall, stately and majestically aristocratic. As she stood in the doorway quizzing Tim through a pair of lorgnettes, she looked at least a Grand Duchess.

Tim produced his courtliest bow.

"I understand that m'sieur has the letter for me?"

Tim handed her Count Bubarski's letter.

He chuckled inwardly at the perfect prospect before him. In a few minutes he would be formally introduced to the wonder Princess. In a few hours he would be starting off for Kriletz in her company. His brain reeled at the thought. It seemed too wonderful to be true. It was as if he had suddenly received an invitation to spend four weeks in heaven.

The Countess surveyed the letter through her lorgnettes and then surveyed Tim. The latter bowed and supposed that the Countess's apparent lack of enthusiasm was due to her aristocratic upbringing. Then the Countess handed him back the letter.

"I think m'sieur has made a mistake," she said in a voice which sent a cold shudder down his spine.

The "letter" was merely a blank sheet of paper.

For some moments Tim gaped at it, wide-eyed and open-mouthed. He felt very much as if he was taking a leading part in an avalanche or an earthquake.

Then he realized what had happened. "Miss Jennings" was something more than a thief, after all. She was a spy in the service of the republicans. She had discovered Count Bubarski's letter and had read it. From it she had learnt something of his plans, but she had not learnt where the Princess was hidden. The Count had carefully omitted to mention the Countess Strelowitz by name or the Villa Azure. These and other important details were too precious to be put in writing. "Miss Jennings" had guessed the position. She had put the blank sheet of paper in the envelope, resealed it and returned it to its hiding-place, knowing that the first thing Tim would do on reaching Cannes would be to deliver the letter in accordance with his verbal instructions.

It was only Tim's tardy determination to trust nobody and the fact that he had jumped from the train that had prevented the spies from shadowing him and so discovering that Count Bubarski's letter was intended for the Countess Strelowitz, who lived in seclusion with her four daughters in the remote Villa Azure.

"M'sieur has made the mistake," repeated the Countess coldly.

There was only one thing to be done, and Tim did it. He told the truth, recounting everything that had happened since the moment when he read the note which had been slipped into his pocket in the Café de la Paix.

The Countess continued to gaze at him with cold suspicion through her lorgnettes.

"M'sieur has made the mistake," she repeated icily.

"But," protested Tim, "it's the truth! Really——"

He might as well have attempted to argue with a statue. The Countess, evidently, had also made the resolution not to trust anybody.

"It is all the mistake," she said. "I have not the honour to be acquainted with Count Bubarski. I know nothing of the missing Princess Natalie whom you mention. None of my daughters has the letter "N" surmounted by a crown tattooed upon her shoulder. I have not the casket containing the Diamond of Saint Boris and the documentary evidence of the identity of the missing Princess. M'sieur, I repeat, has made the mistake."

Tim stared helplessly at her.

"But——" he began.

"I must ask m'sieur to have the goodness to leave my house," interrupted the Countess.

Tim hesitated for a moment, realized the futility of attempting to argue, and went.

V

SEATED by the roadside, Tim stared with unseeing eyes at one of the most beautiful scenes in Europe.

It was useless to cavil at the Countess. She was only showing him how to carry through his own determination to trust nobody.

The question of what was to be done resolved itself into one of what could be done.

He could go down into Cannes and beg or borrow sufficient funds to take him back to Paris and Aunt Marion, to say nothing of Gertrude Dutton. Or he could stay where he was and starve. There seemed to be no other alternative.

Circumstance, however, had succeeded in rousing the Honourable Timothy Torrance. Hitherto he had drifted through life as pleasantly as was possible for one who had expensive tastes and an inadequate income.

But between them, Aunt Marion, Gertrude Dutton, Count Bubarski, Miss Jennings, the Countess Strelowitz and Princess Natalie—especially Princess Natalie—had

stung him out of his normal placidity. He had come to the conclusion that he objected to being made the sport of circumstance. After the experiences of the past few hours many would doubtless have thrown up the sponge. But Tim had discovered that he was made of sterner stuff. Having found the most wonderful girl in the world, he was more anxious than ever to fulfil the conditions necessary to earn that ten thousand pounds.

Obviously, the first necessity was money. And the only place where he could obtain money was Cannes. He rose to his feet, gazed for some moments at the Villa Azure in the hope of seeing the Princess, and then set off in the direction of the town. He was sure that he would succeed in finding some acquaintance who would come to his aid. He had vague recollections of quite a number of people telling him that they were going to Cannes.

An hour later he was crossing the Jardins des Anglais on his way towards the Hôtel Laurens, which was the likeliest place to find an acquaintance. Incidentally, he was coming to the conclusion that it was useless to argue with the Countess Strelowitz any more, and that he would have to deal directly with the Princess herself. He——

Suddenly he felt a light touch on his arm.

"Mr. Torrance," said an appealing voice.

Turning sharply, he found himself face to face with Miss Jennings.

In the half-light she was looking even more demure and innocent than ever. There was a pitiful, troubled look in her eyes.

"Good evening," he remarked.

"Mr. Torrance," she murmured in that soft, appealing voice which, in ordinary circumstances, would have roused all his instinctive chivalry, "I want to speak to you—I want to explain."

Tim scratched his chin. Her voice and manner would have melted a heart of flint. But Tim, having been caught once, was not to be caught again.

"Wants some explaining, doesn't it?" he said.

"Please!" she pleaded. "I want to make amends—if I can! I—I've suffered agonies—ever since——"

Her voice broke off in a pathetic little sniff and the tears gleamed in her eyes.

Tim glanced round. Near by was a seat which seemed suitable. It had a lamp beside it which would enable him to keep a strict watch on Miss Jennings. It also had a wall behind it which would prevent anything in the nature of an attack from behind.

"Right you are," he said. "Let's sit down over here and then you can tell me all about it."

They sat down on the seat. So remorseful was Miss Jennings that apparently she wanted to nestle as close to Tim as possible. By sitting sideways, however, and crossing his legs Tim succeeded in keeping her at a distance. It was the first time in his life that he had deliberately kept a pretty girl at a distance, and he felt rather proud of his iron determination.

Never had he heard a more pathetic tale than that which Miss Jennings told.

Her earliest recollections were of being a waif of the streets. When scarce more than a child she had been found by a crook and trained by him to act as a decoy for his victims. She had never known what it was to be anything but a criminal. In Paris the gang with which she had been working had been approached by some Bulmanians. They wanted help in the task of robbing an Englishman who would be leaving Paris for an unknown destination. As Tim was aware, Miss Jennings had duly undertaken the job.

Tim listened, wondering to what all this was leading.

"I don't know why," went on Miss Jennings, "but—I seem to

have changed. All my life I've been an outcast—a criminal—and I haven't cared. But somehow—you're different from all the others. It's as if my eyes had been opened. When I had carried out my orders, when I had robbed you, I felt ashamed for the first time in my life. That was why I did not give them all the money I had taken from you. I kept some—all I dared—I kept it in the hope of being able to give it back to you. Here it is."

She thrust a great bundle of notes into his hands.

Tim stared first at the notes and then at the girl. Her head was bowed; her hands were pressed to her cheeks; her body was shaken with sobs. Never had he seen such a touching picture of tearful contrition.

"I want to be good!" she murmured in a choking voice. "I've never had a chance. There's never been anybody to help me. They'd kill me if they knew what I'd done. But I don't care! If only you forgive me! I—I want to be good—because of you!"

Her voice was choked with a sob.

Slowly Tim thrust the notes into his pocket. He was thinking that this story might be true. Perhaps the girl had fallen in love with him and was really anxious to reform. Perhaps it was within his power to save her and give her a fresh start in life.

He was sure that, if he had not seen the Princess Natalie, he would have believed the story implicitly. It was just the sort of story he always believed. He would have patted her on the shoulder and promised to do his utmost to help her. He might even have gone so far as to kiss her with a view to comforting her in her distress.

But he had seen the Princess and he clung fast to his decision to be relentless and thorough. He was trusting nobody.

"I see!" he said sympathetically, as he rose to his feet.

"You will help me?" murmured the girl, seizing his hand in her eagerness.

Tim, deep in thought, moved towards some bushes.

"It's the truth you've told me?" he asked.

"It is! It is!" she said in a low, passionate voice, clasping his hand in hers. "I want to be good! I want to cut out the old life! It's the truth! I swear it! That was why I kept back the money, so that I could give it back to you! That was why I slipped away from them as soon as I could and have been walking about for hours, looking for you!"

Tim nodded. He was not sure whether the return of the money was absolute proof of the truth of her story or a very cute trick for gaining his confidence.

"You want me to help you?" he asked. "To give you a fresh start?"

"Oh, if you would!" she exclaimed, her eyes gleaming. "If you would give me a chance—the first chance I've ever had! I—I——"

She vainly sought the words which would express her gratitude.

Tim, telling himself that he was a hardened brute, steeled his heart. A quick glance round to make sure that nobody was about, and he gripped Miss Jennings by the back of the neck. The next instant he had flung her sprawling into the bushes.

At the sound of her gulp of amazement and the sight of whirling petticoats and legs his conscience smote him. Suppose her story was true! Suppose——

But he had no time for supposing. It was for him to be ruthless.

He bolted. Sprinting as he had never sprinted before, he crossed the gardens, raced along the Promenade des Palmiers and disappeared down a side street.

At last, satisfied that he had made good his escape, he went to the Hôtel du Midi and booked a room.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, he awaited the supper he had ordered, and took a handful of notes from his

pocket and stared at them. Why had she given them back to him? At one moment they seemed absolute proof of the purity of the girl's motives. She was genuinely anxious to reform. She had risked her life in order to do what she could to make amends.

And in return he had flung her sprawling into the bushes!

The next moment the notes appeared to be equally conclusive proof of the unscrupulous ingenuity of his enemies. They had the letter from Count Bubarski, but they did not know the hiding-place of the Princess. Miss Jennings's sudden reformation was a trap.

The arrival of the finest supper he had ever seen induced a more philosophic mood. It was no use worrying about Miss Jennings. He could afford to run no risks. The great thing was that he had recovered some of his money and that on the morrow he was going to outwit the Countess Strelowski and see the Princess.

VI

FIVE o'clock the next morning found Tim whistling restfully in his bath and the staff of the Hôtel du Midi on the verge of a strike.

Not only had this eccentric Englishman insisted that it was necessary for him to be wakened at a quarter to five with a cup of tea, but he had ordered a British breakfast to be ready for him by half-past. Never before had such things been known in Cannes.

Tim, however, had no regard for the ideas of the hotel staff. His own idea was to get out of the town before his enemies were astir and to make sure of at least one decent meal that day.

He was convinced that it was destined to be one of the brightest days of his life. As he splashed and whistled with equal fervour he looked forward to the time when the Honourable Timothy Torrance, having already received his promised reward of ten thousand pounds from Count Bubarski, would be invested with the Order of Saint Somebody by Her Majesty Queen Natalie of Bulmania.

Incidentally, he had already decided to settle down in Zagratz. It was doubtless one of the dullest holes on earth, and Tim rated Bulmanians as little, if any, higher in the social scale than Dagoes and Chinks. But the Royal Palace was there, and it seemed to Tim that it was desirable that Queen Natalie should have somebody reliable close at hand.

Having consumed the ham and eggs, the toast and the marmalade which had nearly caused a revolt among the hotel staff, Tim lit a cigarette, paid his bill and set off.

It was a perfect morning. Chuckling at the thought of his sleeping enemies, Tim started off at a brisk pace. He did not, however, forget his resolution to be thorough. He chose a most circuitous route and occasionally paused to glance round over his shoulder and make sure that he was not being followed. Not once, however, were his suspicions aroused. The only people he saw were a few road cleaners.

It was about nine o'clock when at length Tim reached the Villa Azure. For some moments he surveyed the tall screen of dense hedges which hid the villa from view. Then he carefully selected the spot where he would be least likely to be disturbed. Taking the knife which he had bought at the Hôtel du Midi—or rather, had bribed the chambermaid to give him—he set to work to hack a way through.

It was the nearest approach to hard labour that he had met yet, and it was not long before his hands were blistered and his muscles aching. But he persevered, and after about an hour succeeded at last in squeezing through into the garden beyond.

He found himself immediately behind a small flower-covered summer-house. Peeping round, he saw the

flower beds, the wide sweep of the lawn with its tennis court, the shrubberies, the villa beyond. But there was no sign of the Princess Natalie, of the Countess Strelowitz or her daughters.

The only thing to be done, decided Tim, was to sit behind the summer-house and wait for the opportunity to attract the attention of the Princess. If he was still waiting when the night came he would have to take the desperate course of breaking into the villa.

"*Bon jour, m'sieur!*"

The shy voice above his head caused him to jump to his feet. For a moment he stared blankly around him; then a low, rippling laugh called his attention to the fact that a pair of bright eyes were gazing at him through a hole in the wall of the summer-house.

A moment later the owner of the eyes joined Tim behind the summer-house.

It was the Princess Natalie—or rather, it was the wonder girl.

For some moments they gazed at each other, she quizzically, he in frank admiration.

"It—it's you!" gasped Tim at length.

The girl clapped her hands.

"M'sieur is Eenglish? I like the Eenglish. Never have I met one before, but I have read of them, and always in the books they are very nice."

Her accent was as adorable, in Tim's opinion, as everything else concerning her.

"Oh, yes, I'm English," he answered. "My name's Timothy Torrance."

She laughed.

"Teemothy Torrance! It sounds —funny!"

"Most people call me Tim."

"Teem! It is the easier to remember than Teemothy Torr-Torrance!"

She did not, however, confirm his belief that her own name was Natalie.

"Why has m'sieur come here?" she asked.

"To see you."

"*Moi!*" she exclaimed, her eyes widening and a blush tinging her cheeks. Then she broke into a rippling laugh. "And I am in the disgrace because of m'sieur!"

"Because of me?"

She nodded.

"You listen and I tell you."

They sat down together with their backs against the wall of the summer-house.

"You understand that here it is like the prison? Nobody ever come. There is *maman*, my sisters, Katja, and myself. Never there is anybody else. And my sisters and I, we are not allowed to go out. It is the orders of *maman*."

Tim nodded sympathetically.

"Yesterday we play the tennis. I see you, m'sieur Teem, through the window. You are the stranger and for us it is the marvel to see the stranger. I ask *maman* who you are. She say that you are very bad man; she say if ever we see you again we are to tell her. This morning she say we are not to go out in the garden. My sisters they always obey *maman*. They are not naughty. I know *maman* say we are to stay indoors because she fear that you come again. *Moi*, I am tired of the prison; I am interested to see the bad man. Therefore I disobey *maman*. *Maman* very cross. She scold me. She lock me in the room. She tell me that I stay there all the day."

She tossed her head in a derisive way which indicated that the Countess Strelowitz was not without her share of worries.

"I climb out of the window and down by the drain-pipe. *Maman* think I am still locked in the room. My sisters sit indoors and sew like the good girls. I come here to the summer-house. Then I hear the noise. I look through the crack in the wall. I see m'sieur Teem cutting the hedge. *Et voilà!*"

Tim nodded. He was thinking that she was even more wonderful than he had believed, that she was

far too good for a crowd of rank outsiders like the Bulmanians.

"M'sieur Teem, why you come to see me?" she asked suddenly.

"It's rather a long story. But do you know who you are?"

"Who I am?" she echoed, gazing at him with a puzzled frown. "*Moi*—I am myself! I no understand!"

Realizing that it would be high treason to kiss her—and also that any such action on his part might precipitate another crisis in his affairs—Tim folded his arms across his chest and remembered his resolution to be thorough.

"Your name is Natalie, isn't it?" he asked.

"Natalie?" She shook her head. "No, I'm Marie."

Tim's jaw fell. It was the wrong girl!

"Then it's your sister who's called Natalie?" he asked in a constrained voice.

"I no understand," she said, her eyes widening. "There is nobody of the name of Natalie. There is——"

Tim's heart leapt within him. Of course, the Countess Strelowitz had obvious reasons for giving her royal charge another name.

"Then you've the letter 'N' tattooed on your shoulder? And a crown above it?"

"You know about it?" she exclaimed. "Always I have asked *maman* what is the meaning of the 'N' and the crown on my shoulder, but never will she tell me. Always she say that some day I will know. Look!"

She dragged down the sleeve of her blouse, baring her shoulder. On the smooth white skin a tiny "N" had been tattooed in blue and above it was a crown. Incidentally, it was the only really perfect shoulder that Tim had ever seen.

"It means," he answered, "that you're the Princess Natalie of Bulmania."

"A Princess!" she exclaimed incredulously. "*Moi!* It is not possible!"

"In a few weeks you'll be Queen of Bulmania."

In her astonishment she placed her hand on his arm.

"Queen! And wear a crown?"

Of course, her ideas of queens and princesses had been gleaned wholly from romances. To her, the words were synonymous with perfect happiness.

Tim nodded.

"Tell me! Tell me everything!" she exclaimed, her eyes sparkling. "I can't believe it! It is too wonderful to be true! *Moi*, who have been the prisoner here all the life, a princess, a queen!"

Her voice was quivering with excitement.

Tim told her the whole story. Or perhaps it would be more strictly in accordance with the truth to say that he gave her a version of the story. He omitted a good deal about Miss Jennings, and he did not mention the activities of the spies in the pay of the republicans.

For some moments after he had ended his story the Princess remained silent. She seemed to be trying to realize that she was awake and not dreaming. To her Tim Torrance appeared to be some wonderful knight-errant from the pages of a romance of the age of chivalry.

"And you have come to take me away?" she whispered in an awe-stricken voice. "You have come to make me a queen?"

"That's the idea," he answered, doing his best to look heroic.

For some time they were silent.

"M'sieur Teem," she said at length.

"Yes?"

There was a softness in her voice which caused him to glance at her, and he saw that she was blushing.

"When I am the Queen, you will be there—to help me? It—it will be the great adventure for me to be the Queen. Always I have been the prisoner here. I——"

Somehow, he found her hand in his. Slowly he raised it to his lips.

"Your Royal Highness, I shall

always be there—to help you. You will always be able to trust me."

With his lips still pressed to her hand he glanced up at her. Her cheeks were crimson; her bosom was heaving tumultuously; there was a look of mute wonder in her eyes.

"M'sieur Teem, why you do this for me—the stranger?"

"Because you're the most wonderful girl in the world," he answered. "Because I want to make you the happiest."

"It is the very wonderful!" she murmured. "It is like the dream!"

He released her fingers from his grasp and for a long time they were silent.

"When shall we start?" asked the Princess at last.

"The sooner the better. But first of all we must get the casket with the diamond and the evidence that you really are you."

She nodded.

"I will get that. *Maman* keep it in the safe. Often I have seen it. A small box—*comme ça!*"

She indicated a box about a foot square.

"That's it. Do you think we'll be able to get hold of it?"

The Princess considered for a moment.

"Listen!" she said. "I will go back to the room and I will tell *Maman* that I will be the good girl. And I will get the key of the safe and the—the casket—the box. And to-night when it is the dark, I will slip out of the house and you will be here, eh? We will make the start?"

Tim gazed at her with frank admiration.

"You really are wonderful! I thought there were going to be all sorts of difficulties! I thought that you'd be afraid, that you wouldn't trust me, that——"

The Princess laughed.

"All my life I have been the prisoner here, and always I have dreamed that some day the wonderful man will come to rescue me. Yesterday when I see you my heart gave the big leap. I knew that you had come at last—the wonderful hero for whom I wait all the years! I knew it the moment I see you! That is why I laugh when *maman* tell me you are the very bad man. *Moi*, I know better!"

It was Tim's turn to blush.

The Princess rose to her feet.

"I will go back now, before *maman* discovers that I am not in the room. I will climb back by the drain-pipe. Good-bye, M'sieur Teem! To-night I find you here?"

"You'll find me waiting for you! Good-bye—Natalie!"

A flashing smile and she hurried away round the summer-house.

VII

LEANING back against the summer-house, Tim took a cigarette from his pocket and lit it.

Natalie was perfect, divine! Her dazzling beauty! Her simple ingenuousness! The mere thought of her took his breath away!

And she trusted him! She believed that he was a super-hero of romance.

"Dear old Tim," as he was usually referred to by his friends—dear old Tim, whose chief accomplishment was an aptitude for borrowing fivers—a hero! He could imagine how all his pals would laugh at the idea!

He squared his shoulders and clenched his fists. No matter how unheroic his past had been, no matter how his pals might laugh, he was going to be a hero now. He was going to prove worthy of Natalie's trust! He——

"It's all right!" said a low voice from the interior of the hedge. "Don't be alarmed!"

A moment later Tim found himself gaping in blank astonishment at Miss Jennings.

Smiling, she sat down by his side.

"Don't make a noise," she said. "The Bulmanians are on the other side. Speak in a whisper. I've

heard every word that you said to your Princess friend."

Tim was too flabbergasted to speak. His brain was awhirl with questions. How had she found him? Why had she warned him that the Bulmanians were in the neighbourhood? Why had she told him that she had overheard his conversation with the Princess? What was her object? Why——

"You didn't believe me last night," went on Miss Jennings. "I don't blame you, because of course you could not afford to run any risks. I thought at the time that my returning the money would convince you that I was speaking the truth. But I realized afterwards that you could not be sure that it wasn't a trap. So I just set to work to prove to you that I really was speaking the truth."

Tim could only stare at her.

"Have you seen that?" asked Miss Jennings, as she thrust a cutting from the Continental edition of an English paper into his hands.

Blinking, Tim stared at the paper.

CROSS-CHANNEL MURDER
DASTARDLY POLITICAL CRIME
BULMANIAN STATESMAN'S TRAGIC END

Below was a description of the murder on Dover Pier of Count Bubarski, formerly Chancellor of Bulmania and the leader of the royalist party.

"The spies," said Miss Jennings, as she took the cutting back and carefully folded it, "have orders to complete the work by murdering both you and the Princess. There will then be no possibility of a royalist rising in Bulmania. You are alive now because the Count in his letter to the Countess Strelowitz omitted any reference to the Villa Azure. You were allowed to live a few more hours so that you might reveal the hiding-place of the Princess. At the present moment there are six Bulmanians within a dozen yards of this spot. They are wondering where you can have got to. A call from me and your life would not be worth a moment's purchase. And to-night when the Princess comes here expecting to find you they would murder her."

Tim's only comment was a shudder. His brain seemed stunned.

"Go over to the hedge," said Miss Jennings. "Look through and you'll see them."

He obeyed. Peering through the hedge he saw six men standing about a dozen yards away under a tree. They were discussing some subject animatedly amongst themselves. Tim was not expert enough to be able to say with certainty that they were Bulmanians, but, at any rate, they were foreigners and as choice a collection of blackguards as he had ever seen.

Without a word Tim returned to the back of the summer-house.

"They followed you to the Hôtel du Midi last night," said Miss Jennings. "They followed you this morning. Of course, you did your best, but you were helpless against expert spies. It was I who saved you. I managed to send them off in the wrong direction and followed you alone. Now do you believe me?"

Tim smoothed his chin. He did not know what to believe. Still less did he know what to do.

"You're looking worried!" she said, a note of mockery in her voice.

"What do you want?" he asked, turning towards her.

He stopped short, finding himself face to face with a small wicked-looking automatic.

"I want you to lean forward and place your wrists against your ankles," she said, eyeing him calmly over the sights.

For a moment he hesitated. Then, realizing that an automatic is the most persuasive argument in the world, he obeyed.

"That's right," said Miss Jennings.

Within a couple of minutes she had secured his wrists to his ankles

with the aid of a length of cord. She then gagged him with a handkerchief.

Satisfied that he was absolutely helpless, she seized him by the shoulders and, dragging him along the ground, bundled him into the summer-house.

Going through his pockets, she relieved him of what was left of the notes which she had returned to him.

"There!" she said at length. "You can amuse yourself by guessing what exactly I do want!"

And with that she left him.

VIII

HAVING got within sight of heaven, Tim had crashed again. Just as everything had been arranged perfectly, the unexpected in the person of Miss Jennings had intervened.

What did the woman want?

The Bulmanians were understandable. They wanted to murder both the Princess and Tim and thus smash, once and for all, the hopes of the royalists. But so far as Tim was concerned, Miss Jennings was a complete mystery. Her sole object apparently was to be exasperating. Why had she saved him from the Bulmanians and then made him a prisoner like this? Tim felt that, as a very determined hero, he ought to know. He realized that the first step towards triumphing over his enemies was to understand their motives. He was sure that there was some simple explanation to her contradictory actions. And he had an irritating feeling that anybody else would have had no difficulty in finding that explanation.

Having cursed himself for the dullest-witted fool alive, he gave up the attempt to justify Miss Jennings's actions and decided that something must be done. Somehow or other he must save the Princess and outwit the Bulmanians and Miss Jennings. And obviously, he could do nothing until he had escaped from his bonds. He had no idea as to what he could do after that, but it was impossible to think connectedly when his back felt as if it were about to snap in two.

But how were the bonds to be loosened? He had read stories in which the hero, in a similar predicament, had burst them asunder. But Tim had no qualifications for a blacksmith. And he had already strained at the cords until his wrists were raw. He had also read that it was possible to fray ropes and cords by patiently rubbing them against a sharp edge. But there was nothing against which he could rub his cords.

The only thing he could do was to twist and wriggle in the hope of getting his fingers to the knots.

The only result of a quarter of an hour's efforts was that he shifted his position from one side of the summer-house to the other. Then, with the aid of the wall, he managed to turn completely over.

It was in the course of this movement that the box of matches fell from his pocket.

For a moment he stared at the box. Then he grinned.

After much patient manœuvring he managed to pick up the box. More manœuvring enabled him to get a match between his thumb and forefinger. Striking it was an even more difficult accomplishment. But he succeeded.

Shaking off the blazing cord, he hastily struck another match and burnt through the cords which secured the other wrist. He was free. Slowly and painfully he straightened his aching back. Then he sat up and tenderly pressed his tortured wrists. Every muscle in his body was racked; every tendon strained. It was torture to move. Even the effort of taking the gag from his mouth was agonizing. He wondered what he would do if Miss Jennings were to reappear.

A gust of smoke and the crackle of blazing wood wakened him to the fact that he had not only

escaped from his bonds, but had also set the summer-house on fire.

The place was old and dry, and built chiefly of latticed woodwork. By the time that he had scrambled to his feet it was ablaze.

For a moment he stood blinking at the flames as they darted upwards. In a confused way he realized that this would inevitably precipitate a crisis. Miss Jennings, the Countess Strelowitz, Princess Natalie and the Bulmanian spies would all be interested in the fire. He realized that anything might happen.

Praying for inspiration, he turned and, dashing out of the summer-house, made a dive for the bushes near by.

Bang!

The bullet whistled past his ear. With a flying leap he cleared the nearest bush. Then flinging himself flat on his face, he rolled over and over. Crawling a dozen yards or so towards the house, he paused behind some rhododendrons. For a moment he crouched behind it, expecting every instant to feel a bullet crashing through his brain. Then, pulling the branches aside, he peered cautiously through.

The summer-house collapsed, sending a great tongue of flame and a shower of sparks skywards. About a dozen yards away, Miss Jennings was crouching behind a tree. In her right hand she was holding the automatic ready for instant action. She was gazing intently towards the bushes, obviously waiting for him to divulge his position.

Not wishing to receive the contents of the automatic, he lay as still as a log and scarce dared so much as to blink.

Meanwhile, the burning summer-house and the sound of the shot had roused the Countess Strelowitz to action. Tim's visit the previous evening had warned her that some attempt might be made to wrest from her the secret which she had kept for fifteen years. And the Countess was evidently prepared. She and the faithful Katja were busy closing the iron shutters to the windows and generally getting the Villa Azure ready to withstand a siege. At the upper windows her three daughters could be seen gazing with mingled alarm and excitement at the burning summer-house.

Then, one after another, the Bulmanians crawled stealthily through the gap in the hedge which Tim had made. Bending down they gazed sharply around. Clearly, they had more than a suspicion that they had at last stumbled upon their goal.

Miss Jennings, intent upon Tim and the bushes, did not see them. But they saw her. Their eyes lit up as they pointed her out to each other. They began to creep stealthily towards her with the obvious intention of pouncing upon her.

Scarce daring to breathe, Tim watched them. He was beginning to understand.

The girl was a member of a gang of crooks and had been employed by the Bulmanians to rob him of the papers which they hoped would reveal to them the hiding-place of the Princess. She had carried out her task with an efficiency which Tim alone could appreciate, but she was not content merely to fulfil her instructions. She had stayed on—to cheat the Bulmanians themselves. It was the Diamond of Saint Boris that she wanted.

Tim could have kicked himself. Of course, it was obvious—and had been all along if he had had only the wit to see it! Having robbed him of the papers, the girl had learnt of the diamond and the fact that it was worth some tens of thousands of pounds. Being a crook, her cupidity had been aroused. The gem provided the simple explanation to her hitherto amazingly inconsequent actions.

The nearest of the Bulmanians was now within a couple of yards of her. In his hand he held a knife, and still the girl crouched behind the tree, the automatic ready in her

hand, her gaze fixed intently upon the bushes behind which Tim was hiding.

The girl was English, and in Tim's estimation an English crook was an infinitely superior being to a Bulmanian spy. And she was undoubtedly good-looking.

In the circumstances, he was not prepared to lie there and watch her being murdered by the Bulmanian blackguards. On the other hand, he did not forget that, if she knew that he was behind the rhododendrons, she would certainly empty the automatic into it.

Selecting a stone, he heaved it in the direction of the Bulmanians and, without waiting to see the result, buried his face in the ground in the hope of escaping the bullets.

A startled yell told him that his aim had been surprisingly good.

Bang! Bang!

The bullets did not whistle in the neighbourhood of the rhododendrons. Tim raised his nose from the ground and cautiously parted the branches.

Bang!

Two of the Bulmanians had fallen. The rest were scampering for cover. Taking deliberate aim, the girl behind the tree picked off a third before they succeeded in disappearing behind some shrubs.

Tim took these things in at a glance. He realized that now was his chance, at any rate, to make an attempt to get into the house and find the Princess. All the lower windows were now shuttered and the doors were bolted and barred. But he knew the drain-pipe by means of which the Princess had returned to her room. With luck he would be able to enter in the same way. With more luck, he would find the Princess waiting for him. Of course, the Countess Strelowitz, believing him to be a republican enthusiast, would probably shoot him on sight, but that had to be risked.

Darting from bush to bush, he made his way to the house. Reaching the drain-pipe, he glanced up. It was twenty feet to the window. Tim had never climbed a drain-pipe in his life. But he was going to climb this one.

Keeping his eyes fixed upon the window above, he began to shin up. Progress was slow, and by the time that he was a couple of yards from the ground he had come to the conclusion that lying with one's wrists bound to one's ankles was the worst possible preparation for drain-pipe climbing. Painfully, inch by inch, he dragged himself upwards. Only the thought of the Princess Natalie, the most wonderful girl in the world, kept him going.

He had struggled to within a yard of the window when a snarling cry came from the direction of the shrubbery.

Ping! A bullet sped past him.

Splat! Another struck the drain-pipe below his feet.

That last yard was accomplished in record time. Tim flung himself through the window and amidst the crash of glass fell to the floor.

He picked himself up, discovered that he was more or less unharmed, and glanced around.

The room, obviously a bedroom, was empty.

Picking the splinters of glass from his hands and clothing, Tim regained his breath and wondered what was to be done next. Should he set off on a room to room search for the Princess? Would the Bulmanians follow him? Would it not be wiser to remain where he was in the hope of her returning? Had the Countess Strelowitz heard the crash of the glass and learnt that the house was invaded? Had——

"Hi! Tim!" came the voice of Miss Jennings from the ground below.

Cautiously, he peeped out.

That amazing young woman was standing at the foot of the drain-pipe.

"I say!" she called. "Do you think that you could keep those swine quiet while I climb up and join you? They're still in the

shrubbery. You'll be able to see 'em from there. It's all right! I'm on your side! Catch!"

Without waiting for him to express an opinion on her proposition, she tossed up the automatic. The aim was short and it fell back to the ground. The next attempt, however, was better, and Tim caught the weapon.

"Right!" called the girl, and she began to climb up the drain-pipe with amazing speed.

Tim blinked down at her. He was by no means sure that he wanted her company. But he could not help admiring her pluck—and cheek—and assurance—and the way in which she could climb drain-pipes.

Bang!

Tim involuntarily ducked, but the bullet was intended for Miss Jennings.

"Go on!" she cried. "Get busy!"

Spotting the three Bulmanians in the shrubbery, Tim released the safety catch of the automatic and took careful aim.

The distance was a full fifty yards and too great for accurate shooting. But Tim, encouraged at seeing a Bulmanian at whom he had not aimed jump uncomfortably as a result of his first shot, succeeded in "keeping them quiet." Miss Jennings tumbled into the room.

"Thanks!" she said a trifle breathlessly as she took the smoking automatic from his grasp.

Tim, prepared for anything, stared at her in a dubious way.

"Look here," she said, "we'll have to join forces."

His only comment was a slight rising of his eyebrows.

"It's the obvious thing to do," she continued. "You're after the girl. I'm after the Diamond of Saint Boris. If we stick together and play straight, we'll dish those Bulmanian blighters and both get what we want."

Tim blinked.

"But——" he began.

"Of course, you're supposed to take the Princess and the casket containing the diamond and the documents to Kriletz," she answered. "But now that Count Bubarski's dead there's not much point in going there. You won't get the reward he promised you. And you can't take her half-way across Europe without a penny in your pocket. Besides, you're in love with her, aren't you?"

