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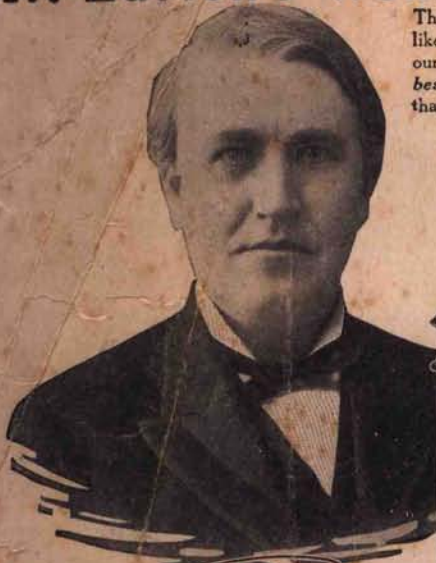
ALL-STORY WEEKLY

*"As the tides are swayed
by the moon, so are men
and women swept irre-
sistibly toward good or
evil by the stars which
dominate their lives."*

Stars of Evil
by J.U. Giesy and Junius B. Smith
A Semi-Dual Story

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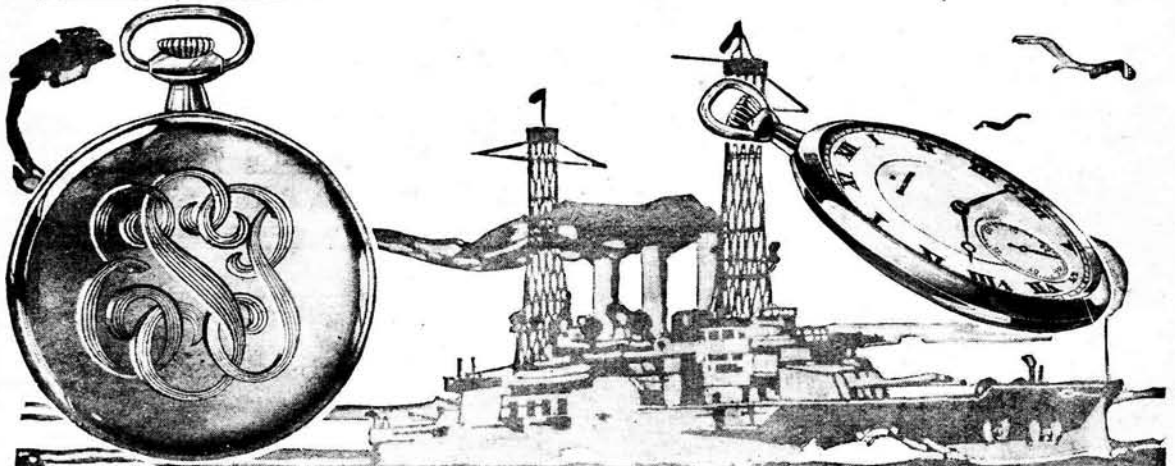
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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME XCIII

NUMBER 2



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THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

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The Frank A. Munsey Company

280 Broadway, New York

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. XCIII

NUMBER 2



SATURDAY, JANUARY 25, 1919



Stars of Evil

by J. U. Giesy and Junius B. Smith

Authors of the *Semi-Dual Stories*

CHAPTER I.

"MAKE IT MURDER, DAN."

BRYCE chanced to be in the central station when the "wagon" rumbled up and Detective Johnson and two roundsmen brought in Harvey Bancroft.

For although Jim had severed all official connection with the police, at the time he and I established the firm of "Glace and Bryce," still he had never quite weaned himself away from old associations.

As a result he formed the habit of dropping into the station now and again for a chat with his former cronies, at such times as we had no press of business on our hands.

I didn't object. It kept us in touch with the constituted forces of law and order and such matters as they had under investigation, and more than once it had resulted in smoothing the way for some of our own investigations as well.

He viewed Bancroft's advent with some surprise. He knew him in a casual way, as one of the younger attorneys of the town. He was a well-set-up chap, square-jawed, and gray-eyed under a mass of light brown hair, somewhat inclined to wave. Now his face was flushed as the roundsmen lined him up before the sergeant, and Jim, edging in, saw that his eyes were troubled, and his lips tightly compressed.