Tim remained silent. There was a relentless logic about Miss Jennings's remarks which seemed unanswerable. But this was the first time that he had considered the possibility of "taking the girl." The Princess Natalie was more than wonderful. He was really in love for the first and last time in his life.

It struck him that it was hardly playing the game to think of her as an ordinary girl. He realized how utterly unworthy of her he was. Besides, she was a Royal Princess. By right she ought already to be Queen of Bulmania. And there was his arrangement with Count Bubarski——

"I should think," said Miss Jennings with a shrug of her shoulders, "that even being Mrs. Timothy Torrance was a better fate than being queen of a mob of cutthroats like the Bulmanians. They'd be sure to murder her in less than a week. By carrying out your orders you would be merely condemning her to be blown to bits with a bomb, or something like that."

Still Tim remained silent. This point of view had not occurred to him before. He was not in a position to produce any counter arguments. The first necessity was to save the Princess from being murdered by the Bulmanians. The second was to avoid that fate himself. The diamond was a minor consideration. And Miss Jennings would undoubtedly make a most efficient ally. It was certainly a case of two heads being better than one.

"Very well," he said, "it's a bargain. You're to have the diamond.

And you'll help me get away with the Princess."

She nodded and held out her hand.

"Shake," she said.

They shook.

IX

PEEPING out of the window, Miss Jennings fired a couple of shots in the direction of the shrubbery.

"That'll keep 'em quiet for a bit," she said. "It'll be half an hour before they pluck up courage enough to stir. And it'll take 'em even longer before they dare try climbing up the drain-pipe. Come on, we'll get busy!"

Opening the door, they stood for a moment listening for some sign of the Countess and her daughters. But not a sound came from any direction. The house might have been deserted.

"I expect they're hiding," said Miss Jennings. "We'll have to search the place. We'll make a start at the top and work downwards. Don't forget to keep your ears and eyes open."

Going to the top floor, they began a systematic search of the house. From room to room they passed without finding any sign of life. Everywhere was beautiful furniture, rich brocades, tapestries, everything that was worthy of a princess. But the Princess was missing.

At last they reached the ground floor and the drawing-room with which Tim was already acquainted. It was quite dark, the french windows being covered, except for a few inches at the top, by the heavy iron shutters.

"They must have gone away," muttered Tim as he gazed around him. "They're not in the house!"

Miss Jennings shook her head.

"They can't have escaped," she answered. "They would have been seen. There's only one door. We would have heard 'em unbolting it. They're hiding somewhere."

They were on the point of resuming their search when suddenly Miss Jennings gripped Tim by the arm.

"Look! The panel!"

One of the panels which covered the lower part of the walls was evidently a secret door. And it had been prevented from closing properly by a shoe wedged in the crack. The shoe Tim recognized as one which the Princess Natalie had been wearing.

Getting their fingers behind the crack, they hauled at the heavy iron door behind the panelling. As it slowly swung round the shoe fell to the floor. Tim picked it up and put it into his pocket.

Beyond the door was a small cupboard-like compartment about four feet square. The farther wall was blank; the side walls were fitted with shelves.

"This must be the safe where the casket was kept!" gasped Tim.

Miss Jennings nodded, somewhat grimly.

"But it has been taken away," she said.

"But she must have had some reason for putting her shoe in the door to prevent it closing!"

"I don't understand that!"

For some moments they stood considering the situation.

"It seems to me," said Tim at length, "that the best thing we can do is to settle those Bulmanian blighters and then wait for the Princess to keep her appointment with me in the evening. I mean——"

Bang! A bullet sped between them and spattered against the wall of the safe. A second bullet tore through the lapel of Tim's coat.

They darted back into the safe. Miss Jennings half-closed the door and, using it as cover, returned the fire with her automatic.

For some minutes the fusillade continued without any result. The Bulmanians were more or less safe behind the door of the room. Miss Jennings had equally good cover behind the door of the safe. Tim had nothing to do but watch Miss Jennings and listen to bullets spat-

tering against the door and ripping the panelling.

"The last one," announced Miss Jennings in a whisper as she slipped a clip of cartridges into the automatic. "I'll wait for 'em to make a rush, then I'll pick off the lot."

Tim nodded his approval of her tactics.

For some moments there was quiet. Then the Bulmanians fired a dozen shots in rapid succession.

The next instant there was a hoarse shout of triumph. The door of the safe crashed to, flinging both Miss Jennings and Tim backwards.

Under cover of the rapid fire, two of the Bulmanians had crept up to the door unnoticed and had suddenly thrust their whole weight against it.

Tim and his companion were prisoners without hope of escape.

Miss Jennings expressed her view of the situation in a torrent of words which were more forceful than polite. Tim remained moodily silent.

X

SIDE by side the two prisoners sat in utter darkness.

Miss Jennings, having exhausted her vocabulary, was now silent. Tim, for want of something more useful to do, was clasping the shoe of the Princess Natalie.

The walls of the safe were of concrete; the door of steel. The cold truth was that Tim and Miss Jennings were doomed to die of starvation side by side. Perhaps in years to come, their bones would be discovered.

His chief worry was the Princess. Where was she? Would she succeed in escaping from the Bulmanians? Would she obtain the casket and spend hours waiting for him by the ruins of the summer-house?

An eternity passed. Tim's thoughts grew steadily more and more gloomy.

Click!

The noise, like the turning of a handle, came from the wall behind them.

With a low gasp of amazement, Miss Jennings and Tim sprang to their feet.

A moment later there was the creak of a hinge, a gust of fresh air swept into the safe and a faint beam of light in the centre of which stood a dim and shadowy figure.

The wall of the safe was a door leading to a passage.

"Who is it?" gasped Tim.

"Oh!" exclaimed the Princess Natalie in a startled voice. Then she laughed and added: "It is you, M'sieur Teem!"

Taking a match from his pocket, Tim struck it.

It really was the Princess, looking more wonderful than ever, and in her arms she was carrying a small wooden casket.

Miss Jennings, remembering that the bargain was that she was to take the Diamond of Saint Boris, promptly relieved her of the casket.

The Princess gazed at her in a bewildered way for a moment and then turned to Tim.

"Queek!" she said. "There is not the time for the explanations. At any moment *maman* may discover that I have escaped and return. Queek!"

Taking him by the hand, she led the way down some steps and along the narrow passage.

Miss Jennings, the casket under her arm, followed.

Five minutes later they emerged into the daylight and found themselves in a remote part of the grounds.

"*Maman* had the passage built for the escape in case, I suppose, the republicans should discover that I was the Princess Natalie," explained the Princess as they made their way into the woods.

For some time they hurried on in silence. Then Miss Jennings gave Tim a dig in the ribs.

"It looks as if we've both got what we want, after all," she remarked. "I reckon you'll be able to manage

without me now. Here's your fare to Paris. The best o' luck!"

She thrust a handful of notes into his fingers and, still clasping the casket under her arm, disappeared amongst the trees.

The Princess gazed after her.

"I'm glad she has gone," she announced at length. "It is better now that there is only you and I, Teem!"

And then, for no apparent reason, Tim took her in his arms and kissed her.

She did not object. In fact, she snuggled quite cosily in his arms.

"I do love you! Natalie, I worship you! I——"

"And I love you—Teem!"

XI

It was a considerable time before they could apply their thoughts to such mundane matters as the events of the past few hours.

At length, as they sat hand in hand beneath the shade of a tree, Tim gave his version of what had happened.

Then the Princess Natalie told how, when the summer-house had been set alight and the shots had been fired, the Countess Strelowitz had caused the house to be bolted and barred; how she had opened the safe and with her daughters and the casket had escaped by means of the secret passage; and how she, the Princess, had left her shoe in the door so that she might keep her appointment with Tim and how she had succeeded in obtaining the casket and in returning.

"I come back for you, Teem," she said. "I come back because I love you, eh? But I come not back to be Queen. It is not nice to be the Queen. I like not the shots and the assassins. I like to be the plain Natalie. Just Natalie and Teem, eh? That is much better than to be the Queen and be shot. So I open the casket and tear up all the papers. But I keep the diamond. It is worth the much money, eh?"

"You've kept the diamond?" gasped Tim, glancing in the direction which Miss Jennings had disappeared. "It—it wasn't in the casket?"

"No, I have it here. I thought perhaps we would need the much money, you and I. The money is useful, eh?"

Slipping her hand under her skirt she took from her stocking the Diamond of Saint Boris.

Tim stared at the gem. He was no judge of diamonds, but he realized from its size and cut that the stone must be worth tens of thousands of pounds.

Then he glanced again in the direction in which Miss Jennings had disappeared.

Suddenly he rose to his feet and held out his hands.

"I think," he said, "that we had better be moving. I don't think that she'll appreciate the joke. And she still has a few shots in the automatic."

Taking his hands, Natalie jumped up.

"Where shall we go, Teem?"

He considered for a moment. Cannes and the Paris express might bring them face to face with Miss Jennings.

"How about Monte Carlo?" he suggested. "We could get married there."

She nodded eagerly.

"Let's!"

Hand in hand they set off.

MARR MURRAY.

The Exclusive Luxury of Enoch Oates

By G. K. Chesterton

"Since the Colonel ate his hat the Lunatic Asylum has lacked a background."

THE conscientious scribe cannot but be aware that the above sentence, standing alone and without reference to previous matters, may not entirely explain itself. Anyone trying the experiment of using that sentence for practical social purposes; tossing that sentence lightly as a greeting to a passer-by; sending that sentence as a telegram to a total stranger; whispering that sentence hoarsely into the ear of the nearest policeman, and so on, will find that its insufficiency as a full and final statement is generally felt. With no morbid curiosity, with no exaggerated appetite for omniscience, men will want to know more about this statement before acting upon it. And the only way of explaining it, and the unusual circumstances in which it came to be said, is to pursue the doubling and devious course of these narratives, and return to a date very much earlier, when men now more than middle-aged were quite young.

It was in the days when the Colonel was not the Colonel, but only Jimmy Crane, a restless youth tossed about by every wind of adventure, but as yet as incapable of discipline as of dressing for dinner. It was in days before Robert Owen Hood, the lawyer, had ever begun to study the law and had only got so far as to abolish it; coming down to the club every night with a new plan for a revolution to turn all earthly tribunals upside down. It was in days before Wilding White settled down as a country parson, returning to the creed though not the conventions of his class and country; when he was still ready to change his religion once a week, turning up sometimes in the costume of a monk and sometimes of a mufti, and sometimes in what he declared to be the original vestments of a Druid, whose religion was shortly to be resumed by the whole British people. It was in days when their young friend Hilary Pierce, the aviator, was still anticipating aviation by flying a small kite. In short, it was early in the lives even of the elders of the group that they had founded a small social club, in which their long friendships had flourished. The club had to have some sort of name, and the more thoughtful and detached among them, who saw the club steadily and saw it whole, considered the point with ripe reflection, and finally called their little society the Lunatic Asylum.

"We might all stick straws in our hair for dinner, as the Romans crowned themselves with roses for the banquet," observed Hood. "It would correspond to dressing for dinner; I don't know what else we could do to vary the vulgar society trick of all wearing the same sort of white waistcoats."

"All wearing strait waistcoats, I suppose," said Crane.

"We might each dine separately in a padded cell, if it comes to that," said Hood; "but there seems to be something lacking in it considered as a social evening."

Here Wilding White, who was then in a monastic phase, intervened eagerly. He explained that in some monasteries a monk of peculiar holiness was allowed to become a hermit in an inner cell, and proposed a similar arrangement at the club. Hood, with his more mellow rationalism, intervened with a milder amendment. He suggested that a large padded chair should represent the padded cell, and be reserved like a throne for the loftiest of the lunatics.

"Do not," he said gently and earnestly, "do not let us be divided by jealousies and petty ambitions. Do not let us dispute among ourselves which shall be greatest in the domain of the dotty. Perhaps one will appear worthier than us all, more manifestly and magnificently weak in the head; for him let the padded throne stand empty."

Jimmy Crane had said no more after his brief suggestion, but was pacing the room like a polar bear, as he generally did when there came upon him a periodical impulse to go off after things like polar bears. He was the wildest of all those wild figures so far as the scale of his adventures was concerned, constantly vanishing to the ends of the earth nobody knew why, and turning up again nobody knew how. He had a hobby, even in his youth, that made his outlook seem even stranger than the bewildering successive philosophies of his friend White. He had an enthusiasm for the myths of savages, and while White was balancing the relative claims of Buddhism and Brahminism, Crane would boldly declare his preference for the belief that a big fish ate the sun every night, or that the whole cosmos was created by cutting up a giant. Moreover, there was with all this something indefinable but in some way more serious about Crane even in these days. There was much that was merely boyish about the blind impetuosity of Wilding White, with his wild hair and eager aquiline face. He was evidently one who might (as he said) learn the secret of Isis, but would be quite incapable of keeping it to himself. The long, legal face of Owen Hood had already learned to laugh at most things, if not to laugh loudly. But in Crane there was something more hard and militant like steel, and as he proved afterwards in the affair of the hat, he could keep a secret even when it was a joke. So that when he finally went off on a long tour round the world, with the avowed intention of studying all the savages he could find, nobody tried to stop him. He went off in a startlingly shabby suit, with a faded sash instead of a waistcoat, and with no luggage in particular, except a large revolver slung round him in a case like a field-glass, and a big, green unbrella that he flourished resolutely as he walked.

"Well, he'll come back a queerer figure than he went, I suppose," said Wilding White.

"He couldn't," answered Hood, the lawyer, shaking his head. "I don't believe all the devil-worship in Africa could make him any madder than he is."

"But he's going to America first, isn't he?" said the other.

"Yes," said Hood. "He's going to America, but not to see the Americans. He would think the Americans very dull compared with the American Indians. Possibly he will come back in feathers and warpaint."

"He'll come back scalped, I suppose," said White hopefully. "I suppose being scalped is all the rage in the best Red Indian society?"

"Then he's working round by the South Sea Islands," said Hood. "They don't scalp people there; they only stew them in pots."

"He couldn't very well come back stewed," said White, musing. "Does it strike you, Owen, that we should hardly be talking nonsense like this if we hadn't a curious faith that a fellow like Crane will know how to look after himself?"

"Yes," said Hood gravely. "I've got a very fixed fundamental conviction that Crane will turn up again all right. But it's true that he may look jolly queer after going *fantee* for all that time."

It became a sort of pastime at the club of the Lunatics to compete in speculations about the guise in which the maddest of their madmen would return, after being so long lost to civilization. And grand preparations were made as for a sort of Walpurgis Night of nonsense when it was known at last that he was really returning. Hood had received letters from him occasionally, full of queer mythologies, and then a rapid succession of telegrams from places nearer and nearer home, culminating in the announcement that he would appear in the club that night. It was about five minutes before dinner-time that a sharp knock on the door announced his arrival.

"Bang all the gongs and the tom-toms," cried Wilding White. "The Lord High Mumbo-Jumbo arrives riding on the nightmare."

"We had better bring out the throne of the King of the Maniacs," said Hood, laughing. "We may want it at last," and he turned towards the big padded chair that still stood at the top of the table.

As he did so James Crane walked into the room. He was clad in very neat and well-cut evening clothes, not too fashionable, and a little formal. His hair was parted on one side, and his moustache clipped rather close; he took a seat with a pleasant smile, and began talking about the weather.

He was not allowed, however, to confine his conversation to the weather. He had certainly succeeded in giving his old friends the only sort of surprise that they really had not expected; but they were too old friends for their friend to be able to conceal from them the meaning of such a change. And it was on that festive evening that Crane explained his position; a position which he maintained in most things ever afterwards, and one which is the original foundation of the affair that follows.

"I have lived with the men we call savages all over the world," he said simply, "and I have found out one truth about them. And I tell you, my friends, you may talk about independence and individual self-expression till you burst. But I've always found, wherever I went, that the man who could really be trusted to keep his word, and to fight, and to work for his family, was the man who did a war-dance before the moon where the moon was worshipped, and wore a nose-ring in his nose where nose-rings were worn. I have had plenty of fun, and I won't interfere with anyone else having it. But I believe I have seen what is the real making of mankind, and I have come back to my tribe."

This was the first act of the drama which ended in the remarkable appearance and disappearance of Mr. Enoch Oates, and it has been necessary to narrate it briefly before passing on to the second act. Ever since that time Crane had preserved at once his eccentric friends and his own more formal customs. And there were many among the newer members of the club who had never known him except as the Colonel, the grizzled, military gentleman whose severe scheme of black and white attire and strict politeness in small things formed the one foil of sharp contrast to that many-coloured Bohemia. One of these was Hilary Pierce, the young aviator; and much as he liked the Colonel, he never quite understood him. He had never known the old soldier in his volcanic youth, as had Hood and White, and therefore never knew how much of the fire remained under the rock or the snows. The singular affair of the hat, which has been narrated to the too patient reader elsewhere, surprised him more than it did the older men, who knew very well that

the Colonel was not so old as he looked. And the impression increased with all the incidents which a fanatical love of truth has forced the chronicler to relate in the same connexion; the incident of the river and of the pigs and of the somewhat larger pet of Mr. Wilding White. There was talk of renaming the Lunatic Asylum as the League of the Long Bow, and of commemorating its performances in a permanent ritual. The Colonel was induced to wear a crown of cabbage on state occasions, and Pierce was gravely invited to bring his pigs with him to dine at the club.

"You could easily bring a little pig in your large pocket," said Hood. "I often wonder people do not have pigs as pets."

"A pig in a poke, in fact," said Pierce. "Well, so long as you have the tact to avoid the indelicacy of having pork for dinner that evening, I suppose I could bring my pig in my pocket."

"White 'd find it rather a nuisance to bring his elephant in his pocket," observed the Colonel.

Pierce glanced at him, and had again the feeling of incongruity at seeing the ceremonial cabbage adorning his comparatively venerable head. For the Colonel had just been married, and was rejuvenated in an almost jaunty degree. Somehow the philosophical young man seemed to miss something, and sighed. It was then that he made the remark which is the pivot of this precise though laborious anecdote.

"Since the Colonel ate his hat," he said, "the Lunatic Asylum has lacked a background."

"Damn your impudence," said the Colonel cheerfully. "Do you mean to call me a background to my face?"

"A dark background," said Pierce soothingly. "Do not resent my saying a dark background. I mean a grand, mysterious background like that of night; a sublime and even starry background."

"Starry yourself," said Crane indignantly.

"It was against that background of ancient night," went on the young man dreamily, "that the fantastic shapes and fiery colours of our carnival could really be seen. So long as he came here with his black coat and beautiful society manners there was a foil to our follies. We were eccentric, but he was our centre. You cannot be eccentric without a centre."

"I believe Hilary is quite right," said Owen Hood earnestly. "I believe we have made a great mistake. We ought not to have all gone mad at once. We ought to have taken it in turns to go mad. Then I could have been shocked at his behaviour on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and he could have been shocked at my behaviour on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. But there is no moral value in going mad when nobody is shocked. If Crane leaves off being shocked, what are we to do?"

"I know what we want," began Pierce excitedly.

"So do I," interrupted Hood. "We want a sane man."

"Not so easy to find nowadays," said the old soldier. "Going to advertise?"

"I mean a stupid man," explained Owen Hood. "I mean a man who's conventional all through, not a humbug like Crane. I mean, I want a solid, serious, business man, a hard-headed, practical man of affairs, a man to whom vast commercial interests are committed. In a word, I want a fool: some beautiful, rounded, homogeneous fool, in whose blameless face, as in a round mirror, all our fancies may really be reflected and renewed. I want a very successful man, a very wealthy man, a man——"

"I know! I know!" cried young Pierce, almost waving his arms. "Enoch Oates!"

"Who's Enoch Oates?" inquired White.

"Are the lords of the world so

little known?" asked Hood. "Enoch Oates is Pork, and nearly everything else; Enoch Oates is turning civilization into one vast sausage-machine. Didn't I ever tell you how Hilary ran into him over that pig affair?"

"He's the very man you want," cried Hilary Pierce enthusiastically. "I know him, and I believe I can get him. Being a millionaire, he's entirely ignorant. Being an American, he's entirely in earnest. He's got just that sort of negative Nonconformist conscience of New England that balances the positive money-getting of New York. If we want to surprise anybody we'll surprise him. Let's ask Enoch Oates to dinner."

"I won't have any practical jokes played on guests," said the Colonel.

"Of course not," replied Hood. "He'll be only too pleased to take it seriously. Did you ever know an American who didn't like seeing the Sights? And if you don't know you're a Sight with that cabbage on your head, it's time an American tourist taught you."

"Besides, there's a difference," said Pierce. "I wouldn't ask a fellow like that doctor, Horace Hunter——"

"Sir Horace Hunter," murmured Hood reverently.

"I wouldn't ask him, because I really think him a sneak and a snob, and my invitation could only be meant as an insult. But Oates is not a man I hate, nor is he hateful. That's the curious part of it. He's a simple, sincere sort of fellow, according to his lights, which are pretty dim. He's a thief and a robber of course, but he doesn't know it. He's only stupid, and I'm asking him because he's stupid; but I'm not going to tell him so. There's no harm in giving a man a good dinner and letting him be a background without knowing it."

When Mr. Enoch Oates in due course accepted the invitation and presented himself at the club, many were reminded of that former occasion when a stiff and conventional figure in evening dress had first appeared like a rebuke to the revels. But in spite of the stiff sameness of both those black and white costumes, there was a great deal of difference between the old background and the new background. Crane's good manners were of that casual kind that are rather peculiarly English, and mark an aristocracy at its ease in the saddle. Curiously enough, if the American had one point in common with a Continental noble of ancient lineage (whom his daughter might have married any day), it was that they would both be a little more on the defensive, living in the midst of democracy. Mr. Oates was perfectly polite, but there was something a little rigid about him. He walked to his chair rather stiffly and sat down rather heavily. He was a powerful, ponderous man with a large sallow face, a little suggestive of a corpulent Red Indian. He had a ruminant eye, and an equally ruminant manner of chewing an unlighted cigar. These were signs that might well have gone with a habit of silence. But they did not.

Mr. Oates's conversation might not be brilliant, but it was continuous. Pierce and his friends had begun with some notion of dangling their own escapades before him, like dancing dolls before a child; they had told him something of the affair of the colonel and his cabbage, of the captain and his pigs, of the parson and his elephant; but they soon found that their hearer had not come there merely as a listener. What he thought of their romantic buffooneries it would be hard to say; probably he did not understand them, possibly he did not hear them. Anyhow, his own monologue went on. He was a leisurely speaker. They found themselves revising much that they had heard about the snap and smartness and hurry of American talk. He spoke without haste or em-

barrassment, his eye boring into space, and he more than fulfilled Mr. Pierce's hopes of somebody who would talk about business matters. His talk was a mild torrent of facts and figures, especially figures. In fact the background was doing all it could to contribute the required undertone of common commercial life. The background was justifying all their hopes that it would be practical and prosaic. Only the background had rather the air of having become the foreground.

"When they put that up to me I saw it was the proposition," Mr. Oates was saying. "I saw I'd got on to something better than my old regulation turnover of eighty-five thousand dollars on each branch. I reckoned I should save a hundred and twenty thousand dollars in the long run by scrapping the old plant, even if I had to drop another thirty thousand dollars on new works, where I'd get the raw material for a red cent. I saw right away that was the point to freeze on to; that I just got a chance to sell something I didn't need to buy; something that could be sort of given away like old match-ends. I figured out it would be better by a long chalk to let the other guys rear the stock and sell me their refuse for next to nix, so I could get ahead with turning it into the goods. So I started in right away and got there at the first go off with an increase of seven hundred and fifty-one thousand dollars."

"Seven hundred and fifty-one thousand dollars," murmured Owen Hood. "How soothing it all seems."

"I reckon those mutts didn't get on to what they were selling me," continued Mr. Oates, "or didn't have the pep to use it that way themselves; for though it was the sure-enough hot tip, it isn't everybody would have thought of it. When I was in pork, of course, I wanted the other guys out; but just now I wasn't putting anything on pork, but only on just that part of a pig I wanted and they didn't want. By notifying all your pig farmers I was able to import nine hundred and twenty-five thousand pigs' ears this fall, and I guess I can get consignments all winter."

Hood had some little legal experience with long-winded commercial witnesses, and he was listening by this time with a cocked eyebrow and an attention much sharper than the dreamy ecstasy with which the poetic Pierce was listening to the millionaire's monologue, as if to the wordless music of some ever-murmuring brook.

"Excuse me," said Hood earnestly, "but did I understand you to say pigs ears?"

"That is so, Mr. Hood," said the American with great patience and politeness. "I don't know whether I gave you a sufficiently detailed description for you to catch on to the proposition, but——"

"Well," murmured Pierce wistfully, "it sounded to me like a detailed description"

"Pardon me," said Hood, checking him with a frown. "I really want to understand this proposition of Mr. Oates. Do I understand that you bought pigs' ears cheap, when the pigs were cut up for other purposes, and that you thought you could use them for some purpose of your own?"

"Sure!" said Mr. Enoch Oates, nodding. "And my purpose was about the biggest thing in fancy goods ever done in the States. In the publicity line there's nothing like saying you can do what folks say can't be done. Flying in the face of proverbs instead of providence, I reckon. It catches on at once. We got to work, and got out the first advertisement in no time; just a blank space with: 'We Can Do It' in the middle. Got folks wondering for a week what it was."

"I hope, sir," said Pierce in a low voice, "that you will not carry sound commercial principles so far as to keep us wondering for a week what it was."

"Well," said Oates, "we found we could subject the pigskin and bristles to a new gelat'nous process for making artificial silk, and we figured that publicity would do the rest. We came out with the second set of posters: 'She Wants it Now.' . . . 'The Most Wonderful Woman on Earth is waiting by the Old Fireside, hoping you'll bring her home a Pig's Whisper Purse.'"

"A purse!" gasped Hilary.

"I see you're on the notion," proceeded the unmoved American. "We called 'em Pig's Whisper Purses after the smartest and most popular poster we ever had: 'There was a Lady Loved a Swine.' You know the nursery rhyme, I guess; featured a slap-up princess whispering in a pig's ear. I tell you there isn't a smart woman in the States now that can do without one of our pig-silk purses, and all because it upsets the proverb. Why, see here——"

Hilary Pierce had sprung wildly to his feet with a sort of stagger and clutched at the American's arm.

"Found! Found!" he cried hysterically. "Oh, sir, I implore you to take the chair! Do, do take the chair!"

"Take the chair!" repeated the astonished millionaire, who was already almost struggling in his grasp. "Really, gentlemen, I hadn't supposed the proceedings were so formal as to require a chairman, but in any case——"

It could hardly be said, however, that the proceedings were formal. Mr. Hilary Pierce had the appearance of forcibly dragging Mr. Enoch Oates in the direction of the large padded arm-chair, that had always stood empty at the top of the club table, uttering cries which, though incoherent, appeared to be partly apologetic.

"No offence," he gasped. "Hope no misunderstanding . . . *Honoris causa* . . . you, you alone are worthy of that seat . . . the club has found its king and justified its title at last."

Here the Colonel intervened and restored order. Mr. Oates departed in peace; but Mr. Hilary Pierce was still simmering.

"And that is the end of our quiet, ordinary business man," he cried. "Such is the behaviour of our monochrome and unobtrusive background." His voice rose to a sort of wail. "And we thought we were dotty! We deluded ourselves with the hope that we were pretty well off our chump! Lord have mercy on us! American big business rises to a raving idiocy compared with which we are as sane as the beasts of the field. The modern commercial world is far madder than anything we can do to satirize it."

"Well," said the Colonel good-humouredly, "we've done some rather ridiculous things ourselves."

"Yes, yes," cried Pierce excitedly, "but we did them to make ourselves ridiculous. That unspeakable man is wholly, serenely serious. He thinks those maniacal monkey tricks are the normal life of man. Your argument really answers itself. We did the maddest things we could think of, meaning them to look mad. But they were nothing like so mad as what a modern business man does in the way of business."

"Perhaps it's the American business man," said White, "who's too keen to see the humour of it."

"Nonsense," said Crane. "Millions of Americans have a splendid sense of humour."

"Then how fortunate are we," said Pierce reverently, "through whose lives this rare, this ineffable, this divine being has passed."

But in truth they were to see more of their divine being, who turned out to be much more admirable as a human being. And the final event in which he was involved can only be reached through the ordeal or purgatorial process of the story of "The Unthinkable Theory of Professor Green," which those who would endure to the end must be content to read at some later date.

G. K. Chesterton.

Twins

By Warwick Deeping

"Trevenna's face twitched. He turned and looked at the photograph on the piano, and then raised his right hand in a salute to his friend."

DR. BRANGWYN had known Trevenna during the war, but when Trevenna walked into Brangwyn's consulting-room the doctor was astonished at the change in him. He looked like a hunted shadow of himself, a thing of fear—restless, jerky, with eyes that were never still.

"I want you to give me something to make me sleep, doc. Dreams, you know. I want to sleep so that I don't dream."

"Sit down, my dear man, and tell me about it."

"You would think me a bit mad——"

"We all have our bits of madness. Besides, a doctor is no use unless he knows."

He pointed Trevenna to one of the big arm-chairs and gave him a cigarette.

"Telling things helps, you know."

"I have bottled up my horror."

"That's wrong. We grown-up kids want to go and blub to someone."

Trevenna's hands gripped his knees.

"Brangwyn, I can tell you. You're not like the ordinary professional fellow. Well, it's like this. My pal Denham got knocked out during the last month of the war. It was my fault in a way, for I had to give him the job, and now I'm always thinking I ought to have done it myself. But that's not the trouble. I saw Jack afterwards—yes, he was pretty horrible, poor old chap, half his face blown away—well, that's that. But somehow the horror of it got me. I began to dream every night, and the horror gets into the dream. I see—poor old Denham—— Oh, God! And then I wake up with a yell, sweating."

"A dream? Nothing else?"

"Ah, that's it. The dream was bad enough, but it is becoming more than a dream. You won't believe me, Brangwyn, when I tell you that it is beginning to get me in broad daylight."

"How?"

"I'm a lawyer, you know, junior partner in an old city firm, and sometimes when I am in the middle of an interview with a client, or dictating a letter to my typist, I see the face. I just sit and stare. Of course, people are beginning to notice things, and I am losing my nerve. I am beginning to shirk the most trifling responsibilities."

"How long has this been going on?"

"About nine months. I took a holiday in the winter and went to Switzerland. I thought a month's ski-ing and a change would put me right; but in the snow, Brangwyn, I used to see poor Denham's horrible red face."

Brangwyn sat on his desk, for this was not an arm-chair case, but an anguish in which man appealed to man.

"Is there anything at the back of this horror, Trevenna?"

"Nothing—nothing but the feeling that I had about sending Jack in that patrol. Then, too, he was

a good-looking lad, and perhaps the horrible dead ugliness of him shocked me more than anything else had done during the war. It is as though the whole beastliness of it got me down by the throat."

Brangwyn nodded.

"Ever seen Denham's people?"

Trevenna looked surprised.

"No. What has that to do with it?"

"Nothing. But who are they?"

"His father was a parson-man down in Bucks. His mother was dead; he had one sister."

"What name?"

"The Rev. Augustus Denham; the girl's name was Rose. Beechbury was the village."

He gave the information in a tired and hopeless voice, as though it was without significance, and Brangwyn, sitting very still, stared out of the window.

"Our minds are like picture galleries, Trevenna. Happy, right living means living with the right sort of pictures. The war finished up by landing you with a cubist horror. We have got to take down that particular picture."

Trevenna looked at him with his hunted eyes.

"Yes, but how?"

"That's up to me. I'm not going to give you anything in a bottle. Where are you living?"

"Hatfield Gardens, Kensington."

"Right. Let's see, to-day is Friday. Come and dine with me on Monday. And I want you to try and fix your thoughts on something else. For instance, by a picture, something pleasant and gentle——"

He smiled faintly.

"There is no romance anywhere?"

"You mean a girl?"

"I do."

"No. There couldn't be, Brangwyn, while I am seeing this face."

"You have got to forget that face. Look here, man, can't you try and think of Denham as he was—before——?"

"I have tried. But the other thing blots it out."

Brangwyn sent Trevenna away with a grip of the hand and a few words of courage, and on the Saturday the doctor did what he always did, took his small car and drove out alone for a day and a night in the country. He believed in the healing properties of green leaves. Moreover, he steered by the map for the village of Beechbury, and, finding it trailing a quiet red street in the deeps of a beech-clad valley, he put up at its inn, the White Hart, and sat down in its garden to a village tea.

"Is the rectory far from here?"

The girl who had brought his tea was a Beechbury girl.

"No, sir; just above the church."

"Do you happen to know if Mr. Denham is at home?"

"Oh, yes, sir. He christened my sister's first one last Tuesday."

"Thank you," smiled the doctor.

When he had finished his tea Brangwyn strolled down to the church. The rectory lay above and behind it, a Queen Anne house sheltered by old limes and beeches, its garden sloping upwards towards a sweep of meadow-land. It was utterly English and peaceful, and as Brangwyn walked up the drive and saw the sunlight on the rector's roses, he thought of poor Trevenna and the nightmare of the war.

An elderly servant answered the doctor's ring.

"Is Mr. Denham in?"

No, Mr. Denham was not in; he had gone off on his bicycle to visit a sick parishioner at one of the farms.

"Is Miss Denham in?"

"Yes, sir."

"Will you take my card and say that I shall be very much obliged to her if she will see me?"

Brangwyn was a man who inspired confidence, and the maid showed him into the drawing-room and went to find Miss Denham. It was a pleasant, shabby room, its windows overlooking part of the garden, a tennis court, and the meadows sloping upwards to the

sky. Brangwyn threw a quick glance round the room, and then moved to the grand piano, for on it he had seen the photograph of a lad in khaki, and he guessed it to be John Denham.

He was looking at the photograph when the door opened, and a girl came in, holding Brangwyn's card. She was beautifully blonde, but with that warm blondeness that goes with healthy eyes and a fine skin; a gentle creature, quietly wise, and rightly called by the Old English name of Rose.

"I hope you will excuse me, Miss Denham. Your father is out, and so I asked to see you. I am a doctor."

She indicated a chair, and, sitting down by the window, calmly surveyed him.

"Would you mind telling me if that is your brother's photograph?"

"Yes."

"You are extraordinarily alike."

"We were twins. Jack was——"

"Yes, I know. And I have come to you about a friend of your brother's. Do you remember a Captain Stephen Trevenna?"

Her face betrayed some emotion.

"Oh, yes, he was Jack's captain and his great friend. He wrote to us—such a kind letter. He seemed very shocked——"

"He was. He has never got over it. May I tell you about Stephen Trevenna? I am his doctor."

"Please do."

So Brangwyn told her all that he had to tell, and she listened with an air of wise pity.

"How terrible for poor Mr. Trevenna. Is it a hopeless case?"

"Not at all. He can be cured."

"You have an idea?"

"I look at it in this way. All the horror of the war—the suppressed terrors and strains of it—have become symbolized for Trevenna in your brother's disfigured face. Forgive me——"

"Please go on. And your idea?"

"Is to replace the symbol: destroy the bad picture and put up the good. If the sense of horror can be dissipated——"

"I see."

"I came down here wondering whether you could help."

Her eyes questioned him, and then turned to gaze upon her brother's portrait.

"How?"

"May I be frank?"

"Certainly."

"Of course you had letters from your brother. Did he mention Trevenna?"

"Oh, often. He had a great admiration for Captain Trevenna. And afterwards I often wondered why Captain Trevenna never came to see us. My father wrote and asked him to come."

"But—now—his failing to come is understandable."

"Yes—I think it is."

"But supposing, Miss Denham, I could persuade him to come now, would you see him?"

"Of course."

Brangwyn stood up.

"Thank you. I hoped you would say that. I thought you would say it. I have a feeling, Miss Denham, that if I can bring Trevenna here something will happen to him. He will feel the peace of the place. Now, I must see Mr. Denham before anything is done. Can you tell me when I shall find him in?"

"Any time this evening. But perhaps that will be too late?"

"No, I am staying at the White Hart. My idea is to bring Trevenna down with me in my car next week-end, and perhaps you will ask us to tea."

"I am sure that my father will. But you will see him to-night."

Brangwyn was not a little doubtful as to the welcome the rector would give him, but when he saw the Rev. Augustus Denham in the flesh his doubts disappeared. A big, ruddy man with merry eyes held out a large hand, while the other enclosed the bowl of a pipe.

"My daughter has told me about poor Trevenna. I was a little sore

when he never answered my letter or came to see us."

"Then you have no objection to seeing him now?"

"My dear sir, my poor boy's friend has some claim on us. Bring him with you next Saturday."

Trevenna came to dine with Brangwyn on the Monday; he appeared slightly more cheerful, and when the doctor proposed to him that they should spend the following week-end together, Trevenna welcomed the idea.

"What time do you push off?"

"After lunch on Saturday."

"Splendid. Where do you think of going?"

"Oh, I never make plans. I like to cruise around, and stop where the mood takes me."

"The very thing."

On the Saturday Brangwyn and Trevenna set out in the small car, travelling westwards towards the summer sun. It was a beautiful afternoon, and when London lay some thirty miles behind them, Brangwyn turned north as though to explore fresh country. It was about four o'clock when they trundled into Beechbury, Brangwyn treating the village as a discovery. He pulled up near the church.

"How does this strike you, Trevenna?"

"Charming."

"Supposing we have a look at the local inn?"

"Excellent idea. What's the name of the village?"

"We'll soon find that out."

Brangwyn left Trevenna in the car and went to the White Hart. They had two rooms for him there, and, returning to the car, he smiled at his companion.

"Quite all right. We'll put up here."

He drove into the White Hart yard and garaged the car. Their suit-cases were carried to their rooms, while Brangwyn and Trevenna went to have tea in the garden.

"I say, doctor, this is a sweet spot. But—what is the name of the village?"

"Beechbury," said Brangwyn, calmly helping himself to jam.

He was aware of Trevenna's startled look.

"Beechbury!"

"Yes. The Denhams expected us to tea at the rectory, but I thought we could stroll round afterwards."

Trevenna half rose from his chair; he looked scared.

"Good heavens! but I can't go there. You ought to have told me——"

"Of course you can go there. We are invited."

"But—how——?"

"My dear chap, I happened to be down here last week-end, and I called on the Denhams. I mentioned you. They are very keen to see you. In fact, they were rather hurt because you have never been to see them."

Trevenna sat down and stared at the doctor.

"Brangwyn, you told them——?"

"I did. They are extraordinarily nice people, my dear man, or I should not have told them. They don't regard you as a stranger. To them you are Jack Denham's great friend. Denham had an admiration for you."

"Who told you?"

"His sister. His letters to her—you know. You'll like her."

Trevenna covered his face with his hands.

"Brangwyn, I can't go. I should see the face there."

"That is exactly what you won't see, my dear chap. I'm so sure of it, that I mean to take you there."

The doctor had his way. He dominated Trevenna for the moment, and about half-past five they walked down the village to the rectory. Trevenna showed some hesitation at the gate, but Brangwyn took him gently by the arm and led him up to the old house.

"My idea of peace," he said. "When I'm old I should like to live in a place like this and grow roses."

Trevenna murmured something about Jack Denham having spoken of the Beechbury roses.

"Or it may have been about his sister."

"Quite likely," said the doctor.

Evidently they were expected, but when Brangwyn and Trevenna were shown into the rectory drawing-room, they found the room empty.

"I'll tell Mr. Denham, sir," said the maid.

"Thank you."

Trevenna was looking round the room with his restless eyes, and suddenly his glance discovered the photograph on the piano. He recoiled a step, and then, as though compelling himself, he approached the piano and stood looking at the portrait of his dead friend. The doctor, aware of his discovery, pretended to be interested in the view from the windows.

"Brangwyn!"

Trevenna's voice was eager.

"Yes?"

"Here's Jack as he was, the real Jack. Good God, to think that I——!"

Brangwyn turned quickly.

"To think that you——! My dear chap, that is what Jack Denham was—and is. The happy warrior with the blue eyes."

"But, Brangwyn, his face——"

"Quiet, man," said the doctor, hearing footsteps outside the door.

It was Rose Denham who entered. She closed the door after her, and smiled at Brangwyn.

"My father will be here in a minute. But we expected you to tea."

"We should have been rather late. Trevenna, this is Miss Denham."

She looked into Trevenna's face and held out a hand.

"I am so glad you have come. We look on you as an old friend."

Trevenna stood speechless. He stared; he made no movement to take her hand, for her likeness to her brother amazed him.

"It's—very—good of you," he stammered.

He continued to stare at her as though she were Jack Denham alive in the flesh. But she was more than that, and Brangwyn, who was watching them, saw Trevenna's dark face flush like the face of a sensitive boy.

Miss Denham withdrew her hand, but not her eyes.

"I have always wanted to see you. My brother talked so much about you, Mr. Trevenna."

Trevenna's eyelids flickered.

"We were great pals. I—was—so badly cut up——"

"Yes," she said quickly, "that letter of yours made me feel that. And Jack's letters had made me feel that I knew you almost as well as he did. You helped him so much."

"I?"

"Yes, in the bad times."

Mr. Denham came into the room, pipe in hand, ruddy and cheerful. He had Trevenna by the hand.

"You have come at last, my dear fellow. We have always expected you some day."

Trevenna rocked on his heels.

"Mr. Denham," he said, "do you realize—that it was I who had to give Jack that order——"

"I knew it."

"You knew it!"

"My boy's last letter—a few words—was written and posted just before he died. I remember some of the words: 'Poor old Stephen had to give me the job. I know that he would rather have gone himself.' So you see, Trevenna, we always knew."

Trevenna's face twitched. He turned and looked at the photograph on the piano, and then raised his right hand in a salute to his friend.

"Dear old pal, you bore me no malice. I'm glad."

He seemed to draw a deep breath, and then Brangwyn, who realized that the room was rather full of emotion, made a suggestion that he would like to see the garden, and attaching himself to the rector, left Trevenna in the care of Rose. Den-

ham and the doctor went out together, and Rose, rising from her chair, glanced out of the window.

"Mr. Trevenna——"

He turned to her.

"Would you like to see the garden?"

"I should."

She paused by the door.

"Do you know, I always feel that Jack has been back here—in the spirit. And such a happy spirit; no horror——"

"You feel that?"

"I do."'

Brangwyn, although he was a London consultant, knew something about roses, and while he and the rector were deep among the Hybrid Teas, Trevenna and Miss Denham walked up and down the tennis court. They were talking about Jack, and to Trevenna the face of his dead friend seemed to have become the face of the happy warrior with the blue eyes, for how could horror and ugliness attach themselves to anything in which Rose Denham was concerned?

"I am glad Brangwyn made me come here. I was rather afraid——"

"You must come again," she said, with her eyes on the distance.

"May I?"

"Yes."

When Brangwyn and Trevenna walked back to the White Hart the doctor felt that he had a very different man beside him, for the fear had gone out of Trevenna's eyes.

"I am glad you took me there, Brangwyn."

"A peaceful spot?"

"I ought to have known that Jack's people would be like that. Do you know—when his sister came into the room——"

"You were astonished?"

"Oh, more than that."

After dinner they sat under the lime tree in the White Hart garden smoking and talking, and it was eleven o'clock before they went to bed. Brangwyn was an early riser, but he found Trevenna up before him, and wandering about the inn garden. He met Brangwyn with a smile.

"Did you sleep well, doctor?"

"I did. And you?"

"Splendidly."

"No dreams?"

"Yes, but not that dream. Perhaps it has gone. You remember what you said about a picture, Brangwyn?"

"To hang a new one in place of the old."

"Yes, that's it."

That Sunday morning Trevenna went to Beechbury Church, nor did Brangwyn see him for lunch, for Trevenna, waiting outside the porch, had been invited to lunch at the rectory. But he returned to the White Hart for tea and for the journey back to town. On the way home he showed a significant interest in Brangwyn's car.

"What's the make?"

"An 'Arcadia.'"

"A good name for a car. Does it cost much to run?"

"No. And she is very easy to handle. Garage and insurance are the biggest items."

"Rather pleasant to be able to get out of town."

"I agree with you, my dear chap," said the doctor.

A fortnight later Brangwyn heard that Trevenna had bought an "Arcadia." He came to tell the doctor about it and to suggest that Brangwyn should join him in a week-end pilgrimage.

"You can give me some tips, perhaps."

"I'll come with pleasure. Where do you think of going?"

Trevenna looked happily self-conscious.

"Oh, what about Beechbury? We could put up at the White Hart. Most pubs are such slovenly holes."

Brangwyn suppressed a smile.

"Yes, the White Hart is an exception. Well, let's settle on Beechbury."

They did.

WARWICK DEEPING.

Gayly, the Troubadour

By Frank H. Shaw

"'Here's a song she sang—there in the twilight, amongst the olive groves,' Gayly mentioned quite casually, and reached for his guitar. The lined face of the prison-keeper softened again as the dulcet strains pealed forth."

THE TZERVIAN TREATY

"IN you go, then!" said the jailer, and pitched the latest prisoner headlong on to the harsh stone floor of the common prison. "And may God fill your bed with sharp rocks!"

As the iron-bound door slammed shut Eric Gayly picked himself up and gingerly fingered his many bruises. Then, finding all his bones whole—though he had not expected so to do, considering the rough handling he had recently received—he chuckled softly.

"At any rate," he mentioned in his mother-tongue, "I'm inside; and it seems harder to get into a Tzervian jail than to keep outside one. Now, we'll see what we see." He was still tenderly investigating his many abrasions when the door was harshly unbolted, and the more evil-avised of the jailers halted on the threshold.

"Here—idiot, here's thy guitar!" he rasped, and threw the instrument, still gay with parti-coloured ribbons. Gayly adroitly caught it ere it suffered hurt on the pitiless stone pavement. To satisfy himself that it had not suffered in transit, he cuddled it to his breast and swept his fingers over the strings. Two-score men in varying stages of misery and hopelessness pricked their ears. Someone in the background sang, in a voice that was as musical as a rusty file, the initial bars of the forbidden song: "Oh, Tzervia, afflicted of God; when will the hour of freedom dawn?" Once more the iron-bound door was noisily unbolted and thrown open.

"Silence!" snarled the jailer. "One more note of that accursed song and the machine-guns are let loose. Come—no nonsense!" In a faltering tenor Eric Gayly commenced to sing, unaccompanied, the opening staves of a love-song that had, for centuries, echoed back from the frowning crags of Stortsmund. He had detected the local burr in the fellow's voice. Then, as the profound silence of fear fell on the assemblage there on the floor of the great prison, he sang the love-song through. At the end the jailer beckoned discreetly.

"I know not why you are here, comrade," he mentioned, as Gayly humbly approached him, "but since you are here—favours might be won—at a price. White bread, and maybe a little meat and wine. How long since you left Stortsmund, then?"

"A fortnight ago," said the troubadour unblushingly. "But I seek no favours. That one there, though——" He pointed to a white-bearded man of lofty countenance.

"Eh? That one? No, no, my friend. The orders are very strict. He is already doomed to death, that citizen. For yourself, might be."

"Well, I have money, Nichiko. A chicken, say, and wine, and white bread For myself, it is understood."

"Saw you aught of one Olga Stublitsch, there in Stortsmund—a slim girl with eyes like summer stars?"

"Ay, I saw her; but her eyes were red with weeping. They told me that she was fading away; a handsome lass enough."

"Ah! My duty keeps me here, curse it! I will write to her tonight; though God Himself knows I'm handier with a pistol than a pen."

"I have a trick of writing," Gayly mentioned, and so won the jailer's heart.

It was one of the troubadour's habits to make friends in all sorts of unlikely places. His creed ran, that whilst princes and statesmen high in office might serve a friendly turn at a pinch, the ordinary folk were more reliable, possessing, as they did, tenacious memories.

"Look you," the jailer said; "I ask no questions. Why you are here matters naught to me; I perform my duty. But—it will freeze to-night, and an extra blanket would do no harm."

"Together with a bottle of water, perhaps? Cold water? And I will write for you the letter to Olga Strublitsch there in Stortsmund."

Gayly chuckled softly to himself as the jailer bolted the door behind him. The man he had been instructed to find and question was an inmate of the great jail—was, indeed, that white-bearded man to whom no favours were to be shown. He was glad of that hint about the possibility of hard frost during the night, because, although circumstances dictated that he should find harbourage in the jail, he did not particularly desire to remain there a single minute longer than was necessary.

Forthwith he got himself to the side of the white-bearded man, on whose care-worn face showed still the bruises of recent harsh treatment.

"In a little while," he said, "there will be wholesome food; yes, and a blanket to protect you against the night's chill."

"Who are you, stranger?"

"One whose dreams are hitched to the planet Jupiter." A claw-like hand closed on Eric Gayly's wrist.

"Either you've said too much or too little. Jupiter rises——"

"In the Southern quadrant, though there might be a touch of the East in it." So far they had spoken together in normal tones, but now the white-bearded man sank his voice.

"You know, then? But what brings you here, Faithful One?"

"There was a woman cried in the night. What would you? I am a troubadour, one who passes here and passes there, seeking a devoir. A young woman, as it chanced, and beautiful. After I had interfered"—Gayly chuckled reminiscently, and drew the white-bearded man's attention to his abraded knuckles—"she gave me this." He drew from his breast a tiny cross of base metal, scratched with mysterious hieroglyphics. There was just light enough in the prison to read them, and the white-bearded man crossed himself reverently.

"Tell me the tale," he said. "She must have been the daughter of Osman Belaita."

"It is a simple matter. I detest all women, but find it necessary, on occasion, to answer their calls. This one called. I played my guitar and sang—the song of Faith." Under his breath Gayly hummed that song which was really the national anthem of a down-trodden race. "At the end of the first verse the woman cried. What could a man do? She is safe, I think. There were men attempting to carry her off; but I argued with them. I afterwards carried her aboard a felucca, whose captain was in my pay, and instructed him to remove her."

He would have entered into further details, but the jailer appeared, attended by a subordinate, who carried a basket filled with comforts. Beckoning Gayly he delivered the load into his hands, and, though demurring at the proffered largesse, ultimately accepted it. Then, raw of voice, he cleared a space in the corner nearest the door, and demanded that a letter should be written to Olga Stublitsch, who tended goats under the hill-shadows of Stortsmund. Gayly busied himself with pen and paper. Slyly enough, after thoughtful glances into the jailer's face, he suggested endearments and promises. The jailer clapped him comradely on the shoulder.

"For myself, I'd never have thought of such phrases," he said, and Gayly winked impishly. "They like them, the women," he said. "Now, hint at an early leave and a visit to Stortsmund," he suggested. "Be sure Olga thinks tenderly of you, though Reich Wahlbeck woos her."

"Ah! does he, then—that one? And my leave is already overdue!" The jailer forgot that he had already mentioned Reich Wahlbeck in the course of his halting dictation. He spoke his mind concerning the frail Olga's suitor as he collected the written sheets and folded them carefully.

"Here's a song she sang—there in the twilight, amongst the olive groves," Gayly mentioned quite casually, and reached for his guitar. The lined face of the prison-keeper softened again as the dulcet strains pealed forth. But a bugle blaring outside reminded him of his duty; he arose hastily and threw the prison rasp into his voice.

"So; attention, little ones," he cried. "Let there be no dreams of freedom, for to attempt escape is death." He fingered the pistol at his belt as he withdrew, and Gayly laughed again, carrying the basket over to where the white-bearded man crouched in his corner.

"Here is food, fit for a sick man, father," he said. "Also a blanket." The sun was setting; light died rapidly from the great courtyard of the jail, hindering the lifers in their varied tasks of manufacturing tawdry toys that might be sold to curious tourists. The white-bearded man ate hungrily of the rare viands set before him. But when his appetite was satisfied:

"There is a reason for all this," he muttered. "What d'ye seek of me?"

"I am a secret agent of the British Government," Gayly said below his breath. "It is whispered that a treaty is about to be drawn up between Tzervia and Mundania. A secret treaty, binding this country to that in an offensive alliance. I am instructed to secure a copy of that treaty, as it might affect the welfare of the world."

"Be very sure of that—it does affect the welfare of the world. It was because I ventured to protest that I am here," the white-bearded man muttered; "I—Schernikal! But those hot-heads saw only the immediate reward and gave no single thought of the future. The treaty makes England an enemy."

"Yes; that's what my chief said," Gayly hinted. "But until he lays hands on an authorized copy of the treaty he can take no action. You, as a statesman, understand how the currents run. There must be proof, definite proof, of this Government's perfidy. I am sent here to secure that proof. Observe: I carry an introduction to Messer Schernikal. But when I come to make inquiries I am told that Messer Schernikal is in the common jail. Therefore it is necessary that I, too, should enter the jail, and here I am. Take a mouthful more of the wine."

"With Jupiter rising in the Southern quadrant," began Schernikal dubiously, his lean hands at his mouth, in the fashion of a man who had often been betrayed before.

"There's a touch of the East in that quadrant, none the less," sup-

plied Gayly as the old man hesitated.

"I see that I may speak freely There is, indeed, such a treaty, although my old blood boils at thought of it. Look you, Englishman, Tzervia is to be sold, as our Master was sold, not for thirty pieces of silver, assuredly, but for the promise of military support. Tzervia is to become great——" He laughed without mirth. "Oh, yes, a pretty plot, a pretty plot! Our young men are to be armed and thrown into battle, to die like flies. I see as far through a brick wall as the next man. At the appointed time, with all the young men dead, Mundania reaches out her terrible hands and seizes Tzervia—the country I love. Who is to stop her?"

"England; if I can but lay hands upon that treaty! But it is vitally necessary that my Government should see that treaty, or a veritable copy of it. Even England cannot act on rumours. So—I am here, in this poisonous prison. Tell me how I may lay hands on the treaty, at all events for long enough to secure a copy. A photographic copy would suffice, at a pinch."

"Maybe there's a way, for a man who forgets to be afraid. I have counted the days—so tedious and terrible—since they flung me in here to consort with murderers and rogues and cut-purses. To-night the treaty will be signed; to-morrow it will be dispatched by a trusted messenger to Mundania. There is but little time. Bend closer."

Eric Gayly complied, aware of an unaccustomed thrill. His lot in life it was to play the part of the inconspicuous string-puller who alters or consolidates the fate of empires. Masquerading as an aimless minstrel, conversant with many tongues, heart whole and immune from ordinary temptations, he wandered hither and thither over the face of all Europe, his ears wide open for clues. Naturally enough, adventure dogged his footsteps whithersoever he went. Try as he might to avoid complications, he realized that his star drove him relentlessly into the widespread arms of Romance. Chiefly, so his experience went, women were the keys upon which Romance played its heart-stirring tunes; wherever adventure beckoned, there in the shadowy background was sure to be the cloaked, intriguing figure of a woman. But so far this, his latest adventure, had brought no feminine complications, beyond the happy chance that had afforded him opportunity to enter the common jail, as a culprit, and thus reach the side of Schernikal, the one man in all Tzervia who could aid him in his quest.

"Though only the good God knows how you can lay hands on the treaty before to-morrow's dawn," concluded Schernikal.

"Oh, I've a plan," Gayly said cheerfully. He had picked up his guitar and was now touching the vibrant strings caressingly. "Take the blanket, Messer Schernikal; the air already grows chill, as that pig-faced jailer said."

"It will freeze to-night, there can be no doubt. Up here in the mountains the sunset hour heralds the frost." The old man's teeth chattered softly, almost in time to the music. "But how a night-frost is going to help you, Englishman, passes my comprehension. Unless you are a devil; and it is said that the English, enraged, are very devils."

"Simplest matter in the world," Eric Gayly said with a hint of a laugh.

"That jailer is a two-faced traitor; he takes gifts and denounces the givers; do not trust him further than you can see him."

"And yet, I think he has given me the means of escape. See this?" A single turn of the hand that was tuning the strings of the guitar sufficed to withdraw one of the pegs. No ordinary peg, this, but a long and sharp-pointed tool, though even

a close inspection of the guitar could not have discovered it.

"Excellent; but—even should you drive that bodkin to the jailer's heart, there are others on guard beyond, and then others, and always others. They hold us fast here."

"Bless you, I'm not thinking of stabbing anyone, least of all that jailer. There's another way, though. I'll show you!" With the sharp-pointed tool in his hand Gayly nimbly leapt to the embrasure of the heavily barred window above the old man's head. Ostensibly he was a fretful prisoner craving for fresh air and a glimpse of the distant hill-tops, glorious in the sunset glow. With an arm about one of the mighty bars he stared pensively forth, but as he stared his right hand was digging steadfastly with the tool that was like a stiletto, digging into the sandstone of the sill in which the bars were embedded. Hearing the soft scratching of steel on stone, Schernikal voiced a protest.

"There are many who have hoped," he whispered.

"Hoping isn't everything; a bit of common sense helps a lot at times," declared Gayly the troubadour. "Freezing water expands in cooling to a certain temperature. Let's see what we see, shall we?" He dug away with his probe, blowing away the powdery dust, until a considerable orifice had been bored. The night air blew crisply on his face as he laboured; his breath grew cloudy. The wind was coming from the north, where were the highest and most frigid of the mountains.

"Now, pass me up the bottle of water," he said, and when it was handed to him he poured a portion of its contents into the hole he had delved. Almost as the liquid entered the hole it commenced to congeal. Gayly descended to the prison floor, where all was now dark as the tomb. The jail was like most Eastern European jails, only violent prisoners were immured in separate cells; for the most part the prisoners shared a common courtyard, galleried, bleak as a crag in winter-time, where they lived or died as best fitted their conditions. For food they relied either on the charity of outsiders, their own means, or the sale of such trifles as they manufactured from bones and bottles and such like litter. Most of those immured, Gayly had gathered, were political culprits, and not ordinary criminals.

He wrapped the blanket about old Schernikal, and fed him again with the rare viands the chief jailer had supplied. He ate like one to whom food had long been a stranger. Little by little confidences came out, as they do when the heart is warmed with food and wine.

"That maiden you succoured, Englishman—I consider she cannot be other than the daughter of Osman Belaita."

"Had I not been a woman-hater I might have named her more than commonly fair."

"And—here comes the curious part—my son, an exile, by reason of his political convictions, which are mine, loves her, as she loves him."

"Ay, I got some hint of a lover," Gayly chuckled. "She fought like a wild cat with those who'd have carried her off."

"But you have saved her; and we as a family count a favour shown to one as a favour to all. Now, I have an inner knowledge of the Great Council Room."

"Come with me and show me the secrets," laughed Gayly, marking how the purple night grew even more chill. There was no artificial illuminant in the prison. Most of the inhabitants were already asleep, though Gayly would not have cared particularly had they all been wide awake, knowing, as he did know, that certain Governmental spies were harboured there to watch and report on the imprisoned ones.

"You will understand that I am not working for personal gain," he mentioned softly. "This treaty is a big matter—an international

matter. I knew that from you I should get the truth; but when I made careful inquiry, here and there, according to my habit, Messer Schernikal, I was told that you had been denounced as a traitor, and cast into this sewer." He sud denly broke away and leaped for the embrasure of the barred window, visible against the all-enveloping darkness. He groped with his fingers; discovered a trivial crack, where the pressure of the cooling water had split the ancient stone. He tried a bar, but it resisted his efforts.

"More water!" he whispered softly, and trickled a little more into the crevice. Then, to pass the inevitable time of waiting, he descended to the floor, and, finding his guitar, strummed very softly and dreamily on the strings.

"We must be patient," he said; but a tinge of excitement thrilled him. He had undertaken many hazardous ventures under this guise of careless troubadouring, which was as effective a disguise as any he could have assumed; but the pricking of his thumbs told him that this might offer possibilities. There was a new dictator in Tzervia, so the story went, who possessed Napoleonic ambitions; who saw himself, indeed, ruler of a Balkan Empire as a preliminary to an Empire that should be world-wide. But it was not the policy of grave and care-weighted England to permit any such dreams on the part of an individual, for the realizing of dreams spells the crashing of thrones and the shedding of much innocent blood.

"Come," said Schernikal; "you allowed yourself to be thrown into this jail of set purpose?"

"Because you were here—yes; and to ask audience of you was to invite the pistol bullet of the assassin. We have talked, and we understand one another; that's enough for me."

"But, if you do not escape?"

"Oh, there are more ways than one of killing a cat. When a man knows the difficulties of the task he undertakes he makes all preparations. If the cooling water fails to serve us, I have a small saw, made from the mainspring of a clock, inside this guitar. But I feared lest the rasping of the saw might arouse suspicion."

"But afterwards—afterwards!" Schernikal protested. "The exits from the town will be most closely guarded; not even a fly will be permitted to escape without much questioning."

Gayly laughed again at that. It was his particular devoir to achieve the impossible.

"Let's see how the freezing is getting on," he said, and nimbly leapt again to the embrasure. The crack had extended considerably; he shook the middle bar, and felt it slacken in its socket. A little heaving and twisting, and the entire stone slab in which it was embedded, split clean from top to bottom; a chunk detached itself, and would have fallen but that Gayly caught it. He inserted his shoulder, thrust his hands between his chest and the bar, and hove. He was no Hercules, but he understood the scientific application of his strength; the bar bent outwards. Descending, he unwound from about his body a long length of fine but tough cordage, known in Air Force circles as aerial lacing. It was easily capable of supporting the weight of a heavy man.

"Now, Messer Schernikal," he said, "there's no reason why you should remain a prisoner any longer. The guards visit at midnight, one understands, so we will effect a camouflage—blessed word, that's displaced that other blessed word, Mesopotamia, in our dictionaries." Working chiefly by feel, he folded the blanket he had secured into a rough representation of a human shape. He laid the guitar close by, so that a casual glance would give the impression that the troubadour slept. Then he hopped

again to the embrasure, extended himself, and offered a hand to the old man.

"Freedom—freedom!" Schernikal gasped. "I counted myself a dead man."

"Come on—no time for rhapsodies now. Up you come!" Passing between the bars he drew the old man after him. He worked quite coolly, knotting the cord about his armpits and taking a snubbing turn about the bar. When the weight on the cord lessened he whispered that Schernikal should release himself. Prior to descending himself, and desirous of avoiding a too-early pursuit, he bent the bar back into its place, and laid the broken stone into its old position. A moment or two later he joined Schernikal on the ground outside.

"My observations go to show me that they depend on bars and the guards at the main gate," he said.

"Is there anything you do not know, sir?" Schernikal asked admiringly. He was breathing deeply with arms extended, as a dying man granted a new lease of life might breathe. "But there is a high wall beyond to be negotiated, and is guarded by a cheval-de-frise of some difficulty."

"Yes; I'd made allowances for that. Come this way." In the corner of the towering wall he halted, and, coiling the aerial lacing in his hands—he had rove it double about the window bar and unrove it when he was on terra firma—threw it dexterously. By its aid—the third throw was successful—he scrambled to the wall's summit, and, bestriding it between the sharp points of the cheval-de-frise, drew Schernikal—not easily—after him. In another few minutes they were in the open street of the city—free men. The darkness promised to stand their friend. But few people moved about the streets, to avoid them was an easy matter.

"I have an inconspicuous lodging," Gayly stated. It was ever his custom, when embarked on an enterprise of this nature, to reserve for himself an adequate base before the smallest hint of suspicion could attach itself to his name. It was not on the day of his arrival in the city that he had been arrested.

In the ground-floor room of a mean house, where a sick child wailed piteously, Gayly invited Schernikal to make alterations in his toilet. The means were ready to hand. He himself he disguised as an up-country peasant, even to the extent of hanging the characteristic earrings of the hillmen of Boldhenz in his ears. To the astonished Schernikal he spoke in the guttural patois of that uncouth province.

"Now, rest here until my return," he advised. But Schernikal would not listen to the suggestion. As the future of Tzervia was at stake it was his plain duty, so he construed it, to take part and lot in the adventure.

"Too, there may be obstacles on which I have not counted," he mentioned.

"Have it your own way; but I cannot afford to run too many risks." Schernikal laughed at that. "You, to speak of risks!" he said. "Wait." From the littered table he selected a pair of scissors and ridded himself of his flowing beard. He donned a rough frieze cloak and a broad-brimmed hat, and, as Gayly slipped an automatic pistol into his bosom—for one never knew where such an adventure as this might lead—the old man picked up an evil-looking Tzervian knife.

"It may come in handy to force a lock!" he said mildly, and Gayly realized that the old patriot had not always been content with a passive rôle. His accompanying laugh was the laughter of the fighting man fingering accustomed weapons. He tested edge and point on his thumb and laughed again.

"I try to avoid killing whenever possible," Gayly said mildly.

"So I judge by the presence of

your pistol, sir; but a pistol is a noisy tool at best. Come, then, let us go." They emerged into the night. The city was asleep, save for a few late cabarets, whence sounded music and light laughter.

"The fools; if they but knew!" Schernikal muttered. "To-night has been signed the pact that leads them bound hand and foot into slavery! All to gratify the ambition of that pinchbeck Napoleon, Waldstron. I tell you, sir, he is a menace to all Europe, with his mad ambition."

"Let's get hold of that treaty and Europe can snap its fingers at him," Gayly responded. "We go to the Senate House, of course?" He had secured the bearings beforehand. But the observations he had made showed him that the Senate House would be a tough nut to crack. Its front and side entrances were closely guarded by armed soldiers of Tzervia, men who had instructions to shoot as they challenged. Gayly had no desire to court early death; life held too much promise of romance for that. His chief in England had mentioned half a dozen matters requiring his early attention, and there were private ventures not a few that he proposed to unravel when his next spot of leave fell due. For adventures are to the adventurous and seldom come knocking on the door; they must be sought, even at a cost of suffering and prayer.

"Now, I will take the lead," Schernikal said. "Let us avoid the Place." They had a glimpse of the great public square as they flitted down side alleys, hemmed in on either hand by cliff-like dwellings. It was well lighted; there was something of a stir toward. Carriages and motors came and went; small bodies of troops passed to and fro.

"Yes; let us avoid the Place by all means," Gayly said, and, speaking, recoiled a little as a cloaked man rushed at him, and, catching his shoulder, demanded his name and business. Gayly gave an excellent imitation of a semi-intoxicated reveller returning from his favourite café; he draped himself heavily about the plain-clothes man's neck, speaking to him in the Boldhenzian patois. All at once the troubadour struck a shrewd, well-timed blow that sent the follow's head snicking back like a gunlock. As he weakened at the knees Gayly punted him down neglected steps into a noisome area.

"Bear a hand here!" he urged, and explained what he would be about. A gag was swiftly thrust into the man's mouth; his hands and feet were adroitly tied; like a mummy for inanition he was rolled into a corner.

"I think he is the fellow called Bertram—a spy and a double-dealer," Schernikal said as they emerged. "Come, then; there has been a gathering at the Senate—the treaty has been signed. Follow me." He led the way down the network of mean streets, halted at an inconspicuous door in a high wall.