He gave his name and occupation in a voice which seemed a trifle thickened by emotion.

The sergeant wrote down his answers and turned to Johnson:

"Charge?" he inquired.

"Leave that open," Johnson replied, and caught sight of Jim whom he had known for years, and with whom he had worked more than once in the past. "Hello, Bryce," he said.

Bancroft threw up his head at the words and glanced about. Some of the cloud of trouble vanished momentarily from his eyes and gave way to sudden purpose. "Mr. Bryce," he requested quickly, "will you please come here?"

Bryce looked at Johnson, and Johnson nodded. Jim stepped to his side.

"Mr. Bryce," Bancroft went on, "something dreadful has just happened at the house of one of my clients and the boys here have brought me in. I wish you and your partner would take up my side of the case and show them I'm telling the truth when I say I didn't kill that fine old man." His voice broke the least bit toward the end. He came to a pause and went on: "And let me call your attention, Mr. Johnson, to the fact that you cannot hold me for any great length of time on an open charge."

Johnson frowned. "I didn't want to write it up against your name, Mr. Bancroft," he said slowly, "but if you will have it, why," he turned to address the sergeant, "make it murder, Dan."

"Wait a minute. Who's dead?" said Jim as the sergeant began to write.

"Chadbourne," Johnson returned.

"Holy smoke!" The thing rather took Bryce off his feet. Henry Chadbourne was a millionaire, a retired banker, a man respected and admired by the city at large. He was a widower and had been for years, living in a large house which he had built for the bride who had died so short a time after her marriage, that not even a child had been left to cheer Chadbourne's declining years. And now he was dead, and Bancroft was accused of his murder. Jim turned his eyes from Johnson to the young attorney.

And Bancroft again compressed his lips and nodded his head.

The sergeant stuck his pen back in a tumbler, handle down, having finished his entry against the prisoner's name.

Johnson glanced at the roundsmen and jerked his head to signify that Bancroft should, in the parlance of the police, be "taken back" to a cell.

"One moment," the latter said. "Bryce—are you and Glace going to take this case?"

"Sure," Jim accepted, making up his mind. "You go on back and I'll get hold of Gordon, and we'll have a little talk."

Bancroft nodded and walked off with his guards. Jim got hold of the telephone on the sergeant's desk, called me at our office, and asked me to come down.

Naturally I complied. I found Bryce with Johnson who was giving out such details as he wished, to a group of reporters. I nodded to one or two of the latter, whom I knew, and turned away to ask Sergeant Dan Harrington to pass us back to Bancroft's cell.

That was easy. Harrington had known me for years, and he knew Jim, of course. He called an officer who took us to the jail doors and turned us over to a warder, who in turn led us down the gloomy line of cages, to one on "murderers' row."

And it was there, in the steel cubicle, I met Bancroft first. The warder unlocked the door and Jim and I slipped through, after which Bryce made me known to the man we had come to see.

Bancroft forced a smile. I admired him for it, too. I like to see a man take punishment that way, and stay game. "My accommodations are rather limited, gentlemen," he remarked, "but take a seat on the couch." He waved a hand toward the narrow bunk against one wall of the cell, and as Jim and I perched upon it, seated himself on a stool which completed the furnishings of the place.

I like to get a good impression of a client at the start, so I watched him closely. I have found that first impressions are with me at least, apt to prove correct.

My strange friend Semi-Dual explains this phenomenon on the hypothesis that at the instant the personal auræ touch one another, you may sense the reflex of the individuality on which your own impinges.

Be that as it may, I have found the first instinctive valuation of a person, stand me in stead many a time. Now as I inspected the young attorney, I saw a man who was keeping a grip on himself over a great emotion, but not as it seemed a man who was afraid. And his first remark indicated no more than one who knew exactly what he was facing and had determined to go through with the thing to the end.

"I'm glad you came so promptly," he began at once, "because as my representatives I want you to get on the ground as quickly as you can. To that end I'm going to tell you the story concisely to begin with, and after that you may ask any questions that occur to your minds."