"Occasionally, when secret matters are afoot, it is as well that the politicians should come and go unobserved," he said. "Few, save the elect, know of the existence of this door. It may be locked." But when he tried the handle the door gave smoothly; on his heels Gayly entered a littered yard. Somewhere in the far distance a leathern-lunged man was orating; his words were greeted with spasmodic cheers. This might be, Eric Gayly decided, Waldstron the Dictator addressing certain of the populace; preaching a fiery gospel of conquest. But England and others of the Great Powers had no desire for an era of bloodshed and strife and suffering. The world was recovering its long-forgotten sanity, reaching out its hungry hands for a period of universal peace. That an inconspicuous country like Tzervia, and a single self-seeker like Waldstron, should prejudice the orderly advancement of the nations was a thing not to be tolerated. But in

order to ensure the effective policing of the Balkans, without creating international jealousies, it was very necessary that proof of Waldstron's treacherous treaty should be obtained without any possibility of contradiction.

"Perhaps we'd better wait a little," Gayly said, halting there in the rustling gloom.

"We will wait in a securer place than here, sir." Schernikal, spite his years, was now eager as a terrier on his task. But the small door towards which he led Gayly proved to be locked.

"As well that I brought the knife; but it is no obstacle," the old patriot said. And, curiously enough, notwithstanding the imposing guardianship of the main entrance to the Senate House, the door proved but a flimsy barrier; a single twist of the big knife-blade set it abroad. Any sneak-thief could have entered as Gayly entered, had he but been familiar with that queer twist of human character that leads men to apply the stoutest of bolts and bars to certain doors and leave others, equally important, wide open to the curious. You may see such a weakness anywhere—your average householder attaches formidable locks to a glass-windowed door through which a burglar can enter by a single scratch of a diamond.

Schernikal, taking Eric Gayly's hand, led him along passages that smelt damply, on whose floors dead leaves rustled faintly to their tread. They mounted a flight of old, worn stairs. A twinging baize-covered door gave them further admission; this door did not even boast a latch.

"Now we are in the Senate House proper," Schernikal said. "We must move with caution and be very wary."

But they were not molested as they traversed a suite of rooms. The din of many voices reached their ears.

"Behold!" whispered Schernikal, and fumbled with a carving of a large picture frame. A panel slid softly aside, a stream of light entered the chamber. It was, Gayly saw, a room of some importance, hung about with imposing paintings—paintings, these, of former rulers of Tzervia, in the days before she found her so-called freedom.

"My ancestors!" Schernikal mentioned, not without pride. "Men of my blood have done much for Tzervia. They have lived for her and died for her—to bring this about!" He directed the troubadour's attention to the scene visible through the secret panel. A section of the painting on the other side of the wall was on transparent muslin; it was possible to see clearly without a suspicion of overlooking being given.

A party of men were entering the room, whose chief articles of furniture were a notable table and a massive safe. One, a portly man, almost purple of face, self-important, led the way. Indubitably he was the hero of the hour. In his right hand he carried a roll of parchment, and Gayly's eyes glistened at the sight. The stout man was Waldstron; the parchment was the treaty he had been instructed to copy. What he required was possession of that treaty for so long as was necessary to create an irrefutable copy. Photography was the only means—but his secret room in the city held all necessary appliances. An hour of time snatched from eternity was all that he required.

"So—it is done!" Waldstron exulted, and sank, with signs of exhaustion, into a large chair. "A new age for Tzervia dawns—the mountain-tops are tinged with radiant gold. At dawn—in five short hours—the courier leaves with this for Mundania. And that is but the beginning. But I am weary, my friends——" None the less, he reeled off a rhodomontade of spurious patriotism which elicited many hurrahs from his

hearers. In the comparative gloom of this other apartment Gayly heard his companion's stertorous and angry breathing.

Those who had been party to the signing of the treaty, which ostensibly handed Tzervia over as a vassal state to Mundania, paid fulsome compliments; then, yawning as men who have borne the burden and heat of the day, they withdrew. But Waldstron remained seated; he yawned. To the watchers everything was as plain as though they stood beside him. A sleek-looking secretary approached the Dictator.

"Permit that I should relieve you of the treaty, Excellency," he said. But Waldstron desired to sate himself with the sweets of success; he waved him aside.

"I watch the treaty until it leaves the city!" he said vainglorously. "Get to your rest, Sleekmann." The secretary laid a jangling bunch of keys on the table at his chief's elbow, and withdrew, as tired a man as the city held that night. Waldstron was left alone. He yawned again, unrolled the treaty, adjusted elaborate pince-nez, and bent to secure a better light on the fateful document. But, reading, his head drooped forward, a long, rolling snore escaped from his nostrils. Waldstron, who would tear Europe into bloody horror, slept the sleep of exhaustion.

"H'm; that complicates matters!" Gayly whispered.

"Be patient," Schernikal urged him. After what seemed an eternity of waiting the old man touched another picture-frame; another panel slid aside, to reveal a clear entry into the presence.

"The matter is in your hands, sir," Schernikal whispered, and Eric Gayly slid into the room like a thief. He had no thought of an immediate trap; Waldstron was superbly asleep. Gayly tiptoed to his side. The treaty was outspread under his hand, a single movement was all that was needed to gain possession of the document.

A heavy pistol crowded into Gayly's ribs; he discovered himself gazing into a cruel, merciless face, with thick lips drawn snarlingly back from yellow teeth.

"So; a plot!" gulped the Dictator. "Make no sound. You have ten seconds wherein to make your peace with your Maker, spy!" And he commenced to count those seconds wheezily. "Eight!" he said; and "Nine!" Gayly saw death staring into his eyes. He had failed, he said. No more for him the sunny spaces of life and the gay insouciance of the troubadour.

"T——!" began the Dictator, and there was heard the whir of a heavy knife. The terrible blade took him between the broad, bowed shoulders and sank deeply, severing his heart. Through a rent in a picture still protruded the hand of Schernikal. The dead Dictator sloughed forward in a lump on to the table, and Gayly caught the unfired pistol.

"Secure the treaty and come!" hissed Schernikal. And there being nothing better to do, Gayly caught up the treaty and slipped back whence he had come.

"Nay; no thanks," said the old man when they had gained the street. "You aided me to right a wrong. He and his murdered my wife, exiled my son—it is justice. Copy the treaty as you will!"

"Why; do you know, I think I'll take the treaty itself home," Gayly said. "My chief will be tickled to death to see it. Come on—I've a fast motor-boat lying hidden. I'll give you a passage to where your son's sweetheart is, and—might be, after a while, we shall establish a new king on Tzervia's throne. If you make as good a king as you are a knife-thrower you ought to take full honours at the game."

FRANK H. SHAW.

(Another story in this series next month.)

The Stranger in the Forest

By H. M. Tomlinson

"'Why, what's the matter with the cities? I've been wishing lately I was back in one.'

"'I guess you have been. You would. But I never do. This is good enough for me. I know what things are here.'

"'We know what they are in the cities, I suppose.'

"'You suppose,' said Maguire, 'but do you? If London and Singapore are what please you, then leave me the trees and the tigers. I know where I am with them.'"

I CONTINUED to hear of Maguire in the most unlikely places. His name would slip into a conversation early and naturally, but, so far as I could see, without relevance. It might have been waiting about, in the air, in the shadows, ready to take any excuse for prolonging its mortality. "Once when I was with Maguire . . ." It was always supposed that I must know him. There was never a prelude, never a hint of a face or a figure. Everybody ought to know Maguire, I had to suppose, or else lose the richness of the stories about him. But I had never met Maguire, and nothing that I was told of him made me feel that in him something rare had eluded me. Nothing was ever said which made him plain. Yet this man had so impressed himself upon those who knew him that they could not pass a few odd days with a stranger in a coasting steamer or a Government rest-house without thinking of him.

When two or three travellers somehow got round to Maguire again, by candle light after dinner in a rest-house, I then began to watch the shadows alter as the silent Malays troubled the darkness beyond us, or gaze into thatch, searching for the rustling lizards I could hear but could not make out. It was not much good listening to what was said about that man. I knew it would be no more than hints, with all the clues left out for me. They seemed to think it was unnecessary to say more.

What was curious was their note of respect, for they were not respectful men. Far from that. Respect out there for an absent wayfarer was certainly strange. The climate and customs of that coast and forest by the China Sea did little to put us in a good light. But even so, I could not glimpse Maguire as a reality. He was an amusing myth, if anything at all. Besides, nobody was expected to take quite seriously much that he was likely to hear in the ships and the coastal towns from Singapore to Borneo by way of Siam. One heard many odd tales, but their chief virtue was that usually one had plenty of time for them. Maguire was like the stories one heard of adventures on unfrequented distant islands, of incredible native customs, of accidents in grotesque circumstances which could have reached their perfection of monstrous form only after long usage and polishing in the cabins of many ships and in many random hostels. Perhaps once there had been a man named Maguire, and a few words about him were still being passed round because they could not be stopped, and because nobody really knew whether he was alive or dead, and did not care.

One day, I remember, a chance companion I found in a village on the coast of Johore, after mentioning the now familiar legend, said he was going to see Maguire that

afternoon. Would I come? The Irishman was staying in the place.

Was that an invitation to add an aspect of veracity to an unsubstantial story? Of course! It was supposed that I would forget it—have something else to do that afternoon; for out East there is rarely a need to see in these invitations more than idle politeness, because conversation, too, in that moist heat becomes slack and aimless, and therefore easily friendly. So I was greatly surprised, when comfortably reading, to see my friend stroll in and affect reproach that I was not dressed, like himself, for an immediate visit to the substance of this familiar legend.

I went. There was a large native house, I remember, built on stilts above the ground, with groups of coconut and betel palms about it. We saw an elderly Malay, a lean and dignified figure—a Datoh, or chief, I understood—who met us at the foot of a bamboo ladder which led up to the door of the great hut. Within the shadow of that door some figures watched us, which we knew were women by the brightness of their dress. Near the chief were several little children staring at us, all of them naked excepting a tiny girl, who wore a silver leaf pendant from a silver chain round her hips. My friend and the chief conversed apart.

I was told at last that Maguire was not there. "He has been here," the Datoh says, "but he has gone again, and nobody knows where."

Nobody knew where! I looked at the chief, who nodded seriously, and half-turned and waved an arm towards the forest. I stared solemnly at an indigo range of hills set far back in the dark unexplored land beyond that clearing, and nodded as sagely as the Datoh. The Malay smiled sardonically. That was the nearest I ever got to Maguire.

There came a long interval in which I heard no more about him. In fact, we had something else to think about at that time. It was near the beginning of the rainy season—much too near for me, for with yet another chance companion I was in the jungle of Perak, on the Siamese border, midway between the Indian Ocean and the China Sea. I was not happy about it, for the country was new to me; new to all white men, in fact, for where we were it was untraversed. And my companion, who was in charge of our little party, confessed to difficulties in a way which convinced me that if I did not take charge of an expedition which was no affair of mine, then it might finish up in a ludicrous and unfortunate way; and that it stood a good chance of finishing that way even if I did.

I believe the Malays with us divined what was in my mind. We were standing in perplexity and extreme discomfort, in a jungle track which had been made by wild elephants, listening there to my companion's confession of despair through being at fault in his quest. The natives must have known what resolution I was forming, because when I looked up they were watching me acutely, and were paying no attention to the other white man. Some show of resolution and indifference in adversity—which I did not feel in the least—certainly had to be given this business of two Europeans. With a fine display of the use of compass and chart a point was fixed upon, and we took another route.

We camped for the night. There were sandflies, a mug of coffee, and nothing to eat; and it would certainly rain, and our wet clothes were blotched with our blood because of leech bites. I cursed that night the folly of my love for adventure. I had found one now all right. "If we could only meet Maguire," groaned my despairing companion. That was the only bit of humour of the day.

We continued our journey next morning through a forest and up

a shrouded declivity which was so gloomy and fantastic that I could not help glancing apprehensively into its silent and heated shadows. But we saw nothing of course, except the tracks of animals. It is not easy to miss the tracks of elephants when you must plough up to the knees through the horrible bog they have made, and then stop to disconnect from your body the leeches which you picked up in it. One was wet through with perspiration soon after sun-up. We paused for a rest by a clear stream in the woods, across which the trail we were to follow went up still more into the shades. Our men stood about, their packs on the ground, picking off the beastly worms from their brown limbs. The columns of great trees enclosed us, in a wreckage of vines. The trunks mounted into a silent darkness. Those tropical forests are not so friendly as English woods. No colour was there, except in the transparent water of the stream by a gnarled root which looked like an arrested lava flow, where a shoal of fishes, striped orange and black, were flashing about. And that was the only movement, though the fish made no more noise than the trees.

I was waiting for my companion to own up to a disposition to start again, and was gazing up the track we were to follow, when two terriers appeared on it, trotting towards us. They were not native dogs. They were much too independent and truculent for that. They stopped when they saw us, cocked their ears, barked and looked back to somebody. A slight but lively figure appeared, making long, energetic strides over the rubbish. Its face was hidden by the broad brim of a felt hat. It wore a neat khaki tunic, riding breeches and puttees. It was a soldierly figure in that dress, with a Winchester rifle under its arm. "Why, there's Maguire!" exclaimed my surprised companion to himself.

The figure stopped a few paces off and surveyed our most unbusinesslike outfit. It did not seem to notice me at all. But I knew at a glance who now was going to take charge of this little affair. Our group did not seem to get that man's favour. Things here and there must have looked wrong to him. But he only remarked, "What the hell!" I felt very abashed.

This man Maguire was going to take charge of us, that is to say, if he lived. The translucent pallor of his shrunken and hairless face was ghastly. The eyes were alive, however. They were restless, abrupt and intent. Their instant bright regard seemed to penetrate. I was impressed, but a little repelled also, for somehow the pallor and the intensity of force suggested by this slender figure gave a hint of coldness and cruelty.

"Been sick?" he was asked.

"Fever, and nothing but durians to eat for a fortnight."

While the two of them were talking I undid one of the packs and got out a bottle of whisky.

"If you've lived on durians for a fortnight, what about a drop of this?"

Our new friend stared at the bottle incredulously, then smiled a slow and beautiful smile. "This saves my life," he said.

Maguire decided for us. I did not hear what the decision was, and did not trouble to find out. I was far from sure that I should like the man, but I was quite sure that his was the only word worth having in that place. One only had to look at him. I should go where he led. He and his Winchester started off with decision enough, quickening our pace, somehow giving more activity to the Malays and inspiring my despondent companion with an ardour from heaven knows what source. I put away my chart. We forded unknown rivers continually, waded through swamps, climbed hills, and swung down through the jungle on the other side; and all at a pace, and without a rest, which would have caused some of us to

complain bitterly a few hours before. Our leader never looked back and never stopped. He expected us to manage difficulties in his own way. If a man with fever, who had starved for a fortnight, could go like that on a mouthful of whisky, I wondered what he could do when he was at his best.

He shot a wild pig, and got us to a small hut at last, where, with the right kind of fire, which had been impossible in the dank forest, we had what must have been the most enjoyable dinner ever spread on a floor. That hut was on the slope of a clearing, in a narrow valley, and below us a river was turbulent over granite ridges with the first charge of the rains. The country beyond the river was mountainous and sombre with forest, and uninhabited, Maguire told me, except by those wild folk the Sekai, the aborigines, with their poisoned darts and blow-pipes. We sat on a log, he and I, looking across and yarning, and watching vast storm clouds gather about the sunset. A respect, at least, began to form for that strange man, perhaps because he gave a comfortable feeling of security where there had been none before. His speech was ironical, yet in such short, quick sentences that the unwary might have thought the man was a simpleton. For a very brief time I myself thought so, till I got from him a shaft which was no accident, but was aimed to hit me where I felt it. But Maguire did not smile, though I laughed aloud. He had my bearings before I had got his. Did he know London? He smiled then.

"You can keep your great cities," he said. He was whittling a stick, and held it away from him, while he shut one eye to scrutinize its straightness. "One day in Singapore, when I have to go, is enough for me," he remarked. "It's better here."

"Why, what's the matter with the cities? I've been wishing lately I was back in one."

"I guess you have been. You would. But I never do. This is good enough for me. I know what things are here."

"We know what they are in the cities, I suppose."

"You suppose," said Maguire; "but do you? If London and Singapore are what please you, then leave me the trees and the tigers. I know where I am with them."

Across the river, a mile away, as it fell dark a local storm thundered and flashed.

"Another sector catching it tonight," said the man in the dark beside me.

"What's the game?" I asked. "Just a local raid?"

Maguire chuckled. Then he said: "Pozières told me all I wanted to know of Europe—that and Villers Brettoneaux and some odd corners. If you smart city people arrange a show like that again, don't worry about me. I shall be fine with the Sekai and the rhinoceroses. I like the rhino. I've never had to shoot him. He's only an abrupt old gentleman. If you meet one over there to-morrow"—he pointed towards the little storm—"don't take any notice of him. He's very nervous."

My now invisible partner said more, which would have been allusive except for the easy scorn which his fun did not sufficiently moderate. I got the idea that I was included in his derisive gesture. Then he began to chant softly a very indecorous song, a speciality of the Australian soldiers when they felt most hilarious on the march. I knew it and joined in. Maguire thereupon broke loose, and together we bawled the offensive words at the mute desolation of central Malaya, just as once they had been shouted in defiance of the nightmare on the Somme.

For some weeks after that he led us, and what otherwise would have been a region where men like myself most likely would have died,

he turned into an exhilarating and adventurous prospect. The Malays, wherever we met them, greeted our chief as though he were good fortune. Certainly we never found a difficulty — though sometimes I thought they were insuperable— which did not vanish as soon as Maguire went to it. In the early hours of the morning, when the camp fire was nearly out, and the tiger, which had been warning us from the far distance of his entire confidence in himself, was now close and cruelly insulting with a subdued snarl, I looked at Maguire's figure among the shadows on the floor, saw it was unconcerned, and tried to sleep again. A Malay would rise to his elbow and stare into the forest towards that moaning yowl.

I lost count of the days, and often could not have guessed within a score of miles of our place on the map. That did not matter. It is something like a miracle that another human soul, without knowing what it is doing, should change the look of the world to us, turn a steaming forest, full of unknown dangers, into an exhilarating pleasure, and make even the loathsome leeches, hunger and the thought of fever only the jokes of the place.

The rains began in almost continual seriousness. We had to plunge into and half swim some of the streams. The leeches increased by myriads. Darkness settled down on the hills, penetrated, like something palpable, into the everlasting woods, and remained there, a settled gloom. We were never dry. Maguire was working round to the hut by the river where we had spent the first night with him.

But something had gone wrong with that country. The hills had become morasses and the low ground was water. The jungle was flooded for miles. But Maguire was concerned about a Chinaman he had left in that hut, and he was going to reach it. To me it seemed impossible. We were thwarted at every approach. And it still rained, as though the solid earth were doomed and there would never be dry land any more. Maguire at first was comical at any new check, with eloquent outbursts against Chinamen and their entire uselessness and inconsequence. Let the beggar die. Then he would turn back as if he had abandoned his quest. Soon, though, we found he was only trying another device.

At length the man became silent and serious. We had no more of his fun; and for twenty hours he and I alone toiled through that inferno of water, mud and trees in a menacing silence and twilight of the earth. That fellow's energy and his tireless and intense mind took me along, indifferent to anything that could happen now, as though his body and spirit were sufficient for two men, for any number of men.

Within an hour of total darkness we came to a vantage above our hut, and that river, once so low and picturesque, was now a terrifying power destroying the country. It had no confines. It was driving irresistibly through the jungle of the lower slopes, carrying acres of trees with it. Its deep roar shook the soul. A patch of land near us, which yet was unsubmerged, was alive with pigs and deer, and crouching there on a rock above the rest of the survivors of the deluge was a black panther.

Our hut, though it had been high above the river, now had the water around its walls. A hundred yards of eddying but quieter river separated us from it. Beyond it again our canoe was tugging violently at its tether, which was attached to a tree. In a few minutes its nose would be pulled under. And the Chinaman was sitting on the roof of the hut. When he saw us he raised a melancholy howl.

Maguire undid his puttees, took off his boots, waded in, and off he went. It was lunacy, and I could not help him. I could not help my-

self, after almost a day in that forest. The swimmer passed the hut and reached the canoe. He got in, cut its mooring rattan, and presently had the Chinaman off the roof and beside me.

The man lay down, shivering and moaning. Maguire kicked him and asked where our ruddy dinner was. Had he been smoking opium all the time, to let the river rise like that? He could take his money and go. *Ialan di-dalam!* The Irishman pushed off again, calling out that there was a rifle and a map in the hut, and he must get them. When he reached the miserable structure I saw that entrance to it was impossible; the water had almost reached the eaves of the thatch. But a figure in the last light of that day appeared on the ridge of the thatch and began hacking it desperately, casting the palm leaves into the stream; and presently it lowered itself through the hole it had made and disappeared within.

I waited for the silhouette of Maguire to reappear on the ridge of that precarious vantage in the waters. The Chinaman beside me continued to moan, and in frantic desperation I could have kicked him myself. It grew darker. The hut suddenly became oblique, and Maguire's head appeared above it like a black chimney pot. He began to chant his ribald song. Then the flimsy structure flattened on the water, flattened and spread, with the Irishman in the midst of the vague rubbish, and hurried downstream, passed a headland of trees, tossed in the waves of a cataract, and all I could see of it then went on and vanished at a place where some giant bamboos were stretching and rocking on the flood like slender rushes.

H. M. Tomlinson.

Summer and Simonetta

By Dale Weed

"It was Jeremy's hour, and he recognized it as such, but the realization dizzied him. He almost let it pass. Then he, too, tried for what he wanted supremely. He turned and took Simonetta's hand.

"'I love you,' he said. . . ."

"OH, don't apologize, please," Jeremy had said. "To be alone in a garden is next best to being together in one." So, his hostess and her daughter having gone in to see their unexpected callers, Jeremy drifted down one brick path and up another, and in his enjoyment of an exquisite old garden, congratulated himself on his decision to come. Really, the borders were wonderful.

He reached a hand to a crimson hollyhock taller than he, forcing it to bow to him gracefully. He lifted a pink gladiolus lying dangerously across the edge of its bed.

He left his hat upon a bench and forgot it. A frivolous breeze stirred garden scents for his rejoicing. He wished Mrs. Penstable's callers might stay for ever. Then in delectable solitude he would see the sun set and the moon rise. Wanting to be sure that vision was robbing no other sense, he closed his eyes and drifted six steps down the path, one step too far, for an ill-omened peach branch raked his glasses from his nose. He heard them crash upon the bricks, and stooped to find both lenses broken. He was just sufficiently near-sighted that without his eye-glasses he became embarrassed and ill-tempered. His one idea now was to return to the house and find another pair. He stepped hastily into a broad walk to his right. It led him down a little slope to a brick-paved circle surrounding a sundial. Its borders were fiery masses of tiger lilies. Their orange flowers full in the sun brought him to a startled standstill. Then across the circle he saw a woman stooping, working in the earth of the lily bed. Without his glasses he could see only that it was a woman's figure, and he crossed to her side, believing it to be Helena Penstable. As he reached her, she rose and faced him, a stranger, smaller and slighter than Helena. Near as he was, the outlines of her features were blurred. Desiring to see and unable to do so, and embarrassed by the feeling of inadequacy that breaking his glasses invariably caused, Jeremy leaned forward, peering at the strange lady impertinently. Afterwards he could have sworn to nothing about her, save her honey-coloured hair and hazel eyes and the corners of her mouth, which twitched a little as he carefully stared at her. Her dress was perhaps orange or maybe brown. She reminded him of one of the tiger lilies, and this despite the fact that she was so small that one's thought should have been of the wood anemone or modest violet. Her hands were thrust into gardening gloves of fearful size, one holding a limp bunch of weeds.

The duration of his inspection was but a moment. He started to apologize and raise his hat, but as he lifted his hand he remembered his hat was upon a distant bench. He flushed with irritation, why, he could not have said, and remarked inanely: "I have broken my glasses and lost my hat."

The hazel eyes looked seriously

sympathetic. Their owner's tone was feeling. "It's the thirteenth," she said.

"Do you think that's accountable?"

"Undoubtedly it is. The only fairly safe way to survive one's thirteenths is to lie in bed and eat sandwiches."

"Why sandwiches?"

"Just because a sandwich *is* safe. You might scald yourself with soup or tea, or choke on a fish bone, or——"

"Overeat on pie?" he interrupted.

"Yes, of course," she agreed. "You see it yourself. But a sandwich with rounded corners is safety itself." She seemed to feel the discussion ended, for she nodded politely, and stooped to her weeding. He bowed and would have left her, but curiosity held him. In his experience, sublime impertinence sometimes served as well with women as studied politeness. He leaned down and asked in tones pleasantly natural: "Would you tell me your name?"

"My name is Simonetta," said the lady in a voice as calm as his own, and she rose and walked away. He saw her pass between the lilies and disappear around a clump of shrubbery, and she did not once look back. Nor was he to see her again that afternoon.

At the dinner hour he was the last to enter the drawing-room. Here he found the family gathered, and for the first time met the son, George McIlvaine Penstable, a man so big that Jeremy shrank into insignificance beside him, and so silent that only his agreeable smile made him a social possibility. Present also were Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Dunning and Mr. Peter Penstable, a cousin far removed. As Jeremy stood chatting with Helena, he saw one of the curtains drawn across the bay window move. "There is certainly someone in the bay window," he said in some excitement.

"It's Etta, probably," Helena answered. "She never appears till dinner is announced. She says the time before is horrible to her, that every man's mind is fixed upon being fed. She says she can't endure divided attention."

"And who is Etta, may I ask?" inquired Jeremy.

Before Helena could answer, dinner was announced. Immediately the curtain was pushed aside and he saw a woman standing in the shadow. Then Mrs. Penstable said: "Oh, Mr. Law, I want to introduce you to my daughter, Mrs. George Penstable." Mrs. George Penstable bowed slightly and gravely. Jeremy experienced a mounting excitement, for Mrs. George Penstable's hair was honey-coloured and her eyes hazel. "Mr. Law came this afternoon, Etta," Mrs. Penstable continued slowly. "Where have you been? You must have forgotten. I told you he was coming."

"I was in the garden," was her only answer. If she had forgotten she did not say so. Irritation touched Mrs. Penstable's face, but she was her smiling self again in a moment.

Jeremy sat at her right, and would have found it an easy pleasure to talk to her, except that his thoughts wandered continually to her daughter-in-law across the table. The latter devoted herself to her dinner with an almost masculine interest.

Dinner over, he believed he could arrange things more to his liking, but he found himself upon a sofa with Helena almost before he was in the drawing-room. Mrs. George Penstable drifted by him, with the two men who had sat by her at dinner. In her pale gown that seemed sometimes green and sometimes grey, and in its softness showed an intangible hint of lilac, she should certainly have reminded him of some small flower of spring; but passing, she turned her face full upon him, and again he thought her like her tiger lilies.

Somehow time passed. For Jeremy, each moment was more per-

verse than the one before. Three more people would have enabled him to free himself, but it is impossible to turn a girl over to her own brother. Suddenly, Mrs. George Penstable rose and came towards them. He read in her face that the sofa was to be again passed by. In desperation he stepped forward to say eagerly: "Won't you sing for us?" It was idiotic; the only accomplishment he knew she possessed was weeding.

She stopped, surprised, lifting her brows a little. Then turning to Mrs. Penstable, she said: "Mr. Law wishes me to sing." He had a curious impression that she was asking permission, but the cordial "Then do, my dear," dispelled it.

Simonetta sat down at the piano and sang:

When I am dying, lean over me tenderly, softly—
Stoop, as the yellow roses droop, In the wind from the South:
So I may wake, if there be an awakening,
Keep, what lulled me to sleep, The touch of your lips on my mouth.

Her voice was of unusual beauty, and she sang with ardent feeling. When the song ended her face was happier than Jeremy had seen it. Her hands had hardly slipped from the keys, and Jeremy was still thrilling with the passionate music, when Mrs. Penstable said: "It was charmingly done, Etta, but the song doesn't seem to me quite——" she hesitated. She spoke low, but Jeremy heard her plainly.

Her daughter-in-law's brows spelled irritation, but her voice was serenely polite. "Ladylike, perhaps?" she suggested.

"If you recognize so old-fashioned a word, yes. That was just what I meant."

"I hadn't thought of it, but undoubtedly it isn't. I won't sing it again."

Mrs. Penstable reddened and walked away. Her annoyance was evident. Her son from the other end of the room had watched her face and his wife's. Obviously disturbed, he came to the piano. His wife, still seated, raised her eyes to his face. Jeremy busied himself with a book on the table at his elbow, and politely turned his back, but he heard George Penstable's voice studiously low, painfully concerned: "Why will you do it, dear?"

The answer escaped even Jeremy's careful attention. George continued: "I hardly know myself what you do, but you irritate her as no one else does, and she isn't young any more. I'm sure you forget, or it wouldn't happen so often." Another strangled reply. George sighed. Jeremy thought he might now add himself to the not too pleasant family party, when Simonetta remarked in a plainly audible tone: "There's a moon, Mac. Let's go for a walk."

"But we can't, dear, with these people here," her husband objected.

"They'll never miss us. We'll just drift into the garden. Oh, take me, Mac. Some night I'll die at one of these devilish dinners, and you'll wish you'd been kind."

George Penstable laughed and capitulated. "Don't you want something around you?"

"I have this," she answered.

As they moved toward the French window Jeremy turned to look after them. Just at the sill George laid a silver scarf about her shoulders. She raised her head and smiled into his face.

The evening dragged through somehow for Jeremy. The guests left at last, and, good nights said, he found himself alone in his room. He felt a disinclination to sleep and sat by his window, watching the moonlit garden. Moonlight and the tiger-lily lady fired his mind. The room seemed close. He would go for a walk. An iron trellis aided his descent. Re-crossing the lawn, he followed the poplar-bordered road

that led down the hill to the left. The rustling of leaves on the lonely road rejoiced him, and he hoped that he might have it to himself, but almost at once he heard voices at the bottom of the hill. Wishing to avoid even a casual stroller, he withdrew under the poplars to wait until the owners of the voices had passed. After a moment, out of the shadows walked a man in evening dress and a woman with a gleam of silver about her shoulders. Jeremy started guiltily forward to confess the trellis and his solitary ramble, but almost at once he saw that George and his wife were well occupied, and without thought of sifting the shadows for errant guests. He shrank back against his poplar, for now they were near. Both were silent, but suddenly Simonetta seized George's arm, giving it a vicious little shake. He stopped.

"Then you don't care," she questioned, "if I go raving mad? It is nothing to you if I must end my life in a cell padded with cotton batting? When you come to see me at Christmas and on birthdays, the keepers will say that I come most regularly to meals, or that they come regularly to me, which is the same in the end, and that I haven't made an unladylike remark for a fortnight. Then you will say: 'Thank you, my good woman, for this gratifying report.'" The tone was intensely tragic, and her husband did not laugh. He put his arm around her, trying to draw her to his side. She pushed him away. "No lollipops," she said. "I must have something more substantial. You are sacrificing me for a notion. You admit I'm the greatest trial your mother has, and yet you force me to remain a permanent thorn in her flesh, for no reason on earth except that it's the custom for all good Penstable sons to live with their mothers after their fathers' deaths."

She was full in the moonlight, not twenty feet from Jeremy, and he wondered at the man who could stand so calmly resisting the misery in her face and voice.

"You know it's not that, Simonetta," he answered. "It would be hard for mother if we left her. She could never understand why. She believes she is making you perfectly happy."

"And since it must be hard for someone, it must be hard for me." Simonetta's voice was bitter. "This is your ultimatum, then, I understand. You owe everything to your mother, nothing to me. I am to endure till death releases me, one way or the other. I am to live two miles from my own adorable home. I am to know that it is empty, and that Uncle Peter is unquiet in his grave because the house he left us has no tenants but mice and spiders. In spirit I am to be homeless till she dies or I die." Simonetta's voice did not change. There was no note of hysteria in it. She looked full at her husband as she spoke, and it seemed to Jeremy that her mournful bitterness came from her heart.

"If we went abroad, Simonetta," George suggested miserably. "A trip through Holland in a motor-boat——"

He was interrupted fiercely. "A motor-boat, a doll baby, more lollipops. I am a woman grown, and I want a home of my own. I want to live in our own house. I never loved it more than I did to-night. Oh, Mac," her voice pleaded pitiably now, "take me home. I am homesick for the weedy, thorny garden. I want to sit in the fat chairs and read Uncle Peter's books. I want my tea out of the old Minton cups. I want to sleep in that funny room with the rosewood bed, and the polite ladies and gentlemen on the wallpaper. Think of having the home of your dreams, just two miles down the road, and to be without hope of living in it. I have been patient two years. Say it is enough, Mac; say it is enough, and that to-morrow we can go!" Again

she clasped her husband's arm, but this time with pleading hands.

There was anguish in George's voice when he answered her. "I can't do it, it doesn't seem right, though sometimes I think I want to do it even more than you do."

"Why, Mac, I didn't know you wanted to go at all!" Her surprise was evident.

George Penstable took her two hands in his and said: "Did you think that any man who might have you to himself would be happy with a compromise?"

Simonetta was silent for a long minute, then she smiled, and in the moonlight Jeremy could see that her smile was sad. "Think twice," she said, "before you refuse two people their heart's desire." Then she withdrew her hands and started up the hill. In silence her husband followed her. They disappeared over the crest.

It suddenly came to Jeremy that he had been eavesdropping. His interest in the tiger-lily lady was of so irresistible a quality that polite regrets died almost with their birth. An hour longer he sat musing upon his rock.

He overslept the next morning and barely escaped being late to breakfast. With one exception the family were in the breakfast-room when he arrived. The empty place at table was accepted without comment until, as they were rising, Mrs. Penstable remarked to her son: "I am sorry that Etta is late again."

Jeremy escaped to the garden somewhat sooner than decency allowed, and lost himself in the twisted paths as quickly as possible. As on the day before, he turned his steps to the bricked circle around the sundial.

The circle was empty. The lilies ablaze in the sun might have tempted anyone to linger, but Jeremy strode on in aimless petulance. He arrived with directness at the kitchen-garden, to find among the cabbages the lady he had sought among the lilies. She was regarding them seriously, her hands clasped behind her. The sun beat full upon the uncovered honey-coloured hair, and Jeremy could see signs of many suns upon the clear brown of Simonetta's skin. From a man who rather prided himself upon his morning ill-temper, Jeremy's "Good morning" was astonishingly cordial. The lady turned without apparent surprise, and answered without apparent pleasure. She seemed to expect him to pass on, but he was not easily discouraged.

"I was sorry to miss you at breakfast. Perhaps if I had not been so virtuously on time we might have met."

"If you mean I was late," said Simonetta, "I wasn't. I don't come to breakfast."

"Mrs. Penstable said——" began Jeremy stupidly.

"She always does," broke in the other. "That is one of the polite fictions that increase the charm of family life. My place is always laid, I never come, and my lateness is regretted. It's like being marked both absent and tardy at school."

Jeremy was embarrassed. The conversation overheard the night before enabled him to read into this even more than was said, and Mrs. Penstable made herself pretty clear to begin with.

He changed the subject. "Those red cabbages look well, and they're coming on, too."

"They're good cooked with chestnuts. I've taught the cook to do it, but Mrs. Penstable says it isn't the kind of thing she likes on her table."

Again Jeremy's words seemed to lead directly to family troubles. He suddenly felt Mrs. George Penstable's silences to be more agreeable than her conversation. She started to walk away, and perversely he determined to see more of her. He would try again. "I know it's absurd," he began, "but you remind me of something or someone. Whenever I am with you, I am haunted

by an analogy that won't come home to roost."

"That's a delirious thought," said Simonetta. "I'd hate to be haunted by anything that wouldn't roost."

Jeremy laughed. "My ideas were a bit mixed, but my interest was serious," he protested. "You stir my mind till it flutters, you recall something vaguely, and it's gone again. It's like the rhythm of a poem without the words."

"If you could have held off until to-night you would have made a record," the lady observed.

"A record?" Jeremy felt jolted by her abruptness.

"My husband is the only man who ever knew me twenty-four hours without telling me that."

"Was that why you married him?" was Jeremy's not too polite answer. He could have left Mrs. George Penstable with pleasure at that moment.

"That was one reason." And she fell into silence again.

At last Jeremy's curiosity got the better of his temper and he tried again. "Do they tell you in the end what it is you remind them of?"

"Remind whom of?" asked Simonetta absently. She had evidently forgotten her companion completely. "Oh, never!" she recalled herself. "No, mostly the analogies always haunt and never roost. It's very trying."

"Has no one ever got it yet?" Jeremy persevered.

"Yes, there was an old man who said once I was like a desert mirage."

"And are you?"

"I don't know. How could I? Mirages as I understand them are in the traveller's mind. You can give me your opinion when you go." She smiled as she spoke, but Jeremy was chilled. "When you go." It was casual and could be nothing more. He had seen her and he must go, and he could not forget her. He knew now that he never could. Her careless words had made his life a desert. All in a moment he was a traveller thereon, weary and thirsty unto death.

He looked at Simonetta. He could see she was drifting away from him again. "Come back," he said. "I am more lonely than you know." He spoke lightly, not daring to rush in.

"That's good," said Simonetta with sudden briskness, "for I hear company coming for you. Good-bye." She dipped under the limbs of a low-hanging tree, walked round the corner of a wall, and was gone.

It was the fourth day of his visit that he came down to dinner a little early, and found Simonetta alone in the drawing-room. He lost no time in seizing his opportunity.

"Come out of doors," he said. "There is almost half an hour before dinner."

"If you like," she answered.

It seemed the moment to say a thousand things, and he dared not speak at all. In silence they crossed the garden, to sit upon a bench in the brick-paved circle where he had seen her first. She leaned back, her hands clasped behind her head.

Jeremy felt choked by his emotion. Passion had waited thirty-five years before laying hold of him, and he knew no more how to meet it than a youth in love for the first time. He cherished no hopes; before him lay nothing but the desert and death, and this in spite of the fact that he was alone in the twilight with the lady of his dreams, who was obviously unhappy and in need of comfort.

"Do you believe," Simonetta suddenly asked, "that there are ever tangles in our lives that can't be straightened out?"

"No," Jeremy answered, "I don't. Do you?"

"I never used to, but I think I am getting old, for problems I could have settled at sixteen with my hands tied behind my back I can't cope with at all at twenty-six."

"It's a sign of advancing years, undoubtedly," he agreed, and laughed a little. "That hideous

open-mindedness creeps upon you until death itself is a relief."

"I thought people liked to be open-minded," said Simonetta.

"They like to be thought so; but surely no one would like to see every side of every question, thereby never getting his mind made up, when he might be settling things gaily with his hands tied behind his back, as you put it."

"There's a new charm for my vanished youth to flaunt," said Simonetta. "It had enough before. But to go back: I am not sixteen any more, and your remarks seem to imply that in later life there are *impasses*. I have always thought cold reason could cut any knot."

"There's nothing in cold reason, Mrs. Penstable. Since we speak of years, mine will soon be thirty-six, and I cast aside cold reason a long time ago."

"What takes it place with you?"

"There is a still, small voice," Jeremy answered promptly.

"Your conscience?"

Jeremy shook his head. "I'd scarcely credit myself with such a thing," he declared. "More likely it's my ego. But in following this voice, I believe I am fulfilling my destiny, which seems to me all that really matters."

"You sound as if you were saying that you do what you like. Is that what you mean?"

"In all matters of moment, yes. In small matters no civilized person pleases himself. But when I have wanted a thing supremely, up to date I have always taken it. You observe I put it modestly. I may find an apple that hangs too high."

"I hope you never will," said Simonetta cordially. "It would upset your destiny awfully, I should think, if your ego should ever come a cropper."

"It would," Jeremy answered. Again silence fell upon them. He wondered at their foolish talk. Close at their sides he seemed to hear two fiercely panting creatures —her misery and his love.

The silence was long, and again she broke it. "We shall be late for dinner. Do you mind?"

"I'd be late for the great Last Day to talk with you."

"It would be lucky for you if you missed it entirely, I should think," said Simonetta grimly.

Jeremy laughed. "I'm glad you think so well of me. Have you formed this opinion because of my guileless remarks about the voice of my ego?"

"What else? If a Congo chieftain formulated his philosophy of life, it would be, I think, not unlike yours."

"I doubt if I am unusual," Jeremy defended. "Don't you do the thing you want to do supremely, when you can?"

"I always have, yes," assented Simonetta. "But it happens that I never before wanted to do anything I thought was really wrong."

Her unconscious word "before" said more than she meant to. She rose instantly. "We must go in; I think it is getting damp. Dinner is probably over. I don't see how you dared do it."

"I wanted to supremely."

Nothing more was said till, just as they were entering the house, Jeremy asked her: "Why were you named Simonetta?"

"A notion of my father's. He was mad about Italy, and the most irrational man alive."

That night Simonetta sang at Jeremy's request. With perfect joyousness, as if there were no trouble in the world, she sang two Neapolitan street songs, infinitely, charmingly gay. Jeremy, having once spent a year in Naples, understood very fairly the racy vulgarity of the words. Mrs. Penstable, who read her Dante in Italian, said "Charming, my dear, charming," when the songs ended.

The next day and the day after were desolate for Jeremy. Afterwards he could not recall how he had spent them.

The third day, neither George nor

Summer and Simonetta

Simonetta was at luncheon. Mrs. Penstable seemed upset by her son's absence. Simonetta was so careless of meal hours that her absence never caused surprise, but George's punctuality was impressive.

No one had the slightest idea of their whereabouts. Simonetta had not been seen at all that day except by Annie, one of the maids, who said she had had coffee and rolls at seven that morning on the west terrace. George had left the house at eleven, driving his own car.

At three o'clock Mrs. Penstable, much distressed, went to her room, complaining of headache. Helena went with her.

Jeremy was unutterably thankful to be left to himself. He carried a book into the garden, but made no pretence of reading. In five minutes he was walking along the road of his midnight ramble. His instinct told him that somewhere along the road he would find Simonetta.

About a mile from the house he heard a car coming, and as he stepped to the side of the road, George Penstable shot by him in a cloud of dust. He gave no sign of having seen Jeremy.

Jeremy hurried on, more impatient than ever to reach Simonetta. He knew he should find her. A week in the Penstable household had taught him that George could be moved as he had seen him by no one but his wife. Somewhere along this road Jeremy felt sure that there had been a meeting and a clash of wills, and that sitting quiet in her despair he should find Simonetta.

And so he did find her. He turned in at the gate of a rambling old house set well back among its trees at the right of the road. In its obvious desertion, Jeremy knew it instantly for the house that had been willed to George and his wife, to prove in the end, not a source of happiness, but of endless contention.

At the side of the house he followed a walk piled with drifted leaves from the silver poplars. He opened a gate in an ivy-coloured wall and found himself in a small enclosed garden overgrown with roses. The air was almost cloyingly sweet with them. The little garden seemed warm and passionate. The place took possession of Jeremy. His heart beat faster, and for a moment he forgot Simonetta. Then he saw her upon an old marble seat at the farther end of the garden. She was sitting quiet in the full sunshine, her head uncovered and her hands listless in her lap. Not even the sound of the gate in the intense stillness seemed to reach her in her withdrawal. She did not raise her eyes until Jeremy stood directly in front of her. Then she started a little, and stood up. She neither smiled nor spoke. She was pale and her under-lip twitched oddly. Jeremy could see that she was fighting for her self-control. In his sudden coming he had forced himself into the inner places of her life. He knew that she was struggling to replace the barriers. Too startled and shaken to succeed, she sank back upon the bench and shook her head despairingly, making at the same time a hopeless little gesture with her hands, a pathetic little gesture which seemed to say: "I have tried to hide my hurt from you, but I cannot. I am ashamed, but you may look if you will."

Jeremy, seeing her crushed by misery, longed to comfort her in his arms; but he felt that he was daring a great deal when he simply seated himself beside her.

There seemed nothing to say. Much as he knew her troubles, it was not of her telling. At last she said: "My apple hung too high." She spoke wearily. Her emotion seemed to have died away.

"Your apple?" he questioned stupidly.

"The thing I wanted supremely," she explained. Then returning to her figure: "I did my best to reach it, and I fell. I am bruised from my fall. When you found me, I was trying to pull myself together."

"But, perhaps," he suggested, "if it is only a fall, and the apple still hangs upon the tree, you might try again."

"No, I shall never try again. I did my best, and I have failed." Her hands clasped themselves fiercely in her lap, and her face was stony with misery.

"Don't say that," Jeremy begged her. "Don't ever say that. Your courage will come back."

"I have courage enough. It isn't that; but I have quarrelled with my husband. He has left me. I said things he will never forgive. I don't know that I want him to. I suppose he will come back, because it is his mother's house, but when he does I shall not be there."

It was Jeremy's hour, and he recognized it as such, but the realization dizzied him. He almost let it pass. Then he, too, tried for what he wanted supremely. He turned and took Simonetta's hand.

"I love you," he said. "Yesterday I would not have told you, but today the world has gone so wrong with you, I must say it. I love you, and I'm truly sorry for you. Perhaps there is something I can do to make it a little easier."

She looked up, seemingly startled. She searched his face long and with a serious intenseness. "You might," she spoke almost breathlessly, "make it a little easier." Colour rose in her cheeks.

He leaned toward her. "Tell me," he said.

She turned to face him fully. "Will you," she asked with her singular calmness, "take me away with you?"

He drew back. A wave of consternation swept him. He loved her. He had no wish to smirch her life. She was beside herself.

Simonetta, watching him, laughed suddenly her gay, indifferent laugh. "Oh, well," she said, "I won't hold you to an offer so rashly made."

Jeremy flushed. "I said nothing I do not mean completely and entirely. I love you and I want you. I would be more happy to take you away than I could ever tell you. But you are not yourself. I cannot let you topple your whole life over in a moment of excitement."

Simonetta laid her hand upon his arm. "But that's it," she said. "That's what I want. When it's toppled over I can never come back here. This will be obliterated, wiped out. That is all I want now. If you care to be used as a way to freedom, and yet——" she hesitated, "that is asking a great deal."

"It is indeed," he answered somewhat ruefully. "I love you more than you know."

"No," she said. "You are mistaken. I know. You will, I hope, believe me when I say that I never for one moment tried to make you love me. I am not too good, but since you have been here I have been too miserable."

"I do you full justice. You've barely noticed me."

"You're mistaken again," she answered. "I have liked you a lot from the first. If it weren't for this cursed thing in me that makes it impossible for any man to be my friend, I would have enjoyed your friendship." She sighed.

"You recognize your limitations?"

"If I didn't I should be a fool, and I was never that. But it made no difference, really, in this case, for the cursed thing is in you too; and you never, in a thousand years, could be the friend of any woman."

"You seem to feel sure."

"Absolutely."

"What would happen if I tried?"

"The woman would love you to distraction in the first hour and a half, and would drown herself within the week."

"But if I returned this distracted love?"

"You wouldn't. You will never want any apple but the one that hangs too high."

"You are unfair. I will show you. I can make you love me. Only

let me try." His voice and face pleaded eloquently.

Simonetta rose to her feet. "Try, then," she said; "only, take me away from here."

After a sleepless night passed upon a lumpy bed of a wretched country hotel, George Penstable returned to his mother's house about ten o'clock of the following morning. He went directly to the rooms set aside for himself and his wife. Stepping into the sitting-room he came face to face with his mother. She was dressed for the street, and her face was grey and stricken. In her hand was a letter. The sight of her son seemed to frighten her. She put the letter hastily behind her.

"What is it, mother? What is wrong? Where is Simonetta? Is she ill?"

Mrs. Penstable turned away as if her son's face were more than she could bear. "I cannot tell you. I cannot," she said. "Mother's little boy, mother's poor little boy!" The letter fell from her limp hand. George stooped to pick it up.

"It's your letter, dear," she continued, choking; "I was so worried I opened it."

It was in Simonetta's handwriting, and was painfully brief:

Mac:

I am going away with Jeremy Law. He has undertaken to make me forget. I trust he may succeed. I wish you equal success. It has all been a horrid waste of life, hasn't it?

Simonetta.

George folded the letter, putting it carefully in his pocket, and turned toward the door.

"Where are you going?" Mrs. Penstable asked.

"I am going to find her, mother."

His face told her little. Unhappiness looked from his eyes, but his long night of black thoughts may have hardened him to bear the blow.

"I am going with you, George," his mother said.

"I would rather you didn't, mother."

"I must. I can't endure it here."

"Well——" he assented grudgingly, and held the door open for her. Helping her into the car still standing at the curb, he turned down the road to the south.

"Where are you going?" his mother asked.

"To London."

"And when you get there?"

"To the biggest and noisiest hotels there are, one after the other."

It seemed he had not known and loved her so long for nothing, for at one o'clock, as they entered the lobby of the third hotel on George's list, they came upon Simonetta, alone on a settee in a corner, watching the people. Seeing her husband she grew white. Then she saw his mother, and a little colour returned to her face.

George bent towards her. "Where is Jeremy Law?" he asked.

Simonetta set her lips grimly, and her colour deepened. Her eyes and voice were defiant.

"He is not here just now," she answered.

"Then take us to your room. I must talk to you."

Without a word, Simonetta led them to the lift. In silence they made their way to the door that she unlocked. Once inside, Mrs. Penstable sank into a chair. Simonetta stood facing her husband. George looked about him with a kind of anguished reluctance. Upon the dresser were Simonetta's ivory brushes, and across a chair the soft, white silk robe, embroidered in white and silver, which he had given her on her birthday two months before. At sight of these intimacies his mouth contracted with misery.

"Pack your things, Simonetta," he said. "I have come to take you home."

His wife gazed at him as if she could not believe her ears.

"I can't go back," she said. "You can't want me back."

"I do. I want you more than ever. I have been an obstinate fool.

Come home with me and I will show you how sorry I am."

"You cannot mean this, Mac. Think what you are saying," Simonetta urged.

"I have had three hours to think in, since I found your note. I want you. I love you. Get your things together. We will say what must be said later."

They had forgotten Mrs. Penstable, who sat gaspingly incredulous of her son's attitude. Now she rose in righteous indignation.

"George, you must be mad. You cannot intend to forgive this woman."

"If she will forgive me, it will be enough."

"You mean you are going to take her back as your wife?"

"If she will come—yes."

"I have but one more thing to say, then. Take her where you like, but it shall not be to my house. That door is closed to her forever. I have your sister to think of. If you are foolish enough to trust your happiness a second time——"

"That's enough," her son interrupted. "This matter is between Simonetta and me. We will go to our own house. Don't ever speak to me of this again."

It seemed to George that at his words a light of triumph blazed for a moment in Simonetta's eyes, but he dismissed the thought as unworthy of them both. Mrs. Penstable was scarlet with anger. She moved toward the door.

"Shan't I drive you home, mother?" her son asked courteously.

"Thank you, no. I will take the train."

Simonetta hastily packed her suitcase, and insisted upon paying her own bill. Within ten minutes they were in the car and driving towards the country and the house that Peter Penstable had left them. Not a word of Jeremy had passed between them since George's first question.

The long afternoon passed in almost unbroken silence. It was after four when George unlocked the door of their home. The long hall opening upon the rose garden at the back seemed cool and dim. Simonetta stepped into it and looked about her with happy eyes. "It's our home, Mac," she said. "How beautiful it is."

George did not seem to share her joy. He followed her into the library, sinking into the big chair which stood before the writing-table. Simonetta flew about opening the casement windows. She could not wait, but left George quiet in his chair and hurried off in her rejoicing to open other rooms.

It was ten minutes before she came back. George was still in the big chair, but leaning forward, his elbows on the table and his face hidden in his hands. As Simonetta looked at the bent head her eyes filled with tears. She knelt at his side, and leaned against his arm.

"Dear," she said, "my dear! Oh! God will have to let me have eternity, for I can't possibly love you enough in one little lifetime."

He turned from the table and gathered her into his arms, kissing her hair. With her face pressed against his coat, she could hear the heavy thumping of his heart. Suddenly he pushed her away and stood up. Still kneeling, she raised her eyes to his face and grew pale at the change she saw. There was no love there, only misery and anger. He spoke, but more as if to himself than to her. "I can't," he said. "I can't. I have tried and I can't." Then he turned upon Simonetta. "I have got to leave you. You can't stay here alone. Put on your hat again."

Simonetta sprang up and grasped his arm. "Why must you leave me? Where are you going?" she asked.

"Get your hat. I have no time to talk."

"Answer me, Mac. Where are you going?"

He shook off her hand. "I am going to find Jeremy Law. The world is not big enough to hold us both."

Simonetta moved in front of him

as if to bar his way to the door, and raised her hands to his shoulders.

"It's plenty big enough. Don't be a goose. I have not set eyes on him since I left your mother's house yesterday afternoon."

"Don't try to stop me with lies, Simonetta. We have enough to forget." His voice was grim.

"Have I ever lied to you, Mac? I meant to go. I wrote the note, and packed and left the house, and all the time I meant to. I went through the garden and across the South Pasture. I was to meet him at the Willows Station in time for the six o'clock train, but, somehow, I changed my mind. I think I must have wanted to be a little surer that I was off with the old love." Her husband flinched as if she had struck him, but her eyes fixed upon his face laughed a little at his discomfiture. She hurried on. "You see, it was as well that I did. The old love has proved himself to be a person of great force of character."

"Hush, Simonetta," George interrupted. "This is no time for nonsense. I have endured enough. Where did you go after you had changed your mind?"

"I sat in the pasture with a beautiful cow for company. I am afraid of cows, so we stayed on opposite sides of the fence, and I told her all about it. Hereafter I shall never make a confidant of anyone else. So serene, so sane! They knock policemen hollow! Then I took a late train to town. Don't look at me like that. Don't! I'm sorry. I meant to tell you in a little while. But it was so beautiful to be forgiven for something I hadn't done. I don't know that that ever happened to me before," she ended reflectively.

"Will you tell me why you didn't explain this to my mother?"

"It would have made such an anti-climax for her beautiful speech, and, besides, she might have taken me to her bosom again."

Simonetta's words were brazen, but if her husband had looked at her face he would have seen that her lips were trembling. But he turned from her, the very bend of his head a reproach. "Oh, Simonetta!" he said, and he sank down in the big chair again and flung himself forward upon the writing-table, his face hidden in his arms. In a moment, Simonetta realized with a feeling of terror that he was crying. This was outside her knowledge of her husband. Watching him, she wept herself. A long moment passed before she gathered her courage together. Then he felt her arms around him, and her cheek against his hair.

"Dear," she whispered, "I am sorrier, maybe, than I seem."

She waited, and while she waited her heart seemed to grow cold with fright. It was a new experience, and one that she was never to forget. At last her husband raised his head from the table and drew her down into his arms.

It was an hour later that George said suddenly: "It doesn't seem to have occurred to you, Simonetta, that it was a little hard on Jeremy simply to be left to cool his heels on the station platform."

"You misjudge me, Mac. In this one particular I behaved strikingly like a perfect lady. I sent him a note by Mrs. Lawson's boy, Bill."

"Oh, Simonetta, you didn't commit——"

"Myself on paper?" she interrupted promptly. "No, I did not. I expressed my fervid sentiments in two bars of music," and she hummed cheerfully: "*La Donna e mobile.*"

George laughed in spite of himself.

"Have you no heart at all?" he asked.

"Only one, my dear, and that has been in your possession for some five years now. I did not deceive the unhappy young man in regard to this matter of the heart. It was all clear from the beginning."

And again George said: "Oh, Simonetta!"

DALE WEED.

Hate

By George Allan England and Edward J. Penney

"He faced her a moment in silence, steadying himself, with one corded hand on the door-jamb. She drew back a little, her own hand going to her breast defensively.

"Their drought of words—man and wife, who now for the first time in four years were meeting—had an eloquence beyond all speech."

I

A STRANGE SHIP'S COMPANY

LOOKS like the Old Man was caught in a nor'-easter, by the way he's rousin' things round, down there," judged Ezra Morris, mate of the *Saucy Lass*. He squinted curiously through the half-open skylight in the cabin. From below sounded language that shocked even Ezra. Then dishes rattled, as a bone-hard fist thumped the table.

"By the law clink! When he gets to bustin' up the crockery ware——!" Ezra shook a disapproving head, not without apprehension. Very far from a coward was Ezra, but Captain Weston Castleman inspired in him at least a sense of caution. "I've sailed a good many few v'yages wid him, but by crook! I niver seen him in no such a fruz. Somethin' sarnly got the cap'n on his beam-ends this time. I wonder——"

"Mate!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" And in some trepidation Ezra went below to the cabin, where Castleman was raging like a pent beast.

As the mate stepped out from the foot of the companion ladder, the captain thrust a crumpled sheet of paper into his hairy, tattooed hand.

"Hallo, sir, what's this?"

"Letter, o' course! Blind, are you? Read the cursed thing!"

Ezra puckered his brows by the dim light, then his lips.

"Wheeooo!" he whistled.

"A whale of a fine proposition, that!" snarled the cap'n. "Women, aboard o' this one! Women, coming *here!*"

"Well——" And Ezra shrugged, as he handed back the letter. "We can manage it, sir. We got three staterooms we don't use, ain't we? Put the women there, eh?"

"I've sworn never to let one o' the she-cats aboard any vessel I'm skippering. Look ye, Morris, if one of 'em was drifting in an open boat, I'd let her perish before I'd put a hand to saving her!"

Castleman's eye glinted with an ugly gleam. His trip-hammer fists tautened.

"Women!" He bit out the word, and sneered.

Ezra, a bit nonplussed, stood there worrying at his beard.

"They sarnly got the Old Man on the lee quarter," he was realizing. He added, aloud: "Well, sir, if ye thinks ye can outsail the conditions o' y'r contract wid the gov'ment, ye needn't take 'em at all."

"Ah, *now* you're getting your sea-legs, Ezra!" The captain's tone grew milder. "That's just where I'm taken abaft. I was fool enough to put my name to a contract, and if I sail without the women I collide with one of the clauses. Know what the penalty'd like to be?"

"Why, sir, no."

"Seizure o' the *Saucy Lass*, and a government hotel for me."

"Holy haddock! That's a wonnerful heavy squall of a forfeit, cap'n!"

"Yes; but it'd come to that if the government pushed hard enough—and it would, too. Because, d'you see, these women are volunteer nurses for the Indian Harbour hospital. They're going down to fight some epidemic or other."

"Humph!" And Ezra fished for his plug of dark-cake. How could he navi-

gate a straight course of thought without the weed?

Castleman turned, dropped into his chair by the cabin table, and struck that table a resounding whack. Even the dim light revealed the man as perhaps thirty-five, sculpturally muscled under his blue "gansey," with bull-throated strength, finely swept curve of jaw, the keenest of blue eyes and a ruck of jetty hair. A strong Celtic strain must have pulsed in those full arteries, to dower him with such a combination.

"Know what the supplies are, we're loading here in St. John's?" he demanded. "I'll gamble you don't. They're for relief, down North. The government got a wireless for grub and nurses, and now—well, we've got to carry both."

"Then, accordin' to that letter an' the statootes, the women has to go?"

"Darn 'em, yes! But by the mighty typhoon, there's going to be no picnic! I'm breaking all my principles, Ezra. Somebody's going to pay for it! We need a crew. I'm going to sign 'em on, to-night."

"If ye don't mind me suggestin', cap'n, I knows a couple o' good men."

"*Good* men aren't wanted on this one! The *Saucy Lass* is going to sail with One-eye Harry, Sweden Mickey, Chink Conway and—"

"Lawks, cap'n! Them's the worst scum as ever struck into Newf'un'land!" The mate's tobacco-maculated jaw drooped. "They'd cut a throat as easy as they'd reef a fores'l!"

"I know all about 'em, Ezra, and the others I'm getting." The captain laughed maliciously. "Some rare birds! There's going to be Billy Brass, Tom Hawk and Italy Dick. Dick just got out yesterday, after doing three years. Fun? You wait and see!"

"Oh, lor'!" groaned Ezra.

And in a sort of daze he stood there looking at his captain. Bucko and man-handler Castleman was, if any ever trod in jack-boots. In socks he exceeded six feet two, and weighed above fifteen stone. No two glances were necessary to gauge his almost gorilla strength. His muscles, tendons, sinews all were those of a man who, at sea, was a law unto himself. Few were the foremast-hands, and far between, who dared talk back at him; and even those who once dared, never tried it twice.

"Morris!"

"Sir?"

"I'll attend to the crew. We ought to be sailing in a couple of days. You look after the women when they come. I mayn't be here. That's all, now."

"As you say, sir." And dolefully shaking his head, Ezra returned on deck. Like one in a dream he walked forward to the fore-hatch. A loose fore-tops'l-halyard needed coiling. Mechanically he looped it over the belaying-pin.

"What in the divil's name's come over him, now?" he muttered, and spat brown over the rail. "A cut-throat gang like that, an' three women aburd! I'm grantin' he's the Old B'y's real limb, but he never had no such swarm of unholy angels to deal wid!"

He leaned patched elbows on the rail, looked shoreward, and sighed:

"Ezra, me son, I'm thinkin' y're an omadhaun. By the lovely ratline, I wish I was off o' this one! Ah, well, though, to the glory-hole wid all of 'em! It's the Old Man's funeral; he's the skip, an' by the hunkydory I'm mate, an' stickin' by him. We may get to Indian Harbour an' back, an' then again, may not. An' if not—well, after all, what odds? . . ."

At noon of the second day thereafter the *Saucy Lass* lay in the stream with hatches battened, and riding to a starboard anchor. A 200-ton, two-mast tops'l schooner, beautifully modelled, she had—according to her mate: "Everythin' to suit a sailor's fancy, cl'ar of a decent crew."

In her fo'e'stle were six of the most unruly, treacherous deepwater rats that ever stood a watch or reefed a mains'l.

"The cap'n, he must ha' got a loan of 'em from the divil," bosun Moses Stirge confided to Ezra after he had seen them come aboard. "An' that there Coke Mason, in the galley, as is goin' to sling scouse an' duff fer we, he ain't much better. A crool, hard lot, forrard, this one's got!"

Seven of them there were, as against only three of the aft-gang—cap'n, mate and bose—who quartered in the cabin. Of this trio, only the Old Man was a fighter. Ezra had already passed fifty-five; a weather-bitten, storm-swept and grizzled sea-dog, as capable as any afloat, and knowing the ropes with the best, but too old to be a man-mauler. He had sailed all the Seven Seas in "everythin' from a punt to a full-rigged," as he often boasted. Stern-faced for the most part, bearded and dour, yet sometimes he beamed a smile like sun after tempest.

By George Allan England and Edward J. Penney

Bosun Stirge was a bit younger, wore a yellow moustache and shaved in all weathers. A thorough-going sailor, he; taciturn, self-contained, stout-fisted. In any trouble, the Old Man could count on him—as on Morris—to the very whiskers of death. Loyal, yes, but against seven cut-throats——?

Now he and Ezra were standing on the poop deck, Stirge sucking at a cutty, Ezra ruminating his quid. The mate's elbows rested on the rail as he surveyed the vessel. A good seaman's pride revealed itself in his eyes that lingered a moment on the clewed sails, then dropped to the main deck.

"She's a good un, this here," he judged.

"None better," Stirge agreed.

"Got a rare lot o' dogs' whelps, forrard, though."

Stirge smokily grunted. That grunt discouraged conversation. Ezra peered uneasily shoreward. This delay was chafing him. Out beyond The Notch a steady sou'-west breeze was kicking up a heart-enlivening sea. July sun glinted on waters of the bluest. Gulls teetered plaintively over the harbour, questing gurry. Newfoundland was indulging in the unusual luxury of a perfect day. The mate fidgeted to be away. Why the devil and all didn't Castleman come aboard, up-anchor and away?

"She's a good un," Ezra repeated, his exultation at having the smartest, trimmest schooner in the island under his feet overcoming his anxiety about the ruffians in the fo'c'stle. He had sailed before in the *Saucy Lass*. He had seen her tapering sticks bend to a full canvas spread, her bow cleave "the pure drop"; had seen her rise to the smoking billows and ride down the fleeing surges with easy grace that thrilled, enraptured. Soon now she would waken, become a thing of life. The pride of Ezra's heart welled forth:

"Yes, old gal, ye could take a handicap wid the best of 'em! We could take the stays'ls an' flyin'-jib off ye, and ye'd show 'em a clean pair o' heels in any weather!"

A voice broke in—a voice not Stirge's:

"I reckon ye're right, mate. She's the finest ever *I* seen. A wonnerful——"

"Who give *you* orders to be on this here deck?" Ezra demanded, whirling on the huge and ugly bulk of Sweden Mickey.

"Who? Nobody! But I kind o' thought, sir, as this here's only a coaster, deep-sea rules didn't go."

"Thought, eh? Le' me tell you, your thoughts is too far aft! You'll find deep-sea rules an' deep-sea men, too, is runnin' this un. Get forrard, an' stand by!"

Anger gleamed in Sweden's crafty eye. Well enough he knew common-hands were allowed on the poop only as duty demanded; but a weak junior officer usually relaxed when the skipper was ashore. Sweden had just found out Ezra was the tough old breed.

He slouched down the few steps to the main deck, and shambled off forward. One-eye Harry was loafing near the throat-halyards.

"Hell's bells!" growled Sweden. "Look a' here, One-eye, *this* ain't no coaster!"

"How's that?"

"I thought the mate'd like to chin-wag wid one o' we. But he huv me forrard. Deep-sea rules is stowed aburd o' this un. Things ain't goin' to be so easy as——"

"Say, Sweden!" And One-eye blinked the sole optic that had bestowed his name. "Ye took the mate fer a guffy. He ain't! Nayther's the skip. We got to work careful, or——"

"Or what, me son?"

"Or we'm liable to get fired ashore alang o' them Labrador Injuns. An' if we did, we'd bide there till we rotted—'cause who'd take us off, as knowed us? Go easy wid things, first-alang. We ain't got no circus, this time!"

Sweden growled an unexpurgated word.

"I've downed two or t'ree skippers in me time," One-eye continued, out of the corner of his gash-like mouth, "but I hears Cap'n Wes' is diff'rent. I knows when I can run a ship an' when I can't, you bet y'r jib-halyards! We got to lay low, b'y, till we gets our bearin's. If we has a come-to wid Wes', an' don't make good——"

"I ain't afeard o' nothin' on four legs, ner two!"

"Ah, but ye niver been up aginst him! Ye'll be out o' y'r reck'nin' if ye thinks he's goin' to be a sweet breeze, count o' bein' women aburd. A cabinful of Angel Gabriels wouldn't kipp un from hangin' a man to the yard-arm if he wanted to!"

"Hmm! I 'spects he's goin' to learn a thing or two, this v'yage, an'——"

"Forrard, there!" old Ezra's voice rang through their dog-growlings. "Stand by fer orders!"

Aft, they saw the captain getting

aboard from a launch. He was in shirt-sleeves; and these, rolled up, exposed tanned arms that would have inspired respect in any port. Tight-belted black trousers and a black peaked cap, a-tilt on that massive head, gave him a brisk, formidable look.

Once over the rail, he walked to the poop rail and swept his men with that ice-blue glance of his. Sweden Mickey and One-eye straightened up a bit; stood to attention. Out of the fo'c'stle shuffled the others, whiskery, bleared uncouth.

"Morris!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Everything ready?"

"'Tis so, sir."

"Women below?"

"Sure, they was, sir. But here's two of 'em now." Ezra gestured at the cabin door. "The other one, I reckon she's in her state-room."

Castleman, with hardly a glance at the nurses—seeing them only as a distasteful feminine blur in the doorway—brusquely ordered:

"We're setting sail. Get below, out o' the way, till it's safe for you on deck!"

They vanished, a bit startled, fluttered by such cavalier compulsion. The skipper shouted:

"Man the windlass!"

Ezra hurried to the fo'c'stle-head. With eyes keen for every move, Weston watched his hang-dog crew.

"Anchor's up, sir!" called Ezra.

"Run up the jib!"

Tom Hawk and Chink Conway took on the jib-halyards. As the schooner paid off, the captain commanded:

"Sheet home the lower tops'l, square the yards an' cat the anchor!"

The harbour breeze filled the topsail, and the *Saucy Lass* began to move towards Chain Rock, at the harbour's mouth.

"Anchor's catted, sir."

"Hoist away the upper tops'l!"

The men took their positions with alacrity. The ring of those crisp commands spurred them to precision and speed.

"Ready to set the fores'l!"

Sweden and Italy Dick jumped to the foretopmast-staysail halyards, instead of the fore-throat.

"What d'you sons o' sea-cooks think you're hoisting?" roared the skipper. "If you don't know the fore-throat from the foretopm'st-stays'l, you'll learn before I'm through with you!"

The doubling of his fists meant mischief. He started for the break of the poop. One-eye Harry, who had been coiling the topsail halyards, feared for his friends, and sprang towards the fore-throat.

"You get back there, One-eye!" shouted the skipper, purpling. "No man does another's work aboard o' this one! Jump to it!"

With mumbled blasphemies Sweden and Italy Dick seized the halyards and hove with a will—the will of fear.

"I'll get the howlin' dog afore I'm troo!" growled Sweden.

"Hold y'r head," Dick whispered. "Nothin' to be gained by any rookery, just yet!"

Under foresail, topsail and jib, the *Saucy Lass* gathered speed. Fish-flakes drew away, fishermen's houses on stilts receded. Cabot Tower loomed immensely high to port. The vessel drew abreast The Battery. Awesome black cliffs opened, beyond which the ocean gleamed invitingly. Already the schooner was beginning to make her manners to old Atlantic.

With a broil of white water under her stem, she cut seaward through the Narrows. Behind her, St. John's wharves and hills faded. Out into the wild, free vastness she surged, as a caged gull might break for liberty.

Now, as Newfoundland's iron crags fell astern, Castleman looked aloft, toward the yards.

"Man aloft to overhaul the hunts and clewlines!"

One-eye clambered up the starboard ratlines. When he had gone far enough, Wes ordered:

"Loosen the to'garns'l!" This was set and sheeted home. "Take the gaskets off the maintopm'st-stays'l and mainto'galns'l before you come down!"

Every command brought instant obedience.

Thus in a few minutes the *Saucy Lass* was dressed off. As each additional sail caught the spanking breeze, she took more life. Under stiffening canvas her bow cut the surges like a butcher's cleaver.

Though hard, tough and blackened in heart and body, the men were thorough sailors. They knew their work, but preferred to slobber it. Nothing like that, here! Work; yes, they were in for a spell of work—unless—but who could tell what a few days might not bring forth?

As they watched the schooner's swift

and buoyant ease, they could not suppress a little admiration.

"This one's a clipper, Sweden!"

"Sarnly is, One-eye!"

"Got a good stick on her, now. I'm sayin'," added Italy Dick. "If this wind holds, we'll be down north in a week."

At this, Sweden cast a meaning glance towards One-eye, who answered with a grin and an offside wink.

"Sometimes wessels gets to where they'm goin' fer," philosophized One-eye, in an impersonal way, "an' then agin, sometimes they don't. All dependin' on quite a number o' things."

"Righto!" assented Sweden, and began whistling.

"Lay off, there!" bade Chink Conway. "Ain't you got narr pick o' brains? Whistlin' on deck! Want geels o' wind as'll pile this un ashore som'eres?"

"Layve un whistle, b'y," said Billy Brass. "*He* ain't handy to the main-m'st, so it can't do no harm."

Sweden laughed.

"One geel more or less, I don't 'low it'll make much odds, this v'yage!" With which cryptic remark he spat carefully over the weather rail.

Castleman, meantime, was casting a glance round, to make sure all stood well before the breeze. Then, giving the course to Ezra, he went below—where, feeling as if half in captivity, the girls were waiting.

II

TEMPESTS OF HEART AND HAND

THE schooner's cabin was commodious. To starboard lay the sleeping quarters of captain, mate and bosun. Aft of these a spare room had before now served for the imprisonment of mutinous seamen. A pantry and three state-rooms occupied the port side.

As you stood at the cabin companion-way, looking in, you saw a long table in the middle of the space, with a swivel-chair at each end, and three at either hand. A brass lamp in gimbal-rings swung over the table, and was itself topped by the barred skylight. Floor was covered with heavy linoleum; woodwork gleamed white-painted and scrubbed. A tidy place, that.

Into it Captain Castleman entered, and went to his own state-room to look at the ship's papers. On top of the pile, there on the little table where he usually worked his positions, lay a sheet with the names of the three passengers. The captain read them, frowned, blinked and looked closer.

"Janice Garth!" he stammered. And then: "*No!*"

Looking very queer and dazed, he stood staring. His heavy jaw fell a bit; his hands twitched.

"But—it can't be *that* one! There must be more than one Janice Garth!"

For all his bulk and weight, hard muscles and corded thews, the captain was trembling. He licked his lip with a tongue gone dry.

"It can't be—can't be——!"

Only a maddening silence, more discomposing than any words, answered him. Silence of human speech; though voices of the sea and ship were speaking. To Castleman's ears drifted the shuddering impact of surges, the harping of halyards, creak of blocks, ratching of booms. He stood there, swaying a little with the head pitch and side roll of the schooner. And with a look that feared yet longed, he glanced at the port state-room doors.

Closed, these regarded him with the blank indifference of eyeless faces.

"Janice!" he stammered, and sat down at the desk, quivering.

A minute or two all his forces were put to rout; but presently they rallied.

"Of course it's another one!" he growled. "Things like this don't—don't happen!"

And yet at the back of his brain something was whispering:

"*This* has happened! Go, like a man, and see!"

"Hang it, I will!" he exclaimed, as if answering some human tormentor. He glanced at the paper again, noted the "Number 2" opposite the name, and shoved the paper back with a hand now steadier.

He got up, strode to that door, and knocked.

At first no answer. The captain knocked again, harder. A voice within asked:

"Well?"

"Miss Garth! Come out, please."

The door opened. In the half-light of the cabin Castleman sensed her tall litheness, the graceful lines that even heavy sweater and tweed skirt could not conceal. He had remembered impressions of brown eyes, golden-chestnut hair that waved over a forehead only too broadly calm.

He faced her a moment in silence, steadying himself with one corded hand on the door-jamb. She drew back a little,

her own hand going to her breast defensively.

Their drought of words—man and wife, who now for the first time in four years were meeting—had an eloquence beyond all speech.

Janice found her stopped breath, with the strangest of little laughs.

"I—I didn't know——" she began.

He made a throaty sound, deep-down, with something animal-like in its intensity.

"You didn't see me on deck, eh? When I told you to go below?"

"Oh, that?" This time her laugh was sheer quintessence of scorn. "Why, no, Weston. I really don't look at sailors, of course."

"Wait! Don't 'Weston' *me!* I'm Captain Castleman to you!"

"Oh, as you like. But no, I didn't see you. I don't notice every rough, shouting, bullying type I come across. Such men are just—you know——"

The dismissive wave of her hand stung more brutally than if those slim strong fingers had smitten with full force across his cheek.

"Of course, if I'd known," she added, "I might have made some other arrangement. I never asked who the captain of this schooner was, or heard. And after all, what does it matter? Just one favour, though."

"Favour, to you!"

"Well, Captain Castleman," and every syllable flayed, "I suppose it's mutual. The other two girls——"

"Oh, I'm no such fool!"

"I'm glad they needn't know," she smiled. "And now, really, I must ask you to let this end."

"Not till I tell you how surprised I am that *you* are going——"

"That I'm going down north to nurse Esquimaux?"

He nodded, with a peculiar laugh.

"Perhaps your family's aristocratic exchequer has been shipwrecked since such a 'low type' as you once called me has refused to keep it afloat any longer?"

Her face hardened.

"Go on, say more like that! I'm not at all surprised at your reflecting on the honour of my father. If he were alive, you'd never dare! There's blood on every dollar you earn. When I found out what kind of captain you were——"

He laughed then with true enjoyment.

"Ah, now we *are* talking!" he gibed.

"Keep your voice down, captain! The other girls are seasick enough, heaven knows, but still they might hear."

"No, they'll hear nothing from me!" His tone carried only to Janice.

"I envy them! A man who spends his life hunting port slums for the worst human wreckage—always paying off and shipping men, and always treating them with a brutality that's come to be a by-word everywhere——!"

"Running hell-ships, eh? Why not say it? Yes, you're right! And let me tell you, *this* is one, too!" He laughed again. "Hear me? A hell-ship! Understand, you're not going on deck till I give you word. You're not mistress over slave-driven servants here, or using a quirt on a mortgaged horse."

"You beast!"

"Ah, that's better! Hell-ship, remember. And—what you're going to see!"

He turned abruptly, walked to his state-room and disappeared into it. Laughing, but shaken with a small, compelling tremor, she closed the door.

Silence once more possessed the cabin, save for the glad free chant of wind and sea.

Old Ezra was standing at the lee rail, not far from the skylight. He saw the captain's head rise above the companion-way. Intuitively he read trouble. As Castleman emerged on deck, Ezra noticed that the captain was girt with two revolvers.

"By the lovely logline!" muttered he. "What the divil's wrong, now? Has the Old Man gone daft, or——?"

"Mate!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Get every man-jack o' the crew on the main deck."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

Ezra walked forward, shouting: "All hands on deck! Look alive, men!"

Came a scurrying of feet, a few oaths, no little grumbling from two or three who had been turned in, having a doss-down. When all the sorry crew were present, Ezra so told the captain.

Castleman walked to the poop rail, keenly looking over that tatterdemalion gang, one by one. They, in turn, scrutinized him. All saw the belt and pistols. Some faces showed surprise; others looked a: "Just try it!" None revealed fear.

Now the captain set the watches. One-eye Harry, Chink Conway and Billy Brass he put in the starboard. Italy Dick, Sweden Mickey, and Tom Hawk formed the port. They were all just turning away when the Old Man spoke:

"Avast, there! I'm not half through with some o' you. I'm going to tell *you*

a few things! I know you for what you are—the dirtiest tribe that ever stepped on a ship's deck.

"If the truth was known about some o' you sons o' she-wolves, there's many a sailor and a few cap'ns you've sent to Davy Jones. I saw you look at these guns." He slapped the one on his right hip. "I've put 'em on to show you I'd drive a bullet through any one o' your black hearts as quick as I'd shoot an Esquimau dog. D'you hear? I know the history of every one o' you, and a yard-arm 'd be the proper place for you to swing from. If you had your dues, you'd all ha' been kicking from a rope's-end, long before now!

"You've started trouble on any ship unlucky enough to have you, and the cap'n that took two or more o' you never came back. Let me tell you, this is going to be a different ship. There's going to be no slindging here. I'll have you at work, morning, noon and night, so you'll have less time to chin-wag and scheme, you low-down, lazy, jail-birds!"

Sweden's eyes blazed out at this; so too, those of a couple more. Hard words these, even though true. They called for reprisal.

Anxiously old Ezra watched.

"The cap'n's a fool," thought he, "to be cruisin' into trouble like that. Plain suicide, I calls it!"

Sweden jostled ahead. He stopped a couple of paces in front of his comrades, bunched near the mainmast.

"Ye'd make a splendid orator, Cap'n Wes," he began, "if ye'd a better subject. But if ye thinks ye're goin' to be the whole sea-breeze aburd o' this un, an' can blow on us whenever ye likes, I fer one ain't goin' to run afore ye. Now that ye've throwed the water over us, as the sayin' is, we're goin' to do as we thinks fit, whedder ye likes it or lumps it, same we've done on odder ships." He turned to his comrades for corroboration. "Ain't we, mates?"

Captain Castleman with one leap sprang from the poop and landed beside Sweden—struck as he landed one smashing blow. Sweden catapulted into the others. As the group staggered the captain smote right, left, hurling them broadcast.

"By the mighty typhoon, the divil's loose!" muttered Ezra. "Sweden, you'll wish ye'd been born dumb!"

Before the seamen could rally, Castleman swooped up his victim, held him a second erect with strangling clutch, drove a crushing fist to the man's jaw. It seemed as if Sweden's head must be knocked clean off his shoulders. He crumpled. Released, he sprawled in a quivering heap.

The others rallied, rushed Wes. The deck became a fighting, snarling tangle. A knife spun away along the deck. The sound of blows, kicks—dull, like axe-blows in a slaughter-house—mingled with howls, oaths, groans. Like chaff the captain scattered his enemies. Men crawled, dragged themselves away; they collapsed, rolled in the scuppers. Hardly had the battle begun ere it was ended.

Captain Wes drew back, hauled up his trousers, drew a long breath and laughed in bitter mockery.

"So you'll do as you like, eh?" he taunted, panting a little but by no means winded. "You'll loaf, and talk back, will you? Looks like it! Anybody want to continue the argument?"

None answered. The captain dealt a final kick of his heavy jack-boot, and ordered:

"Get up out o' this now, you dogs' whelps! Get to work and swab this deck."

One-eye Harry was first to crawl up. He painfully dragged to his feet; holding by the rail; then pressed a hand to fearful and swelling bruises. Blood was stealthily trickling from a split lip into his bristle of beard.

"Get 'em up out o' that now, before I help you!" Castleman menaced with clenched fist. "Get 'em up, I tell you, and look lively!"

With many a groan One-eye helped Sweden up. Italy Dick struggled to his knees, spat a tooth, and arose like one drunk. The others revived, in various conditions of injury and pain.

Weston looked them over, laughed, turned on his heel and walked aft. As he went below, Ezra shook a troubled head.

"What the divil iver's back of all this?" he wondered. "Plain enough to see, Cap'n Wes is sp'ilin' for a muckery. These poor guffies is fools enough to help him. What's up—what's in the wind? I'd give me hand to know!"

III

DISCORDS

His passion spent, Captain Wes shut himself up in his state-room. Save for a cut knuckle, where he had struck Italy Dick in the mouth, he had taken no harm. He felt singularly relieved,

as always after one of these outbursts. Still, bitterness toward his wife laired deep in the man's heart.

"Of all the ships on all the seas," he pondered, sunk far down in his chair, "to think she had to take just this one! Fine idea, eh?" Savagely he laughed, and wiped the blood from his hand. "It wasn't enough for her father to clean me out of all my savings! No; he had to poison her against me afterward. After I was squeezed dry, what good was I to either of 'em? Well—he never told, and I'm very sure *I* never will. Let the dead lie still, at all events. We'll all join 'em soon enough. It can't come any too soon for *me!*

"An honourable, high-class man old Garth was, eh? Politician, and all that. Hobnobbed with that Government House bunch. Well—if that's blue blood, thank Heaven I've got none in me—nothing but red!"

And for a long time he sat there brooding, his face that of a man who has plumbed all the nether slimes of torment.

He kept his state-room, seen by none, till past three bells of the first night watch. The *Saucy Lass*, driven by a smart south-west breeze, clove the long dark seas that led to the Labrador. Her canvas loomed up ghostly, tall, fading against the stars that rocked in slow, vast arcs over her tops, the northern stars crisp, scintillant, aloof.

Glad the schooner seemed, and free, yielding herself to the sea's strong wooing like a Valkyr maiden to a resistless Viking's arms. But among the sailors dwelt only rage, pain, hate. No sound of cheer drifted from the fo'c'stle; no chanty, no sweetheart-song. That day's disastrous events had driven from their hearts the stern joy that even the hardest ruffian—if an able seaman—always wakens to aboard a well-found vessel in fair weather. Dread, foreboding, dark thoughts of violence and lust and murder shrouded their minds, muted their thick tongues. Like beasts driven to bay they cringed, snarled silently, nursed their injuries; they pondered black deeds among the fitful shadows of their bunks.

Black, too, were the captain's thoughts, blacker his memories. Out of the past, envenomed words were rising up to poison him even now, after all this time. Half-forgotten taunts were sounding once more in his ears.

Memories—brands for the searing of his heart. . . .

Memories of the love he once had borne this woman, and the trust; memories of her father and all the evil he had wrought; memories of the day when, asking Janice to break with all that fettering, falsifying life in musty old St. John's, to sail with him, be mistress of his ship, she had retorted:

"Sail with *you?*" Her laugh had gashed deeper still. "Once, maybe, I might have—but now——!"

The scorn in her eyes had been more patent than if her tongue had spoken it. He had seen, had understood. Well—that had been long ago. Four years are an eternity, sometimes. Years of torment, vain hopes, uncherished dreams that would not wholly die. Slowly he had laboured to forge chains of forgetfulness. And he had forced himself to the belief that this had come; that all the past was a scroll up-rolled; that some time it would fade to less than memories of a fevered vision.

But after all——

"Great Heaven!" the captain groaned, smiting his table. "What have I done, for *this* to come upon me?"

A knocking at his door broke the agony of revocations.

"Hallo?"

"The passengers is askin' your permission, sir," sounded Ezra's voice, "to go on deck."

A long silence. Then the captain answered:

"All right. But have 'em below by five bells."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

And Ezra departed to get deck-chairs for them.

Captain Weston lighted the blackest of pipes, and sat there all alone, grimly pondering. Scant thought was he giving to the rebellious, half-mutinous scum forward. He felt no fear of consequences now, any more than ever he had felt in all his long man-handling. And after all, what odds?

No; but the women—what of them?

What effect might they have on such a cut-throat crew? Three girls were dangerous cargo! In the secret labyrinths of the captain's brain some very disturbing thoughts began to evolve; some allurements of revenge, fear, wonderment—aberrant waywardnesses of fantasy that gave him pause. To him it seemed as if dark abysses were opening, at whose brink he faltered, longing yet afraid. With his cut hand he smeared fine sweat from his forehead; he moved uneasily in his chair, and laughed—and in that laugh lay bitterness beyond all telling

"Might as well have a kink o' sleep while I can," at last said he, and flung himself down into the bunk; but sleep was not for him. A quarter-hour's restless turning, and he was up again. The state-room stifled him; he jammed on his cap and went on deck. The three girls were snugly stowed in deck-chairs along the skylight on the starboard side. Janice, wrapped in a plaid, sat between Laura Murray and Alma Newland. The vaguest of lights blurring up through the skylight half revealed them to Weston as he stood a moment undecided; he could hear them murmuring together. Laura and Alma still seemed a bit under the weather, but the captain's wife gave no sign of sickness.

"Always was an A1 sailor," he remembered, and even that embittered him still more. "What a comrade for a seafaring man she'd have been, if——"

He made an explosive sound of repulsion, of disgust, and swung out on deck.

"Good night, captain," Alma greeted him, using the odd Newfoundland phrase that does duty for " Good evening."

"Good night," he hardly more than growled.

"Awfully nice of you to let us up on deck," laughed Laura, a bit weakly.

He grunted, like a very sea-bear, and conversation fell flat. Presently the girls knit up a little talk among themselves. The captain went aft to the wheel, and for a while stood there in smoky silence near Bosun Stirge, who held the spokes. No great smoker, the captain; but to-night the pipe tasted good.

"Got a grand stick on her, de night," at last volunteered Stirge. "She's reelin' it off, pretty."

"Yes. Good nice breeze o' wind, bosun. Making good weather of it."

"A hell of a bunch, a-dere forrard, sir."

Weston laughed, curtly, but made no comment. Instead, he went and leaned on the quarter rail, looking abroad over the illimitable face of the sea. The world of upborne waters was all a miracle of mid-summer beauty, sparkling vaguely away to a lee set of haze under the white magic of a gibbous moon.

Weston stood long, and brooded, watching the familiar aspect of cleft waters, feather-white, fall off astern in swirls of tumbling spume. And the heart swelled within him, and he knew one love, at least, could never die—love of the one true mistress, infinitely cruel, marvellously kind: the sea.

Thus more than half an hour passed, while the *Saucy Lass* rejoiced in that fair, following wind, and seemed herself only a more tangible part of the immeasurable mystery. Four bells struck, and five, musically tolling through the July night, and even the long western glow faded to dark across the viewless vastnesses. The short darkness of that far northern night closed down like a cupped hand.

Old Ezra sought the passengers.

"Sorry, ladies, but ye got to go below now."

"What?" asked Laura sharply. Red-haired was she, and sharp of tongue and temper. "I should say not!"

"Yes, miss; ye got to go."

"No!" Alma protested. "Why, it's early yet. And what a night!"

"Can't help it, miss. Night or no night, orders is orders."

"I suppose the captain wants to show his authority," put in Janice, in an acid tone. "It must be wonderful to be master of all you survey!"

"Well, miss, any cap'n as *is* a cap'n, got to keep discipline. Things 'd be in a wonnerful fruzz if he didn't."

"Discipline! Over helpless victims! An armed man against——"

"Who's been talkin' to you, miss?"

She only laughed; but presently added:

"Oh, a little bird, maybe."

"Well, I advises you, miss," returned Ezra with some heat, "as how the less birds go flyin' round this 'un, the better it'll be fer all hands!"

"Do you know, mate," she went on, "I admired the man to-day who flung back the insults your captain threw at him. And I admired the others forward, too, even though they were downed by brute force."

"You'd admire 'em a—hm!—sight less if they had their arms round you, or a knife to y'r throat!"

"Oh!" gasped Alma, but Laura gave a nervous little laugh.

"How romantic!" she exclaimed.

"Captain Castleman has you well-trained, that's obvious," cut in Janice. "I don't understand how it is that no knife has touched his throat yet—or yours!"

"That's enough, miss!" The mate's face darkened; his tone altered. "I think ye'd be well advised to get below, rate now, an' learn more wisdom about ships an' crews afore ye let y'r tongue run away wid ye!"

Janice sprang up, but the dramatic quality she intended to impress on old

Ezra was a little marred by her feet getting tangled in the plaid, so that he had to steady her.

"There, there now, miss—least said, soonest mended. Go below, an' let's have narr nudder word about it!"

Her eyes were angry in the moonlight as she bade:

"Come, girls! It's plain enough what *we* count for here!"

"Don't ferget y'r rug, miss!" Ezra caught it up and handed it to her, loose-rolled. "It be's too good a thing—like y'r temper—to be losin' here!"

Ungraciously she took it, shrugged her shoulders, and—followed by the others, a little over-awed—walked to the companion-stair.

Ezra watched her wavering course, unsteady by reason of the schooner's rolling. He shook his head as the girls all vanished below.

"Some women's a wonnerful sight worse'n weevil-biscuit," he muttered, as he folded the chairs. "That Garth un, now—a purty brig, but too much headway. A fine, smart, rollickin' craft, an' purty as a sunset at sea. Give her a little trimmin' an' she'd be all rate. Ah, well——"

IV

MURDER WILL OUT

THREE days the wind held steady, then died away till the *Saucy Lass* hardly crawled five knots. It faded to a calm. The sea lazied like a cat in the northern sunlight: a rare mood for old ocean in those latitudes, and one that might bode ill.

Far offshore the schooner was standing; so far that only now and then could a vague purple blur on the westward horizon mark some jutting promontory of the Newfoundland coast. Betimes, with a drift of fog, even this vanished.

Captain Castleman worked his men unceasingly, holystoning, scraping, painting, what-not. If no task existed, he invented one, even to chipping and painting the anchor-chains. Watch on and watch off his eye was on the rebellious wretches. None could shirk.

Over the schooner as she idled northward a pall descended; a something that seemed to spy, to wait, biding its own time. The silence grew oppressive. Every word carried distinctly. The faint whisper of long, indolent sea-suspirations scarcely vexed the sides. An ominous quality inhered in such tranquillity, windless, tideless, under a sun vaguely tempered by the most tenuous gossamers of mist.

Whenever the girls came up, they were now allowed only "the fling o' the poop." The main deck had been forbidden them. Captain Castleman gave orders that they should eat apart. He and the other two of the aft-gang messed separately. Like a hawk he watched them, and when he was not about old Ezra kept a sharp eye lifted. No diplomat—any more than the captain—he by no means dissembled this guardianship.

As the crew chafed under such rigid discipline, so too did Janice. Her nerves began to grow rather wire-drawn. The afternoon of the fourth day, standing at the counter with the other girls, she voiced her indignation:

"We might as well be slaves and done with it! Here we are penned into a few square feet of deck—absolutely penned. But I suppose His Majesty's word is law."

Alma gave a bright little laugh. Laughter came more easily to her rather fair and somewhat trivial prettiness than any other mood.

"What's the matter with you, Janice?" she asked, sunlight revealing her cheek warm and not entirely innocent of the finest peach-bloom down. "Anybody 'd think the captain was an ogre, or something, the way you talk. I'm sure *I* feel a lot safer here than poking about forward."

"Me, too," agreed Laura. She smoothed down the sleeve of her brushed-wool sweater, that, being red, rather swore at her frankly red hair. "I don't need more than one look at some of those chaps forward to make me glad—well, you know. It's kind of nice to feel——"

"Oh, pshaw! Clinging vines and all that!" retorted Janice.

"They're a hard lot, all right," affirmed Alma.

"Yes, and who makes them hard? Bucko captains! You can't feed men on oaths, brutality, gun-play and fists, and not reap the reward of it! The only wonder to me is——"

"Just a minute, there," interrupted the captain. He turned from the poop rail, fixing on her an arresting, angry eye. "As far as you're concerned, Miss Garth, my order to keep off the main deck doesn't apply. You're free to go anywhere you like, at any hour. *I'll* not keep you from associating with the kind of men you like!"

He looked round, spied Ezra, and called:

"Mate!"

"Sir?"

"From now on let Miss Garth have the run of the ship."

"Aye, aye, sir! The five-bell rule——"

"No. No curfew on Miss Garth."

"As you say, sir!"

A minute Janice looked at him with eyes half-startled, wholly angry. She set teeth in her full lower lip. Her nostrils expanded. Then she laughed.

"Thank you, captain. I'm sure I shall enjoy a few words with poor wretches not even permitted to use their own minds or express their thoughts."

It was the captain's turn to laugh, and at the sound of it, a dull flush heightened the woman's colour.

"Don't thank me too soon, Miss Garth! They won't be at all backward about expressing their thoughts to a giddlesome person in petticoats."

Her lips tightened. She seemed about to retort something, but held her tongue and turned away. A very devil of anger smouldered in her brown eyes, a look neither Alma nor Laura had ever seen there.

"Good gracious!" half-whispered Alma. "Now you *have* done it. If you get *him* down on us——"

Janice laughed again, but her fingers, drumming the rail, gave her amusement the lie.

"You don't mean—you—that is, you wouldn't really go forward, would you?" asked Laura.

"And you call yourself a nurse?" Janice retorted, mordantly.

"I *know*, dear, but——"

"Lovely weather, isn't it?" gibed the rebel. There was that in her look which forbade further discussion. The other two stood rather awkwardly by the rail a minute or two; then Alma went below, and Laura followed, a little frightened.

"Well, of all things!" breathed Laura. "I wish we were safe at Indian Harbour."

"Or anywhere but here," Alma agreed.

Janice remained alone at the counter, watching the long slow wake unroll its smooth-curling garlands of white. The silence now fallen upon her had communicated itself to the entire schooner. And for a few minutes no sound broke that stillness save the slight creak and give of masts, booms, cordage—the voice of every ship, now high in storm, now low in calm, but never wholly quieted.

Then, quite of a sudden, that silence was shattered by Sweden Mickey. His outburst had something the dramatic quality of a bomb exploded in a Sunday-school.

Sweden had been sitting on the main-hatch, splicing a frayed halyard. The man's fingers, cracked and sore with dirt and brine, slipped on a rebel strand; the pain, trivial in itself, broke his patience, worse-worn than the rope he was working on.

With a round oath he jumped up, flung the halyard down, and stamped his boot on it.

"To hell with Castleman an' this son of a one of a schooner, too," he snarled. "Him, wid his everlastin' work, work, work. No more o' this, says I. Come on, b'ys, an' show him we ain't dogs."

"Good for you," cried Janice.

Without volition, just a cry of reflex action that leaped with her own thought, the words escaped. No reasoning power lay behind them, nothing but instinct—and hate.

Rebellion! This she longed for. Of this she had dreamed. Though she herself had beaten off the captain, repulsed and scorned and cast him by, still with the age-long irrationality of all Eve's daughters, she hated him for that he had gone, had left her, given her up and made his own path in the world, alone. Whom do we ever hate one-half so much as one whom we have wounded, wronged—even slain?

Her father dead, money vanished, power lost, she who had been trained to dominate was now being dominated by the greatest master of all, the world and its invincible disciplines. That had not chastened her nor softened her. It had embittered, hardened and made her hateful. It had bred envy of those who still held power. And now, here was her husband personifying power; and for that she hated him tenfold the more. With all her trembling intensity she longed to see this man beaten, ousted from command, a victim of these brutes' unreasoning passion.

Mutiny! For this she thirsted, as never for anything in life. And its possible consequences to her, to the other women? Of that she had no thought nor any care. Mutiny—war! Come, now, and vengeance!

A hush fell on the schooner, just the instant of dead calm before tempest. A moment, one might have thought Castleman had not heard Sweden's mutinous words, the woman's encouraging cry. But only a moment.

He had heard, right enough. And

hearing, all bonds of self-restraint were sundered. The devil smouldering in his heart leaped up, a-shriek. War, eh? Let it come!

The captain's face twitched. If ever a man's eyes blazed, his now were blazing; and flames like those are kindled in hell. As one bereft of reason, he tore off jacket and even shirt. Naked to the waist, he jumped to the main-deck.

As he rushed on the doomed seaman, muscles like loops of steel played under that smooth, white skin.

"It's murder!" gasped Ezra, clutching the poop rail. Janice, gone white, ran forward past the skylight to Ezra.

"Stop him! Stop him!"

Ezra thrust her aside.

"Go below!" he ordered.

But on the instant battle was joined.

Sweden crouched to meet attack; how vainly! The captain gathered him up, held him in a vice-grip, beat him down.

"Help!" shrieked the wretch just before the engulfing blackness of oblivion swallowed him.

One-eye Harry came on the run, and with him Chink and Billy Brass. Chink snatched a belaying-pin; Billy had a sock with a two-pound lump of rock-ballast. A sheath-knife glinted in One-eye's fist.

Who could follow, who record that whirlwind violence? Snarls, oaths, yells made hideous the summer air. The captain's fists landed crushingly; men sprawled. The weighted sock, futile, spun away. One-eye hooked upward with the knife, ripped a long gash in the captain's right side, and on the instant dropped with his jaw broken. Chink and his belaying-pin both rolled in the scuppers.

"Come on out, you two!" roared Castleman, advancing towards the fo'c's'le, where dazed faces appeared—Italy Dick's and Tom Hawk's. "Out, if you want to see who's master here!"

Tom gulped, retreating. The fo'c's'le door banged shut, was hastily barricaded. From the galley peered the frightened cook's face.

"I—I ain't done nothin', cap'n!" he quavered. "I niver——"

Castleman laughed, swung round and jumped for Billy Brass, the only man on deck with enough consciousness left to feel pain.

He leaped for a coil of rope, slashed off a length. He dragged Billy to the port side, held his wrists in grips of steel, and cast half-hitches round them. He triced them to the belaying-pins as easily as if Billy had been a child. He tore off the man's jumper and shirt, cut another length of rope, and laid it on the naked back with the swift, dragging slash of old-school flogging.

Frozen to horror, Janice clutched the rail and stared.

That red mutiny had raised its head, that the crew would have murdered Castleman had they been able—yea, and Ezra and bosun Stirge into the bargain—she was not thinking now. What fate would have been hers and the other women's she was not considering. Only she saw that demoniacal figure swinging the rope scourge; only heard its shuddering impact.

A choking cry escaped Janice. She scrambled down the short ladder to the main deck. Dignity—where now had it vanished? Ezra shouted after her. She did not hear. She ran at Castleman, a tiger-cat of fury, snatched at his hands to hold them, to catch the flailing torment.

"Ho, *you*—again?"

He whirled on her, rope all a-dangle. A moment she thought he meant to strike her down, and braved him with face of fury. At sight of her, though, he laughed and tossed the scourge away.

"I never knew a beast lived li' you!"

"You've never known me at all. You may yet, though!"

And as she stood consumed with fever that was somehow cold, that clutched the heart and breath, he turned from her, unlashed his twitching victim.

Janice, pale about the lips and nostrils, sat down on the main hatch, suddenly feeling very sick indeed. She thought she was going to faint, but she did not faint. Vaguely she wished for a knife, a gun. Those, yes, those would stop this madman. But——

Billy Brass was freed now. He collapsed like an empty meal-bag.

"There's *one* of your friends," the captain laughed at Janice.

He strode to where One-eye and Sweden were reviving. One in each huge, sinewed hand he dragged them up, knocked them together and cried:

"You dogs! Next time I'll drive a bullet into your black, mutinous hearts."

The captain's face, distorted as a Japanese tragic mask, thrust itself close to Sweden's. That quivering wretch got an eye open, and glimpsing it, saw an expression he had never yet beheld. Horrified by tragic recognitions, Sweden gasped:

"Mercy—it—it's—*his son!*" As in a dream Castleman heard.

His grip loosened on One-eye, letting that bemauled unfortunate slide to the deck, where promptly he crawled away. The grip, though, tightened on Sweden.

Castleman shook him till the bruised man gulped for breath.

"What's that you said? His son? *Whose* son?"

Sweden could not reply. His ugly bulk quivered.

"Come on now, spit it out!" Captain Weston flung at him. "Out with it! *Whose* son, before I strangle you?"

"Nobody's, sir—nothin'—I don't mean nothin'——"

"You lie!"

The captain drew his knife and brought the sharp point close to Sweden's throat.

"Now then, whose son?"

"Cap'n Matt Castleman's!"

"I'm his son, eh? You recognize me as his son? You knew my father?"

"Don't, cap'n! Please, sir—don't kill——"

"Come on, answer now! Who murdered my father?"

No answer. The sailor's eyes filmed with prescience of death, but in his battered face an invincible rebellion stood plain. Kill him the captain might; but not a word more should he have.

The captain saw that look, realized himself for the moment beaten. He lifted his victim bodily, slung him across his shoulder, and bore him off to the cabin like an ogre carrying its prey.

There he opened the little cell-like room at the extreme stern and flung his burden heavily to the floor. He fetched irons, and manacled the prisoner.

"You hear me now," said he, standing over the hardly half-conscious mutineer. "You'll tell me who murdered my father, or you'll never leave this one alive. I've been sailing up and down the world for years to get my hands on somebody that shipped with him aboard the *Sebastopol*, that last voyage of his. And by heaven, I think you've got news for me. Whatever you know *I'm* going to know!"

The broken man only shivered and groaned. No word escaped him.

"All right, my hearty, but—well, I've been East a bit. Out to the Indies, China, and all that. Those people know a thing or two about making men talk. Clever at it, they are. I've learned some of their tricks. Before I'm through—you'll talk!"

The captain laughed, turned and walked out, locking in his victim. He went to his state-room, washed his wound, and cleaned up. Calmer now, he put on a shirt, and once more began somewhat to resemble his own natural self.

"I'm on the trail at last," said he. "It won't be long now—won't be long!"

Almost laughing he went up on deck.

V

JANICE LEARNS

THERE he found Ezra taking charge in quiet efficiency, while Bos'n Stirge held the wheel. Already the mate had ordered Italy Dick and Tom Hawk out of the fo'c'sle, and had made them drag thither Billy Brass and Conway. One-eyed Harry had managed to get there under his own power.

"Now then, swab the deck!" the mate was ordering. "And look alive!"

He stood watching them as they jumped to obey. An odd smile curved his lips. Truth was, the mate had just received illumination. To him had been revealed the vexed reason why Captain Castleman had for years shipped the roughest, most brutal crews. Now he understood why Weston himself had been so systematically brutal.

"*Ain't* that an idee fer a man, though?" he ruminated. "Allus raisin' a muckery, so that some time or nudder somebody'd let a word slip? Well, that word's slup now."

"Where's that woman?" the captain's question shot in upon his speculations.

"Where? I wish't she was alow, wid de two odders!"

"Well, where is she? Forrard?"

"I hates to say it, sir, but—yes. Forrard, sir. Goin' to nurse dem sons o' scaldies. Heal 'em up, so dey can go manus agin, I 'spects."

Castleman's face hardened. The smile died there. He shook his head.

"You're a good man, Ezra. You'll stick. Stirge is another. The cook—doesn't count, one way or another. But there's three of us, anyhow. Five bad ones forrard, now. And One-eye's jaw is broken. And it'll be a day or two before Chink and Billy Brass want any more. We've got 'em all right. And enough hands to work ship—if the weather holds good."

"Yes, if it do. But the glass——"

"I know. Falling a bit. But a low glass doesn't always mean trouble this time o' year. I've seen some great-time weather, Ezra, with a low glass in summer round Belle Isle."

"Yes, an' some as wa'n't so gert, not by a long sight, sir. I minds the time, in my remember——"

And Ezra launched into something of a dissertation on summer hurricanes. But Castleman heard little of all this. He was looking towards the fo'c'sle, and as he looked pictures formed in the chambers of his mind, not good to dwell upon.

Somewhat tremblingly, but driven by a sense of duty mingled with the gall of hate and scorn for Castleman, Janice had entered that place of feminine taboos.

She knew that sea custom regarded such a step as beyond bounds of pardon, save perhaps in case of very life or death. But now all bonds of convention were loosed, all bonnets thrown over the mill.

"And besides," she fortified herself, "am I not a nurse, and are these not wounded men?"

Once inside the fo'c'sle she paused in a rather disconcerting half-gloom. But as her eyes grew more accustomed she saw a range of bunks fore and aft on both sides, running together in a V at the bows. A table strewn with dirty dishes and kit-pans, kettles and miscellaneous litter occupied the central space. Tea-leaves and garbage were strewn underfoot.

Over the table in gimbals swung a lamp with its chimney so smoked as to render the light a wan, dull reddish blur. All the porthole glasses were dirt-encrusted till only the dimmest of daylight seeped through. The air hung heavy-laden with fumes of smoke, stale food, fusty clothing.

"But I'm a trained nurse," Janice repeated to herself. "And down north among the Esquimaux I'll find little as pleasant as *this!*"

She stood a moment hesitant, surprised that no one gave her any heed. Expected greetings failed to materialize. Distress was too great for a mere woman to be of import. Italy Dick was bent over One-eye, groaning in a foul bunk on the port side. At the other, Tom Hawk was supporting Billy Brass. Chink Conway, in a lower bunk, was alternating grunts of pain and fervent blasphemies on the *Saucy Lass* and on Captain Castleman.

"Are you very much hurt?" Janice suddenly asked Conway, by manner of introduction.

"Hey, matey! A loidy to see ye!" called Italy Dick, as Chink made no answer.

Chink painfully turned himself. His scrub-bearded face and narrow-slitted black eyes tried to show pleasure, but the man's soul was too steeped in baseness for any but an evil expression to be manifest.

"Wonnerful glad to see ye, miss," he half-groaned. "Come rate in, an' set down!"

"Anything I can do for you?" And she approached him in that filthy den, where oilskins swung like hanged men on nails, where bunks held booted forms lying on foul blankets.

"Do fer me, is it?" coughed the seaman. "Why, y'r presence alone be's healin' enough, miss. Ain't it, mateys?"

Growls of acquiescence answered him. Groans ceased and oaths died down, and Italy Dick forbore not to spit extensively.

"I'm a nurse, and——"

"Ye see, miss," Chink continued, elated by this turn of events which was giving him perhaps the first chance in all of life to talk with "a loidy," "ye see, we ain't laid eye to a pictur' like you in our cosy little home here fer more 'an a dog's-age. If I could I'd flag dis fo'c'sle off in wonnerful style, to show how proper glad we is to see ye. I hopes y'r visits 'll be often—if ye're let."

"Let? Oh, I can come and go as I like. But now, what can I do to——"

"It makes me 'shamed o' meself an' me mates, miss," Chink went on, lying there with his poisonous eyes on her, "to see how we ain't got no pluck, same's you. I ain't got no liberty, an' none o' we has. Instead, we got to be flogged an' bet up, an' walked on. Look-see what happened! An' One-eye get de jaw knocked sideways in his face, an' Billy Brass lashed wid a rope's-end an' Sweden a pris'ner! An' all de rest of it. Is we men or is we dogs?"

"You've only yourselves to blame!"

Chink hauled himself up sitting, and caught her hand. She tried to draw it back, but he held fast.

"Miss, ye've said de words I been usin' all me life. Ye're a hero, dat's what! Help us show Cap'n Wes we ain't dogs, an' evvery sailor from here to Cape Horn 'll sing y'r praises. We'll sing a chanty to ye every time we hayves an anchor! Eh, mates?"

"Aw, clew up!" growled Billy Brass, in whom perhaps some spark of decency still lingered—and then again, perhaps his flogging might have taught him caution: "If we ain't got the wind to do it ourselves widout gettin' a skirt to

take us in tow, us better let de Old Man run his own ship!"

"I allus knowed you was yaller!" Chink retorted. "Y're well named, Brass. If it wasn't fer a lot o' men like you we'd be better off to-day!"

"Y're a liar! An' a coward, too. Ye niver even got one crack in at de Old Man wid y'r b'layin'-pin. Niver dared close in on un at all! One-eye, *he* was all rate, dough. *He* give un a proper rip wid his knife. If he'd only got un——"

One-eye muttered something thickly that sounded like: "Us can't handle de Old Man, an' dat's a fact. *I* say, let's finish de v'yage, an' den jump into somethin' easier!"

"Anodder coward!" gibed Chink. His hand a second relaxing, Janice pulled hers away. She was beginning to feel a bit uneasy; perhaps more than a bit. Her ministrations as a nurse seemed far from in demand. Another atmosphere than one of submissive gratitude was developing, tautening with sinister purposes. Feminine instincts told her so, even though no word of evil portent had yet been spoken.

"Well," she said, retiring towards the doorway, "there's no use in you men disagreeing among yourselves."

"Righto!" exclaimed Tom Hawk. "It's disagreein' as allus gets de wind on our quarter or gets us took abaft, same as to-day."

"Don't I know it?" cried Chink. "Look at de state o' me, now!" He thrust his head a little out of the bunk, so that the vague lamp-shine fell on cuts and bruises.

"Mighty little *ye* got, 'langside o' me!" Billy declared. "Not one o' ye was flogged like me. Here I been goin' to sea all me life, workin' hard an' honest, niver missin' a watch. Niver did I refuse duty, goin' aloft in de dirtiest wedder to take in canvas. I allus done me duty, I did. An' *now* look a' me. An' ain't got enough money put by to babtise a fairy!"

"Listen, men! I came here to help you," insisted the girl. "I'm a nurse. Can you get me some warm water and soap, and a towel, and——"

Derisive laughter interrupted her, from Italy Dick.

"You must t'ink us runnin' a hotel here, miss."

"Stow dat," menaced Chink. "or I'll stow *you!* De loidy means it all rate an' kind. I t'anks you, miss, fer de kind heart o' ye, an' so does me mates. I wish us had somebody de likes o' you, all alang. If us had, us wouldn't be in dis state."

Again he seized her hand, and this time violently dragged her down towards him. She tried to pull away. He held her fast.

"Ye don't have to go, miss! Wid you an' a drop or two o' good calibogus, ah! 'Twould be somethin' like, eh? It ain't often a angel, a proper angel, s'help me! comes to de fo'c'sle. Ye'll come back agin, won't ye? We'm lookin' for you to deliver we!"

Then swiftly, almost as a wild beast pounces, he nuzzled his mouth to her hand. She felt his hard, scrubby, dirty beard grinding against it, his mutilated and swollen lips. Sudden, sick loathing swept her.

"Ugh!" she cried, and jerked her hand away. Full strength she smote him fair across the face; she turned to run.

But now foul oaths and blasphemies echoed through that narrow den of dark thoughts, black passions. A figure loomed before her, barring the doorway.

"Avast dere, miss!" snarled Italy Dick. "Ye come here widout bein' asked to, an' now ye'll ondly layve wid our consent! You hit Chink, an' ye're goin' to 'pologize *an'* some more, too!"

He caught her round the waist. She seized a stanchion, desperately clinging with one hand, beating at his face and neck with the other. Italy Dick laughed with easy scorn of her futility, wrenched her free and——

"*Hands off, there!*"

The form of Ezra loomed in the doorway. Lamplight dimly flicked on a pistol-barrel.

Dick cursed with exceeding bitterness, but released her. She ran to Ezra, who helped her, half-fainting, out on deck.

"Oh, oh, oh!" she gasped.

"Y're all rate, miss. All rate, now!"

"Beasts!"

"Yes, I know. Come along aft wid ye now, miss."

She could hardly walk. He had to steady her.

"Mate——"

"Well, miss?"

"How—tell me—how can I ever thank you?"

"Don't thank me, miss. Thank Cap'n Wes. 'Twas him as sent me."

"No!"

"'Tis so, miss. An' I'm glad 'twas me as went, an' not him. *He'd* 'a killed Dick. Some says this about the cap'n, an' some says that. But narr un can't never say but he respects women, an'

pertects 'em! Now, go below, an' let's have no more nonsinse aburd o' this one."

In silence she walked aft, the old mate with her.

"Don't ye be narr pick afeared, miss," Ezra reassured her. "As long as him an' me's alive, ain't nobody goin' to get to wind'ard o' you ner any o' you women. Ye're safe as if in God's pocket."

She gave him a silent look, and went below. None saw her again that afternoon.

VI

BLIND!

It was two bells of the second dog-watch before the cook had cleared the supper-table. For the first time since having left St. John's Captain Castleman had eaten with the passengers. The meal had passed with only a few perfunctory words. Events of the day had double-reefed all tongues.

Janice had remained silent, muted—it seemed—of thought as well as speech. Twice or thrice she had glanced at the captain; but if he had even seen those looks he had made no sign. He had ignored her as if she had been so much thin air. Alma and Laura had made a few meagre, tentative beginnings to talk, but these had died of inanition. A cheery supper, that!

Finally, it dragged to its tedious end. The captain ordered:

"Bring the prisoner a mug up, cook. Not too much, mind. Just enough to keep him alive and able to answer questions."

"Yes, sir. 'Scuse me, sir, but——"

"Well?"

"If he's hurt bad, want me to——"

"No! Get out!"

Janice sat silent, looking at the table, trying to think and making very poor work of it. Vaguely she was wondering what torments were in store for that unfortunate; what he knew, that the captain was determined to extort from him by cruelty beyond imagination. Only imperfectly, through the whirling blur of impressions that remained from that appalling scene on deck, could she recall the captain's questions. When Castleman had set his knife to the seaman's throat, she had covered her face with both hands. She had heard dimly as in a dream something about a murder—but what murder? Yes, she remembered he had once told her, in those vanished days of other time, that his father had been killed at sea. But how? Did this prisoner know the murderer? Was he himself, perhaps, the culprit? It all seemed confused, unreal. Currents, cross-currents of hate and violence, tide-rips of passion, maelstroms of evil, of blood and agony and death, seemed swirling all about her, enveloping, dragging her down.

She shuddered, got up silently, and—putting on her heavy coat and taking her rug—went on deck.

Only there, under the paling twilight with the first timid stars beginning to peep, could she find assuagement of the fever in her soul.

"Don't thank me, miss. Thank *him!* 'Twas him as sent me!" She still heard Ezra's words. "He respects women, an' pertects 'em." And in contrast sounded the captain's: "You'll see who's master here!" and then the shuddering, sick impact of the rope.

After a while the other girls came up and sat with her, far aft near the wheel. Silence held them all. The spirit of an ominous boding meshed them round.

"Some jolly little voyage, this!" Laura at last made comment, with a toss of her red head. "You won't catch *me* going down north again on any schooner—if ever I go again at all. I'll wait for the regular mail steamer."

"Same here," chimed in Alma. "They don't whip the crew to ribbons, and—and everything, on steamers. We've only been out four days already, and it seems like a month. Wonder where we are?"

"Why not ask the mate? Mr. Mate, oh, hallo there!"

"Yes, miss?" from Ezra.

"Where are we, anyhow?"

"Well," and he raked at his beard with crooked fingers, "we ain't far from Cape Bauld. In a couple of hours we'd oughta be crossin' the Straits, wid Belle Isle off to port."

"Port? Which side's that—right or left?"

"Well, miss, I 'lows you'd call it left, lookin' forrard, y'know."

"Everybody knows that!" put in Alma. "*I* always remember by the green light being on the right-hand side, and the red one on the left, and port wine's red, so the left is port—see?"

"Well, I'm both red and green," laughed Laura, "so what am I? Mystery! Oh, Mr. Mate, how much longer is this going to last?"

"What last, miss?"

"This trip. When are you going to get to Indian Harbour?"

"If I knowed that, miss, I'd be knowledgeable to 'most as much as the Man Above. 'Bout of a week more, mebbe, if all goes nice an' tidy. But ain't narr man as can answer fer wind an' wedder, or——"

"Or what?"

"Wedder an' wind, miss."

"I do believe he was going to say 'mutiny'!" half whispered Alma. "How exciting. Wouldn't it be perfectly thrilling to go through a mutiny, and write letters about it, and——"

A long, despairing, rising shriek from below cut short her exclamation. That shriek held them all taut, listening. Janice, who till now had spoken no word, gripped the arm of her deck-chair with a gasping little cry.

She seemed about to spring up, as if perhaps some vague idea dwelt at the back of her brain that she might intervene. But all at once she sank back, shivering a little.

"I don't like *that!*" snapped Laura. "Beating and torturing, and all that sort of thing!"

"Shhhh!" Janice interposed, and laid a hand on Laura's arm. "Whatever happens, you keep *out!*"

"If I thought the captain was really——"

The scream arose once more, then died to mumbling groans.

"This is simply outrageous!" declared Alma, flushing. "We're nurses, and it's our duty to put a stop to it!"

"Miss!" cautioned Ezra sternly. "I'm old enough to be y'r fayther. Old enough to advise ye right. What will be, will be—must be!" He spoke with predestinate fixity of conviction. "Ye can't change nothin' here; ye can't better nothin'. All ye can do is to make things a wonnerful sight worse. Be blind, I'm tellin' ye. Be deaf. An' thank y'r God y're livin'—when ye get to Indian Harbour. Mind, now, no nonsense! Ye're a pretty brig, but got a trifle too much headway; so clew up! Clew up!"

Wherewith he walked away and left them motionless, silent, every nerve a-quiver.

No further sounds of anguish, however, came from below; and after rather an awful half-hour of tensions the girls went down. Nor were they seen again that night.

Long before day a sudden and ominous change in the weather gave notice of impending trouble.

Till now the wind had held with unusual steadiness from the south-west, veering only a few points. But now it began to chop round to the westward and blow a rising blast. At about seven bells of the middle watch, Captain Castleman, having that night slept no wink, became conscious of a threatening change, and went up.

He saw Ezra had trimmed the yards by the wind, and that the *Saucy Lass* was spanking along under a full spread. All very good so far, if nothing worse befell.

By two bells of the morning watch the wind had hauled north, and it continued hauling till it blew directly out of the north-east. The schooner had by now "broke off" about ten points to the eastward. As the wind chocked it increased in violence. The *Lass* began jamming her head in deep, splitting the sea that had begun to build in boiling drifts of foam. The ocean grew flurried with rain. Black clouds came marshalling in flight that masked the dawn.

As the mate saw Castleman he stopped humming his favourite song:

"Oh, I come from Upper Gullies,
An' me head filled up wid knowledge.
An' I niver went to free-school,
Or any other college/
But one thing I will tell ye,
That is, if ye are willin',
I'll tell ye how this world was made,
While ye're gropin' fer a shillin'.

Walk in, walk in, walk in, I'll say,
Oh, walk into the parlour,
An' hear the banjo play!
An' gather round the fire,
An' hear the darkies' groans,
An' watch the niggers' fingers, while
They're playin' on the bones!

The world was made in six days,
An' then they made the sky,
An' then they hung it overhead,
An' left it there to dry.
An' then they made the stars,
From pretty lasses' eyes,
To give the men a bit o' light
When the moon it didn't rise——!"

He turned toward Castleman.

"Looks bad enough, cap'n," he judged. "We'm goin' to get some dirt afore this day's yesterday, I'm thinkin'."

The captain laughed.

"It's nothing. Hell would crack before this one."

"'Tain't that I'm meanin'. But we'm wonnerful short-handed, an'——"

"Short-handed, my eye! Sweden's the only man out of it. The others——"

"One-eye, he's got his jaw bust, cap'n."

"What on earth's a jaw to do with working ship? Jaw or no jaw, he'll work. And so will all of 'em—but Sweden."

"You—don't mean—he's——"

The captain gave no answer, but his smile was odd.

So far the schooner was meeting all that wind and weather had to give, and making a good job of it. The suddenness of these Labrador tornadoes, at times their ravening ferocity, combine to make them dreaded of all Newfoundland skippers; but Captain Wes had yet to see the gale that could disturb him. His eye swept in the prospect, then travelled over sticks and rig. He nodded, satisfied.

"She'll do," said he, and lighted his pipe in shelter of the cabin-companion housing. Smoke therefrom trailed out with sparks upon the dark, forbidding air of dawn that was no dawn. "If the wind chocks round to eastward we can 'stay' and run north till we run down Indian Harbour. This won't give us much of a set-back, I'm thinking."

"I hopes ye're right, sir," was the mate's only answer. "I do so!"

Castleman continued smoking, watching the onset of the tempest, its violence and swiftness comparable to those of his own rage. If he felt any harm from One-eye's knife-slash he gave no sign. That had, after all, been only a skin-cut, already healing by first intention. An inner satisfaction that raised him above the trivialities of the flesh possessed him. Nor mutineers nor storm could vex him now; no, nor yet the wife who was no wife to him. Inscrutably he smiled.

After some half-hour or so he went below and tapped the barometer with his finger, to make sure the needle had gone as low as truth demanded—an old seaman's trick.

"She's twenty-nine—low enough, but not so bad."

By eight bells of the morning watch, breakfast being done with in gloomy silence, the wind had swung to the north-west and was coming up hand over hand in good earnest. Scuds of rain were lashing ship and ocean. A clawing sea buffeted the schooner.

"Rolling down a bit heavy, she is," judged the captain; and so she was. Half the time she wallowed scuppers-under. Not one of the girls ventured to put a nose out.

"Goin' to shorten, cap'n?" asked Ezra.

"Mmmm, yes. This may be a howler we're in for—with fireworks. 'Twouldn't surprise me if we got a bit o' lightning along with this rain." He walked to the poop rail and roared out:

"All hands on deck to shorten sail!"

The shout rang into the farthest corners of the fo'c'stle, louder than the gale's harping. Five men, such as they were, tumbled out. Haste and a consuming eagerness to obey possessed them. Recent memories ensured *that!* A sorry-looking crowd that was. Chink's face showed purple blotches. Billy Brass moved with a crouch, in respect of his raw back; his features, too, bore the Old Man's handiwork. One-eye's head was wrapped in what the fo'c'stle called a "sayzin'," to hold his jaw in place. Only Tom Hawk and Italy Dick were scatheless of body; but their minds bore anticipatory scars that lent their muscles agility.

"Clew up the to'gal'n'sl!" blared the command, and on the heel of it a distant boom rolled roundly from the rain-drenched clouds. Into the rigging jumped the men, and never was sail more smartly clewed.

"Haul down the to'gal'n-stays'l!"

More keenly smote the swift-rising tempest. As the men laboured, a play of lightning brought their faces—distorted with injuries and striving—into pale relief against the deepening gloom. Wan, ghostly the ship appeared. The marching hills of water slewed into long broideries of foam. Smooth hollows showed all pitted with raindrops swirling volleys; rain danced elfishly on the men's oilers, along the tilted decks; it guttered, swashed, fled off before the gale in dribbling streamers.

"Haul down the flying-jib now! Look alive! Take in the main gaffitops'l!"

Now the *Saucy Lass* began gulping it in earnest. She was taking it green, all forward. The heavy surges cascaded over her fo'c'stle-head, poured down into her waist, and swirled aft with a foaming dash against the poop wall, then raged forward again to seek an outlet through the scuppers; but these were rarely clear.

Ezra was working now with the men. Hardy, shrewd, and knowing his ropes drunk or sober, awake or asleep, he was as good as two. Enheartened by his help, the hang-dog crew assumed an aspect of staunch men. Their energy was not all rooted in fear of Captain Castleman. Another and a vaster

enemy now threatened to engulf them. With life perhaps at stake, they rose to meet the emergency like men indeed.

Secretly the captain admired their seamanship, their courage and address.

"If I had 'em to lick into shape a year or two," thought he, "I might make 'em almost white."

He waited till the upper tops'l was lowered away, then shouted:

"Make everything fast, and stand by!"

Steadily the wind kept mounting. It ravened with a kind of malicious glee at the staggering schooner, as if to heave her down for very spite's sake. A vast, bewildering tumult bellowed above, below. A million raindrops glistened one split-second, then vanished as the lightning blacked out. In weird, acid colours all things stood revealed, only to fade once more to drabs and formless greys.

Another order now:

"Double-reef the mains'l! Haul down the boom jib!"

Captain Castleman was making a good job of shortening. Though the storm-sails had already been stowed, the *Saucy Lass* was still heavily labouring.

Men staggered aft to the poop, bizarre figures in oilskins and sou'westers. Old Ezra stood on the port side; Castleman moved from the to'gal'n-rail to the fife-rail at the break of the poop.

"Come along now, you slindgers!" he roared. "Look alive there, you loafing——"

A splintering, sulphurous crash annihilated the epithet. The ship glared blue-white.

The captain reeled, caught himself a second, then crumpled to his knees and sprawled distorted.

Even as Ezra was exhorting: "Get them reefs in, lively! Watch y'r hellum, there—don't layve her broach to!" he saw Castleman fall.

"Heaven's mercy!" he gulped, and ran to the smitten man.

He dragged the captain to his knees, and held him swaying there with the pitch of the schooner under that drumming drive of gale and drench.

"Hurt bad, cap'n?"

Castleman was making uncertain gestures with hands that quivered in a palsy.

"Ezra—that you?"

"Sure 'tis me! Come on, sir—go below. She's all rate now. I'll mind evveryt'ing. This won't last long. Below wid ye, sir. Come on, below wid ye now!"

He hauled mightily to get the captain under way.

"Up to y'r feet now, sir. Can't ye stand an' navigate a bit?"

Castleman made a stern effort. Helped by Ezra he got up and stood there, head hanging, numbed, shaken.

"Ezra!" His voice had become a kind of thick whisper. "Tell me what—what makes it so dark?"

"Dark, sir? A wonnerful starm, sir."

"I know, Ezra. But—it's more than that. It's all black." His voice hardly was audible above the mad, hilarious swoop of sea and wind. "*Black*, Ezra. *Everything!*"

"Why, no it ain't, sir. Kind o' duckish, I 'lows. But ye can see all rate. Come along, cap'n. I'll bear a hand."

The captain blinked, passed a groping hand before his face, and caught in a sudden breath.

"Ezra—I—Heaven above! I'm——"

"What's astray, sir?"

"*Blind!*"

VII

TIGHTENING COILS

All that day the mate kept on watch. Full responsibility had now fallen upon him for the schooner and the women. Castleman stayed below, sightless, impotent. The nurses could do nothing. Lightning blindness, perhaps one of the rarest of all accidents, lay far beyond their scope. Dressings and bandages exhausted their skill. So the captain remained alone in his state-room, his powerful head tight-swathed, a figure beaten, broken, done.

"A rare do," thought Ezra. "'Tis so! Long as *he* was in charge we could hold these here ones; but now——!"

Forebodings fingered at his heart. Not even the pistols he had belted on reassured him. Only two—bosun Stirge and he—now remained to manage the schooner, and eventually one or the other must sleep. And then—what?

So long as the storm should last the men would make no demonstration. Their own skins demanded obedience. But once the gale should moderate——

"Look out, then, fer muckery!" Ezra said to Stirge.

The bosun, his yellow moustache dripping rain and spray under his equally yellow oilskins, shook his head as he leaned competent weight on the kicking spokes.

(*Continued on page* 257)

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"*I* ain't borrowin' no trouble! I got me own gun. That's three us got. An' them trash, a-dere forrards, ain't got narr un. Wipe 'em out, easy, if they starts an argyment. That's *my* say-so!"

"Mebbe. But—I niver killed a man yet, an' I been to sea more'n forty year, man an' boy. 'Course I could, on a pinch, but——"

Stirge laughed.

"Men! *Them* ain't men. Dogs, I calls 'em. Us'll show 'em, sudden too! How's the Old Man?"

"Wonnerful bad-off, Moses. You know what blue flashnin's like. An' he got a rare dose of it, rate down in front of his face."

"Hmmmph!" grunted Stirge. "Well, it's all in the swim o' the day's work. All us can do is hope fer the best—an' chance it now!"

Towards night the storm showed signs of abating. The rain ceased, clouds broke, and tiny patches of sky fugitively appeared, not yet quite big enough "to make a Dutchman a pair of trousers," but giving promise of clearing weather. This, ordinarily welcome, now had become to Ezra a source of heavy dread.

At supper the captain did not appear. A gloomy meal that. They talked only of trivialities, as people sometimes will when disaster impends. After the table was cleared Ezra carried food to Castleman; but he, sitting a swathed, despairful figure, would have none of it.

"My mind's not for eating now, Ezra."

"*Don't* have the bad word, sir!" Ezra tried to comfort him. "The men ain't made narr move yet, an' if they does me an' the bose can handle 'em. An' as fer them eyes o' yourn, once us gets to Indian Harbour there's good doctors."

"Yes, once we do. Oh, Ezra!"

"Sir?"

"Don't forget to feed that swine in irons. I still need him."

"I minds Sweden, sir."

"Has he been making any row? Saying anything?"

"Narr pick, sir. Quiet an' appliable as a babby—like all of 'em."

"They're hatching trouble, never fear. And I—here I am! Can't strike a blow, fire a shot, or whatever! Here I've got the finest bunch of cut-throats and the first real clue I've ever run down, and now——"

"Be easy in y'r mind, sir. 'Twill all work out in time."

Castleman pondered, then held out his hand. Ezra took it.

"You're the full sail and the double reef all in one, Ezra," said he. "A good sound man. Tell me—the women—all right, eh?"

"As rain, sir."

"None of 'em afraid, or anything?"

"No, sir."

"Don't let 'em be, Ezra. You know—put the best foot forward. We mustn't let 'em worry."

"Trust me for that, sir. An' if them dogs forrard thinks they're goin' girlin', after this blow's done——"

"I know, Ezra. Well, that's all now."

The mate departed to feed Sweden, and Castleman remained in darkness, brooding.

At this same moment Janice Garth was thinking, too.

Lying in her berth, lamp turned low and its vague light swinging fantastically along the state-room walls, the captain's wife was indulging in a mood wholly strange to her. Regrets and self-reproaches had always been foreign to her dominant, a little cruel, personality. She had always driven—driven her father, servants, horses, friends, everybody. She had tried to drive her husband, too; but no being lived who could do that. So she had lost him, and, losing, had hated. When poverty had come after the disaster of her father's bankruptcy and death, she had still tried to keep up the same hard driving. How vainly!

The world had retaliated, and had driven her instead. Driven her to work, to submit, to take orders. She had fought and lost. But through it all she still had hated. The soul of her, a caged tigress, had striven against steel.

Through all, in all, she had for ever blamed others. This one and that; they had always been the cause of her defeat and misery. Her husband who had abandoned her; she had hated him above all. That he had thus abandoned because she had been intolerable, had never absolved his guilt. She had never admitted the intolerableness. What woman ever really does?

But now, doubts, wonders, admissions came battering for recognition. These past days had rent the veil, not wholly, but enough for light to glimmer through.

As mental and spiritual vision had come to her, Castleman's physical sight had been dashed into blackness. Something implacable, sinister appeared at work; forces she could not grasp.

A long time she pondered, there in the dim-lit cabin. Her eyes, liquidly dark, seemed to see nothing of her harsh environment. They looked beyond cabin walls, beyond storm and sea, to larger objectives, vaster ends.

"Blind!" she was thinking. "All these long years—blind!" And from unknown and unsuspected deeps there suddenly upwelled a prayer unbidden:

"God, take my sight and give it all to him!"

Not until about seven bells of the morning watch next day did Castleman reappear on deck. Night had been a boiling cauldron of anguish, sleepless, unspeakable Fear for the ship and for the fate of the women—Janice vastly above all—had outweighed any thought of what might befall himself; even bitter realization that perhaps the world had now for ever become a place of blackness for him. As with a kind of added torment, ironically driven and clinched, he had realized defeat even in the hour of seeming victory; the hour in which he had hoped for vengeance on a man he felt knew who had murdered his father. Nay, perhaps been the murderer himself!

Soon, he knew—if not already—the fo'c's'le would learn of his blindness. The mutinous dogs would pluck up heart again for another try at seizing the ship and the women. And Janice, yes, she would learn lessons too terrible even for thought.

Gropingly he made his way up the companionway and out on deck. He stood a moment, scenting wind and weather, realizing the storm was done. Against the housing he steadied himself. His sea-legs had deserted him. A lost sense of strangeness, of aloofness from his mighty friend the sea, filled and frightened him—who never yet had been afraid.

"Oh, Ezra!" at length he called.

"Sir?" the mate answered from forward.

"Come aft when you can."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

And when Ezra came the captain asked:

"How's the wind and sea?"

"Moderated a wonnerful lot, sir. Fine civil wedder comin', if all signs don't fail. Had y'r mug-up yet, sir?"

"No. Can't eat—yet. How's she heading?"

"Nor'-east-be-nor'd, sir. Nothin' else to report, as I knows on Anyt'ing I can do fer ye, cap'n?"

"No. Only—drive her like hell on wheels! Clap on every bit o' canvas we've got."

"I'll do that, sir." And Ezra walked forward once more.

The captain stood there, fishing for pipe and tobacco in the pocket of his pea-jacket

A touch on his shoulder startled him.

"Hallo! Who's that?"

"Don't you know me, Weston?"

Janice had come up the companion-stair quietly. Now there she was, beside him, a little pale and wistful—frightened, almost—but smiling.

"Oh, you, Miss Garth?"

"Not Miss Garth now. Your wife, Weston."

"*Puh!* No, no!"

"But listen——"

"No! You're Miss Garth, and I'm Captain Castleman. Nothing doing, at all. This pitiful-angel idea won't go. The sooner you get that into your head the better for both of us!"

"Listen just a minute," she entreated. "You're hurt, blind. That changes things, doesn't it?"

"Not one iota! Makes 'em worse, if anything. A man that's not good enough when he's O.K. can't be good enough when he's on a lee shore with all cables parted. And——"

"But that's for me to judge, isn't it?"

"And besides, you're not good enough for *me* now. That's flat. I'm not beating round any bushes. What's the use? I'm done!"

A moment she winced, finding no answer. She rubbed her fingers gently up and down along the rough seam of his sleeve, her eyes softer than ever they had been.

"Life—it's strange," she said with none of the old-time aggressive fire in her voice. "It teaches you things, just as a father and mother teach a child things. You have to learn. You suffer and rebel, but—you learn. These last few hours I've been learning. Such a great deal! I've changed. You don't know—how much. Things are different. And——"

His laugh held an unanswerable brutality.

"You mean to tell me," he demanded, "I'd listen to you? After the way you went into the fo'c'stle like a very—well, I won't say it! You know what I mean!"

A flush of anger, of shame, spread from her throat to brow. She turned, and, saying not another word, went below.

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Page 259
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Page 260
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No stories were affected

The news of Castleman's bandaged eyes flashed like wildfire through the fo'c'sle. Chink Conway exulted more than any.

"Look-see here, maties!" he cried, his face a devil's by the smoky light. "Here's luck, by glory! The Old Man's blind! Ain't that fair wonnerful?"

"Now's our time to show as we ain't dogs to be kicked an' flogged!" mumbled One-eye thickly. "Things is comin' *our* way now!"

"If we're deep-water men worth the name," Tom Hawk added, "we'll learn him a lesson he won't be fergettin' in a hurry."

"Right-o, matey!" agreed Italy Dick, blowing smoke. "Us workin' our hearts out fer a dirty thirty a month, while the Old Man's gettin' flakes o' money!"

Silence, a moment, brooding and bodeful. Then Billy Brass spat nicotine, and began:

"I don't mind takin' in canvas when there's danger, ner goin' aloft if there's reason. But as for all this swabbin' decks, polishin' metal, splicin' dead halyards an' emptyin' skungeon-buckets—yes, an' eatin' any old kind o' grub!—why, I'm sick of all this here, an' me heart longs to be free an' roamin'—sailin' where I likes. Why shouldn't we have a wessel of our own, I'm askin'?"

"Meanin' how?" cut in Chink.

"Ain't we earned one, after all these years, by our sweat? What's amiss wid takin' this here one? We can sail her rate on up to Baffin Land this time o' year, load her wid furs an' skins from the Huskimaw, cross over to the Old Country, an' sell out. Sell it all, furs an' ship an' the whole business. We'd clean up enough fer life."

"Ye sure got a long head, me son," agreed Tom Hawk. "I'm wid ye! What say, men?"

"Ye're forgettin' one t'ing," painfully articulated One-eye, his jaw swathed in a dirty rag of bandage. "There's that mate of ours, Sweden Mickey, starvin' in the cabin yet. Us got to have un out o' dere afore he perishes!"

"Now ye're talking!" Tom Hawk rejoiced. "It's a say-so fer all, an' the quicker us gets the job troo the better. Couldn't be a finer time 'an to-night. Wind's droppin', an' this un 'll be able to look after herself fer the few minutes it'll take us to clean up."

A bestial, low growl filled the fo'c'stle.

"Eight bells o' the first night-watch it is, b'ys," Chink instructed. "An' not a move till I shouts. An' when ye knife—knife to kill!"

VIII

THE BATTLE OF THE "SAUCY LASS"

The afternoon passed quietly, with falling wind and sea. Captain Castleman kept below. The girls came on deck, and for a long time sat in a kind of feminine apathy, just brooding away the hours. Bosun Stirge slept; Ezra took charge with Billy Brass at the wheel.

"An' no nonsinse out o' ye now, neither," the mate cautioned. He hauled back the flap of his pea-jacket, showing a pistol belted beneath.

The dog-watches passed. At the beginning of the second Stirge took on, and let Ezra have his wink of sleep. Stirge, too, was armed. He took the wheel himself.

"An' look ye, Brass," he warned the seaman going off-watch, "the first man as sets foot on this poop-deck gets a bullet through his gizzard. You sons o' pups are hatchin' mischief. Well, we're ready—an' you go tell 'em so, too."

Brass went, all protestations of innocence. Once back in the fo'c'stle, however, he ripped off a yard of foul oaths, and told the incident with much embroidery.

A little after four bells of the first night-watch the girls turned in. Janice, through some premonition of evil, some instinctive warning, put her door on the hook. As she lay in her berth she could see a narrow segment of the main cabin, not far from Castleman's door. Thoughts disturbed and unhappy, longings, regrets, even pique and feminine resentment kept sleep afar.

Perhaps an hour later she heard steps in the cabin, saw Ezra pass her line of vision. Only a momentary sight of him, that was; but in that glimpse she had seen round his waist a belt, and in that belt a gun. She slid out of her berth, and barefoot went to her door, peeped through the crack of it. Ezra was gone; she could hear his jack-boots on the companion-stair.

Stabbed by a very real uneasiness she stood there pondering a moment, and as she stood Castleman's door swung open. The captain appeared. Quite plainly she saw his bandaged head, swathed below the eyes, the swing and set of his shoulders, the groping of his hand as he walked down along the cabin wall. She watched him while he went to the door confining his prisoner; saw him try the knob as if to satisfy himself the door was locked fast; then retrace his steps. And up from her

heart, like tides along a stormy coast, rose a resistless pity for this lonely wounded, bitter soul.

"Captain!" she called, in hardly more than a whisper.

He stopped short, listened, half-turned.

"Who's that?"

"Janice!"

He made a sound of repulsion.

"There must be something I can do—something, surely?"

Bitterly he laughed.

"Yes, there is."

"What is it?"

"You can—but there—where are you?"

"I'm in my state-room. Talking through the crack in the door. If you'd only tell me——"

"I will. I'll do more than tell you; I'll command you! Close that door and bolt it! And if you put it on the hook again to-night, or open it, I'll have you locked in till we reach Indian Harbour. That's all!"

He waited till he heard the bolt drive home. Then, his lips hard and white, he sat down at the table in the main cabin. Moving not, nor smoking, a figure as if carved in wood—helpless, beaten, impotent—he kept his lonely vigil with vague lamplshine on his bandaged eyes.

At eight bells of that watch—midnight in land-faring time—Chink Conway issued from the fo'c'stle with a belaying-pin up his sleeve. Dark figures, hardly more than Acherontic shades, moved ghostly behind him.

Ezra, standing near the section of the poop-rail that had been shattered by the lightning-bolt, had been watching the palest of moonlight seep through drifting cloud-banners and fleck the sea's slow trundling. He spied the ominous figures, and turned his head to Stirge at the wheel.

"Bose!"

"Hello?"

"Keep y'r wedder eye lifted. They're comin' aft. Get y'r gun loose an' handy."

"Right!" And Stirge, one hand on a spoke, with the other drew his pistol.

Ezra did as much, leaving one gun still in his belt at the left side. He stood up to the rail, ready for business.

"Ahoy, there! Who's that?"

"It's ondly me, sir," answered Chink, meeker than Moses ever dreamed of being. Along behind him the others drifted.

"What d'ye want?"

"Ondly a few words wid the Old Man, sir. Couldn't I see un, please?"

"Ye got to wait till mornin'. This here ain't no time to see no cap'n. Get along forrard."

Still Chink advanced, warily. The weight of the belaying-pin gave him courage; so, too, a razor-sharpened sheath-knife naked in his pocket.

"Please, mate," Chink persisted, "the men has app'inted me to interview un."

"Get forrard!"

Chink's arm whirled. At hardly ten feet distance he flung the heavy iron pin.

His aim was true. The pin caught Ezra's collar-bone, crumpled it, sent the mate reeling.

Hideous, wild yells split the night. Chink rushed, drawing his knife. After him streamed the others, howling.

Louder than all arose Chink's howl:

"Come on! We'll give de cap'n what me an' Sweden Mickey a'ready give his faythen!"

He charged, leaped up the steps to the poop and broke for the cabin companionway.

The others swarmed after. Stirge's gun spat fire, all six shots. One-eye grunted, doubled up and rolled against the rail, holding his stomach.

Ezra struggled up and let him have it again, so close the powder burned his face. One-eye kicked, flattened out and lay still as a bundle of rags.

At the wheel it was hand-to-hand work now. There the renegade cook was at Stirge with a cleaver. The bosun beat him off a moment with the pistol-butt. Only a minute, though. The cleaver smashed down and Stirge stumbled forward, hands clutched to his throat.

The cook turned with the stained cleaver in hand, dashing for the companionway, and pitched prone, a bullet from Ezra's gun through his head.

Before Ezra could fire again Italy Dick leaped, knifed him, wrenched his gun away. The dark kept them from noting the other pistol belted round him. Ezra collapsed.

"Hayve un overburd! Look alive!" The order snarled from Chink, at the companionway. Italy and Tom Hawk seized him, swung and gave him a toss off the poop; but the inert body failed to clear the schooner's rail in the waist. It hung there a moment, precariously poised, then slumped back heavily into the scuppers and lay oddly distorted.

"Come on, b'ys!" Chink shouted. "Below now! The women's down there, an' ondly that dog's son of a cap'n to

settle wid—an' he's blind as a bat. Dick an' Billy Brass, you two down the skylight. Hawk, you come wid me!"

Crouched below there, tense as a tiger for its leap, the captain was waiting. Sightless, he was girt for battle: a Samson of destruction. Chink's shout: "We'll give him what me an' Sweden a'ready give his faythe r!" had carried to his ears. One of the murderers had let slip the truth. Castleman's blood seethed. He cursed, and in the same instant prayed:

"Oh, God of War! Give me my sight only one little moment—then do with me as ye will!"

Swift inspiration dawned. He groped for the table, the lamp above it; smote off the chimney, and with a puff reduced the cabin to blackness save for a narrow filigree of dim light above the door of Janice's state-room. Her lamp, still burning, showed vaguely through the ventilating panel. Darkness swallowed all else. Castleman must fight in the black. So too, then, must they.

Italy Dick and Billy Brass were wrenching off the skylight-covers. Pieces of glass rained down on the table, clattered to the cabin floor. Then Brass swung himself over the edge, and, already dangling, stopped.

"Mercy's sake, it's dark!" he shouted. "He's doused the lamp. Chink—lanterns! Avast, there. Lanterns, afore we——"

The shout ended in a whoop of terror as Brass was swiftly plucked down. Something vice-like, resistless, caught him; something that gripped and held like tentacles of a devil-fish.

A wrench. He vanished. His shriek ended. Something thudded; all grew silent.

One of the girls began to scream hysterically.

"Come on, ye guffies!" Chink harangued. "Are ye men or are ye dogs?"

"Hold hard!" Italy bawled hoarsely. He thrust into the skylight the pistol he had wrenched from Ezra. Turning it in an arc, he fired the four shots still remaining.

"Hayve down some fire from de galley, an' smoke de varmint out!" cried Tom Hawk.

"An' burn de ship, mebbe, an' choke de women? No, *sir!*" Chink vetoed. "What's de matter o' you b'ys? 'Feared, eh? I *thought* ye was yellow! Narr un o' ye don't dare foller me down!"

"Hell's flames, *I'm* wid ye!" bawled Italy, and made a clean jump through the skylight, knife in hand. He struck on the table, slid off. Eyes wide, body crouched and knife raised ready, he froze to silence, waiting for some sound, some hint of Castleman's position. Too vague was the light for vision. Blinded man, and man in the dark, they waited.

Chink, at the instant of Italy's leap, plunged down the companionway with Tom Hawk at his heels.

And now from aft sounded a splintering crash, an uproar of kicking and of sundered wood. The door confining Sweden Mickey slammed wide, its lock smashed by Sweden's heavy sea-boot.

As Chink and Tom Hawk burst furiously into the cabin, another sound of splitting, of breaking, filled the place. Castleman had just seized a cabin chair in his gorilla hands and wrenched it from the bolts that held it fast.

"Come on, ye son of a one!" roared Chink. "Get the same as I give y'r old man——"

It ended in a grunt, a gasp and fall, as the cabin chair swung like a trip-hammer.

Feet braced, back to the wall, Castleman swung that chair. Now dimly Hawk saw him. Hawk dropped to his knees and crawled for the captain. He would slide under that deadly sweep, knife him upward.

Sweden rushed, stumbling, blaspheming—a battered, broken man with hate envenomed.

"Layve me at un!" he howled.

Italy Dick swung his knife for a throw. The chair, blindly sweeping, hit the lamp, catapulted it into Italy's bestial face with a drench of oil. The knife, deflected, struck into the wall over Castleman's head, vibrated there.

Eyes and mouth filled with oil, Italy choked, sputtered, smeared savagely with sleeves. Castleman laughed—the first sound he had made since the attack had started.

"Now, Sweden!" he shouted. "Now for *you!*"

He lunged along the cabin, battering with the chair, and by that instant's grace, that change of position, missed the upward slash of Hawk's long blade.

He stumbled in his blindness, though, over Chink's body, and went asprawl. Sweden Mickey fell on him, beating with the heavy manacles. Castleman got a grip of the man's throat.

Tom lunged for them as they rolled beside the cabin table. He struck—and the blade came back crimson with Sweden's blood.

Castleman swung for Hawk, caught him by a leg and pulled him down. The captain was bleeding now from a badly wounded hand, and the ragged lacerations wrought by blows from the manacles. Little he knew of that, or felt, or cared! He overbore Hawk as a lion might a jackal. The captain's left hand sought, found, Hawk's right wrist, and closed like a python's coils. Hawk's fingers weakened, opened, the knife fell from them.

And on that instant, as Italy Dick found breath again and some glimmer of vision after his oil-drench, the door of Janice's state-room burst open.

The captain's wife appeared there, in slippers and girt bath-robe, with her masses of black hair loose and free. Her state-room light outlined her. It showed, too, the gleam of metal in the woman's hand. Metal—scissors!

Dick was just crouching, knife ready, for a leap at the struggling men on the floor; just poising an instant to make sure which was Hawk and which the captain, before striking. He blinked, his face a maniac's. He raised his knife, tensed for the blow——

Janice was on him, the full strength of her arm drove that blow. The scissors plunged under his left shoulder-blade.

Dick stood a moment dazed, then turned.

"Why, damme—if it ain't one o' de gals! An' nervy, too. Jabbed me wid a pin, or somethin'!" He advanced towards her, leering. "Well, now—de very girl I'd set me heart on——"

He stopped then, and his face twitched. He coughed. A trickle of crimson dyed the corner of his mouth. His eyes grew blurred with a vast, formless terror.

"If you—if you've done me in, you——!" he gulped, and raised his knife. His face grew waxy, seemed to shrivel.

Even as he would have struck at her, the strength drained out of him. He bent sideways and tried to sit down in a cabin-chair that dimly showed.

But strength failed for even this. The knife dropped from his hand. He slid down. A dark flood choked all speech, and he died.

The captain, staggering up—a nightmare figure—from the lifeless body of Tom Hawk, panted:

"Any more now? Come on—come along!"

But only a woman's sobbing cry made answer.

IX

PULLING TOGETHER

Morning, after a night of horrors manifold, found the *Saucy Lass* still northward-bound under her full spread.

Janice held the wheel, steering the course that Castleman had given her. The other two women were at work, Alma in the galley, Laura finishing the most ghastly labour of her life—that of bringing the wrecked cabin into some semblance of order. They had dressed the captain's wounds and got him into his own berth; had—at his command—ventured on deck with a lantern and discovered, near the binnacle's ghost-gleam, the fearful thing that had been Stirge; had mustered courage to drag it over the rail and consign it to the sea's kindly oblivion.

Then they had heard Ezra groaning and calling somewhere in the night; had got him into blankets on deck, in the lee of the galley. There they had bound his gash, but had been obliged to leave the setting of the bones till morning.

"I'll be fine, ladies," he had tried to smile, with white lips. "Dead? Not by a jugful! But all them sons o' ones—all topped their booms, ye say? Grand news fer sore ears, me darlin' nurses. Oh, Cap'n Castleman's the b'y to handle muck like them! But—Moses Stirge? Gone, eh? Ah, well, 'tis as he'd 'av liked it best. A quick end an' a sea-toss, an' safe now wid Davy Jones at last!"

The schooner all this time had been a crazed thing, coming up into the wind, then paying off. Sticks and canvas had groaned, thrashed, slatted. Good hap, both wind and wave were moderate.

Now, broken, battered, stained, the schooner once more knew the touch of human guidance, once again held her course. Castleman felt her steadying, sensed her obedience as he lay brooding and in pain.

Under his occasional orders, with once in a way an added suggestion from Ezra in his blankets on deck, a kind of rough order began to emerge from chaos.

As Janice felt the tug and thrust of the wheel, and as—eye on binnacle—she held the needle true, her nerves grew calmer. What links a human soul more closely to the elemental power and freedom of the sea than this, to sense the ocean's illimitable suspirations and the wind's glad strength? At a ship's wheel to thwart yet work with both?

To the surprise of Janice, about six bells of the morning watch, Captain

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Castleman came out of the cabin companionway, and stood there blind-bandaged and with swathed right hand, seeming to sniff the weather.

An extraordinary figure he, with the whole top of his head and half-way down his nose now tightly wrapped in white. His peaked cap would no longer fit, so he had dispensed with it. Grotesquely enough, a pipe projected from beneath the bandages, but it held no fire. The swaddled hand gave him a helpless air. Silent he stood, head a little raised, as if peering afar into that fresh-breezed morning tempered by fading mists. Blind, yet seeming to stand at gaze, he remained a little while motionless. Then he groped to the shattered poop-rail, down to the main deck, and called:

"Ezra!"

"Sir?"

"How you coming on?"

"Couldn't be finer, sir. I'm wonnerful easy, sir. They're goin' to set me leg afore long, so they tells me. But how's y'rself?"

"Al. Scratch or two, that's all. Never mind about me. All I'm thinking is, I wish we had this one at Indian Harbour."

"She'll make it all rate, cap'n, wid mermaids an' ocean fairies like them to man her!" He tried to laugh, but, shifting his position a bit, groaned instead.

"Will, if the weather holds—maybe," Castleman made answer. "The way she thrashed round before we got her steady didn't do her much good. Might ha' sprung her a bit, I'm thinking."

"It might so. If I ondly had the use o' me leg, I'd sound her."

Captain Castleman felt his way to the fiferail of the mainmast, where he located the sounding-rod and line. Lifting out the pump-boxes, he let the line run to the bottom, then hauled it up and fumbled back to the mate.

"What's she like, eh, Ezra?"

"All rate, sir. Not over eight inches. Ain't made a drop, sir. Not a drop."

"Good!" And the captain shuffled blindly away to replace rod, line and pump-boxes.

"A fine job!" he growled, returning. "I'm blind. You've got a broken leg. And here's three women and a full-dressed schooner!"

"Which one ye got to the wheel now, cap'n?"

"Eh? Oh, Miss Garth."

"Garth. That's the purty one, ain't it? Her wid the goldy-brown hair an' eyes." Ezra raked his beard, contemplatively. "Her as any man'd glad to haul in 'longside of, an' cast anchor?"

No answer, save a hardening of the captain's jaw.

"Think ye ought to drive her this way, sir?"

"Drive who?"

"It ain't a who I'm talkin' on. It's a which, sir. I'm referrin' to this here *Saucy Lass*. Us got a power o' canvas on her, fer runnin' so short-handed. Short-handed? *No*-handed, I better say. S'posin' now, sir, it come on scuddy, or a squall was to hit us? Where'd we be, too, but in that same Davy Jones's locker, long o' the others good an' bad?"

"I don't know but you're right, Ezra. I was only thinking about driving her—getting down north at all hazards. But I'm maybe wrong. We must be somewhere off Island of Ponds. Sight the Labrador, can you?"

"Narr sight, sir! But, anyhow, if we was to heave her up it'd be safer. Bound to be some schooner or other comin' along afore the day's out. Heave her up, says I. Square the yards, sir, an' bicket the wheel. That's *my* say-so—though who'm I, sir, to be advisin' ye?"

"First-rate idea, Ezra. We *are* taking chances, this time o' year. July-month you can never tell from hour to hour. You be eyes for me, Ezra, and I'll do the job!"

"Wid one hand in a sayzin', like that?"

"Why not? What's a hand or less?"

He fumbled his way amidships, found the lee main rigging, and—using only his left hand—let go the braces. He crossed to the weather side, hauled the yards square.

"Tell me when they're squared, Ezra!" he called.

"Yes, sir. Go ahead; *leetle* more. Just a touch, the laysest little touch. Steady! All rate, sir!"

From the galley sounded a: "Well, of all things!" Alma, looking out in wonder, opened a mouth of astonishment. "See here, captain, you oughtn't to be working—with your hand in that state!"

"You oughtn't to be talking with your brains in that state!" he retorted. "I'll have more than this to do before long. You'll have to re-bandage my hand, leaving the fingers out. And, by the way, how long before you're going to set the mate's leg? Proper nurses, *you* are! Leave a man lie here this way!"

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—you mustn't use your fingers yet a while. We've got everything wrapped tight. You'll just start your wound bleeding again, tear everything all open and—might set up an infection, or Heaven knows what! No, no—you can't use your fingers yet."

He laughed savagely, and with his left hand seized the bandages.

"Will you dress my hand again, as I tell you, or shall I rip all this off right now?"

Amazed, she stared a silent moment. Then:

"Come below, captain," said she.

Half an hour onward, it being then two bells of the forenoon watch, Castleman came on deck for a task the like of which had never yet been attempted and probably never will again—the task of going aloft and furling sail while blind.

Janice had so arranged his bandages that the fingers of his right hand projected from about the second joint. Discoloured and swollen those fingers were.

"But," as Ezra pondered to himself, "ye might's well whistle hornpipes to a bollard as try to stop the Old Man when he's fer anyt'ing. So, layve un try it. Ain't narr nudder t'ing to do!"

"You watch out for me sharp, Ezra!" bade the captain. "You've got to be eyes for me now."

"I'll be y'r eyes, sir. But if they girls 'd move me a bit aft o' here I'd get a better shoot at aloft."

Castleman called the women. Carefully they dragged Ezra, bed and all, back to the poop wall, and banked him up with pillows.

"There now, you're all right, eh?" asked Castleman. "Now, watch sharp, I'm going to take in the flying jib first."

"Let me go along, too," put in Janice. "I can help you get there."

He pushed her hand aside as she laid it on his arm, and groped away forward, silently. Without difficulty he found the jib-halyards and let it go. Clambering up the steps to the barricade he located the downhaul, and pulled the sail down tight.

Back again he fumbled to the main deck, and there eased off the jib-sheet. Returning to the barricade he hauled down the jib tight on the boom; then, on deck again, hauled the jib-sheets aft tight.

With curious, only half-understanding eyes, the women watched him.

"I suppose," smiled Alma, "that's what they call 'knowing the ropes.' Eh, mate?"

Ezra puffed vast smoke

"Y'ain't begun to see nothin' yet," he rumbled, and caressed his tangle of beard. "No, ner know nothin' o' that man. There's just two kinds o' men in this world—*him*, an' all the rest. When the Man Above got troo wid makin' Cap'n Wes, He tore up the plans, I'm thinkin'."

To this, none made any comment. Janice half opened her lips, as if to speak, but held her peace. Her eyes, though—liquid, profound—glowed with another light than they had borne only yesterday.

Slowly now Captain Wes came aft to the fiferail of the mainmast, while they watched him as if he had been some master-conjuror.

Blood had now begun to seep through the bandages of his hand, spreading in a sullen, crimson stain; but he gave no sign of recognition to that grievous hurt.

Now he groped along the side. In his strong grasp he took the to'gal'n-halyards, and lowered the yard on the lift. He found the sheets and let them go. Then he made way to the clewlines, clewed up the yard-arms, and hauled the buntline taut.

Ezra could not resist exclaiming:

"Ladies! Ye're lookin' at the finest sailor as iver stood afore a mast! Hard he might be, an' tough, but evvery square inch o' he 's a sailor."

Aft again, Castleman let go the maintopm'st-stays'l halyards. He went forward, eased off the sheet, then with the downhaul finished the task.

"Well, sir, ye got t'roo all rate, praise be! But *I* ain't had nothin' to tell ye."

"I'm not done yet, Ezra."

"Where ye goin' now, sir?"

"To put the gaskets on the to'gal'ns'l and to'gal'nstays'l while I can. I reckon it may be too late before long. How's she look, the weather?"

"Well," and Ezra cast a wise eye at the heavens, "I've seen it wuss, an' better too. There's wind comin' afore night, that's sure. But—take it easy, sir! No long chances now. An' if ye could see y'r way cl'ar to *not* goin' aloft——"

Castleman made no answer. Already he was at the weather rigging, ready to mount.

Hand over hand he went up the ratlines, while the watchers almost forgot to breathe. Janice knew every minute threatened disaster that might cost his life. Her fingers twisted together with nervous tension

Furl after furl Castleman put in the canvas, precariously clinging far aloft there. An age seemed to have dragged away before that task was done.

The end of it, though, loosed something of their tensions. Coming in, Castleman made fast the bunt. Then—his hand caught for the backstay—missed. He had misjudged the distance.

Janice choked back a cry. Ezra swore. Alma and the other girl uttered little, pale screams. The captain swayed, caught his balance, worked nearer the backstay. This time his grip of steel caught round it. He worked his way down the ratlines to the deck again.

A tremulous sigh escaped Janice. Everything whirled. Thoughts grew fevered. Why had that man risked life, done this unparalleled thing? Why, but to keep them from possibilities of evil, to bring them safe to port? The past closed in about her, stifling her.

Now he was moving forward again.

"Ain't ye done enough, cap'n?" hailed Ezra, a catch in his voice.

Castleman crawled out on the jib-boom, and, swaying there, put the gaskets on the flying jib. Now at last satisfied, he came inboard again, and groped aft to the watchers.

Blood was stealthily oozing down the captain's fingers. One dark, slow drop fell on deck. Silent though that fall was, it seemed to strike a blow that clamoured through Janice's life and soul and heart.

"Let me dress your hand again," she said, in a strained, unnatural voice.

"I think the schooner ought to run easy now, mate," judged Castleman.

He turned and made his way to the steps.

His bandaged hand, wherever it touched to steady him—and he was swaying more than the schooner's easy roll would warrant—left dull smears.

Looking after him, Janice felt tears brim her eyes, unbidden.

X

PERHAPS?

She found him sitting sunk far down in his big chair by the table in the cabin that still showed grim scars of battle, murder, and sudden death. His wounded hand lay on the table. The pipe in his mouth was cold. In every line of his attitude dejection and pain outstood. His heroic mood had passed; he had become just a big, lonely man, sore-wounded, blind, desperately spent.

"Hallo! Who's there?" he cried, with a try at sharp command.

"I hardly know, myself," she answered.

"What d'you mean by that?"

"Well, who *am* I? I'm not Miss Garth any more, really. And I'm not your wife. I'm just—just a woman, I suppose."

"I want no women here now. Go on deck!"

"No; I'm not going on deck yet awhile. I'm going to dress your hand."

An hour ago he might have got up, taken her roughly by the arm, thrust her out of the cabin and locked the door. But now mental and physical reactions had set in, ebb-tides of fortitude.

"Well, make it short!" he commanded. And as she went to fetch scissors and a basin of water, and to tear up a sheet for bandages, he drummed impatiently on the chair-arm with the fingers of his left hand.

When he heard her come back he said:

"Before you start overhauling me again, just one thing I want done."

"Well?"

"I've got to have the distress-signal run up, in case we're sighted. Off this part of the Labrador there's something bound to come along before a great while. We mustn't let it pass us."

"What shall I do?"

Where was the Janice of other days? *Now* she was taking orders gladly.

"You'll find the flags at the top of the companionway, at the starboard side—the right side, you understand."

"I know. In those little pigeon-hole boxes?"

"Yes; they're all lettered. Carry them to Ezra. He'll show you how to run 'em aloft on the signal-halyards. Go along now. My hand will wait."

When she came back he was still sitting much as she had left him.

"All ready," said she. No answer. She took her scissors, the same that had killed Tom Hawk.

Once the handling of those scissors would have made her cringe. Once—when she had been that other woman, that vanished Janice Garth—memories of having killed a man would have obsessed her, terrified her; but now these memories left her cold. In the greater good she had wrought, that death had become to her no more than the annihilation of a copperhead, a cobra swollen with rage and venom.

With careful skill she dressed the wound, loving it as a symbol of the man's battle for her and for the others.

(*Continued on page 275*)

Through all this work Castleman never moved or winced. When it was quite done the silence only seemed to deepen. Janice was first to break it.

"There's something you don't know, and that I ought to tell you," she began.

"There's many a thing I don't know; but there's one thing I *do*, and that is I don't want to learn 'em from you."

"You must. It's about the fight here in the cabin. When you were struggling here on the floor, and that fellow was battering you with his handcuffs—no, it was after that—it was after you'd got this wound——"

"You'd better go on deck now. I might have a bit of a nap if you did."

"Plenty of time for naps later. You've got to hear me now. It was when you'd been wounded. Another one of the mutineers was just going to drive a knife into you——"

"If he had, now"—and Castleman laughed oddly—"that would have been a solution to the whole problem, eh?"

"Just going to knife you," she persisted, paying no heed, "when I—I——"

"Yes, I thought I heard a woman screaming."

"Not me!" She picked up the scissors, pressed them into his left hand.

"Hallo! What's that?"

"A woman's weapon!"

"Oh, scissors, eh?" He turned them in his powerful fingers and laughed again. "Yes, yes—a woman's weapon. That's right. Samson and Delilah——"

"You don't understand this time. These scissors, well—you can feel yourself how long the blades are, and sharp!"

"What about it?"

"These scissors, these very scissors, Weston—they killed a man!"

"*What?*"

"It's so. They did. Killed him!"

"You mean you—*you*——?"

"Yes!"

A heavy silence fell while he turned this amazing news in the dark places of his mind.

"You mean to tell me that Janice Garth, daughter of the Honourable Dexter Bowring Garth—killed a man?"

"No, Weston. It wasn't Janice Garth at all. It was Captain Castleman's wife! Janice couldn't have done it—couldn't possibly. Because she never knew you, or understood, or—anything. She's gone! There's another woman in her place now who does understand!"

"Another woman?"

"If you could only know her as she is!"

"If I could only know her?" he repeated, in a strange voice. "If she could only know *me!*"

"Know you? Of course she knows you! That's why she's here now. That's why she's telling you all this!"

"Telling me this! Me, a blind man. Why, how do you know I'll ever see again?"

"As if that mattered now! You'll see again. A week, a month—no matter—light will come back. But even if it never did, couldn't I be eyes for both of us? And haven't I been blind, too?"

Silence, a little longer this time. At last:

"Janice?" he said.

"What is it?"

"Nothing. I don't know. Nothing, perhaps. Everything, perhaps. This is no place, no time for——"

"I understand, my captain. But some time? Somewhere?"

"Who knows?" he whispered.

His left hand sought and found her hand, gropingly. About that hand his fingers closed, strong and hard, yet with a tenderness beyond all telling.

GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND,
EDWARD J. PENNEY.

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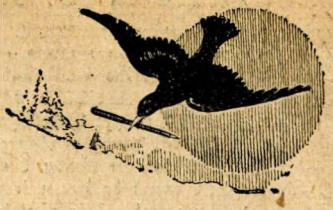

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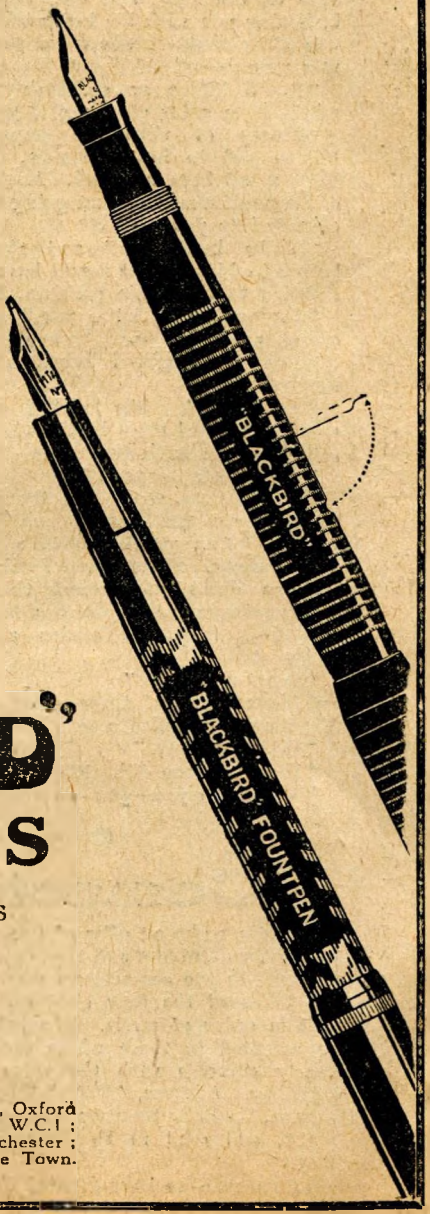

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