I nodded. Bancroft took a deep breath and went on. "I'm going to give you only what I deem essentials right now. I have been Henry Chadbourne's attorney for some time. My employment in that capacity came about through my own employment of Miss Nadine Norgall as a stenographer in my office some eight months since. Miss Norgall was intimately acquainted with Mr. Chadbourne. In fact she had known him all her life. She was the child of his former partner in business—"

"Hold on," interrupted Bryce. "This young woman was John Norgall's daughter?"

"Yes." Bancroft nodded. "Did you know him?"

"I knew of him," said Jim. "Go on."

"Then," Bancroft resumed, "possibly you know that when her father died something over a year ago, Nadine was left without means or any immediate relations. Norgall's whole private fortune went down in the wreck of the bank of which he became the head when Chadbourne retired. And if you recall that, you will see why his daughter studied stenography and later came into my employ."

"Easy," Bryce assented. "Get along to the real facts."

"They bear on those already mentioned," Bancroft said. "Henry Chadbourne had no children of his own and he was fond of his partner's child. I happen to know that he went to her at the time of Norgall's death, which followed not long after the failure of his bank, to which it was actually due, through worry and a final collapse. He offered her a home. But Nadine was not of the dependent sort—and she wouldn't accept charity even from her father's old friend. Having failed to gain his end in that way, Chadbourne formed another plan. He decided to adopt Nadine and make her legally his heir."

"You mean that literally, Bancroft?" I inquired.

He gave me a glance. "Yes. Wait, Mr. Glace—you'll see how it all fits into this mess. Chadbourne had kept track of her and knew she was working for me. He came to me and asked me to handle the legal end of the affair. We took it up with Nadine together and after a time, and after Chadbourne had put it up to her on the grounds of his own lonely life and wish for her companionship and love in his latter days, she agreed.

"That settled, I drew a will, naming her as Chadbourne's sole heir, or practically so. Of course there were several minor bequests to old servants, and things like that, but the bulk of the estate went to his adopted child."

"How much?" Bryce demanded tersely.

"A little over a million, Mr. Bryce," Bancroft returned.

Jim whistled.

"You say his adopted child," I broke in. "Did he actually adopt Miss Norgall, before he died?"

"The matter was closed this morning," Bancroft said.

"This morning?" Bryce took him up. "Wait a moment—this wasn't any probate day."

Bancroft shook his head. "You're right, Mr. Bryce; but—this was an *ex parte* matter. Chadbourne had no heirs whatever. Nadine was of age and there was no one to raise any objection to the proceeding from first to last. Furthermore, Chadbourne wanted the matter settled without delay, and—well—we took the matter up in open court, at ten o'clock this morning, at which time the final steps were taken in Nadine's adoption."

"And after that?" I urged.

"After that we went over to the Chadbourne house. Mr. Chadbourne wanted Nadine to do so, and I had some business of a personal nature to close with him myself."

"What?" Jim shot it out, cutting short what seemed a glossing over of the point by the attorney.

Bancroft frowned. For the first time he seemed to hesitate in his reply. "I suppose I may as well answer that now as later," he said at last. "I desired to pay Mr. Chadbourne a promissory note which I gave him some weeks ago."

"Well—" Jim prompted as the attorney once more paused. "Come clear, boy—let's start this thing straight."

"You're right," Bancroft agreed. "Well—I got caught in a margin speculation a few weeks ago. Chadbourne advanced me six thousand dollars to cover a break in the market, provided I would quit speculating in the future. I promised as soon as I could get 'from under' that I would thereafter confine my investments to proved rather than problematic stocks and bonds and would forever eschew *margin-gambling*. That's what he called it. Well, I pulled out the other day and this morning, after we left the court-house, I stopped at my

bank, drew the money and took it with me to lift the note."

"And did you?" Once Bryce got on a point he was pretty much like a bulldog. You couldn't shake him loose.

"Yes." Suddenly Bancroft flushed. "But I haven't got the note. The police took that off me, before we left Chadbourne's house."

"But he gave you the note after you got there?"

"Yes, Mr. Bryce. I handed him the six thousand in bills and he handed me the note, from a drawer in his desk."

Bryce subsided and I took a hand. "And after that, Mr. Bancroft, what?"

"Then Mr. Chadbourne asked me to step out of the library and wait, as he wished to speak with Nadine alone. After that I don't know. I went out, and found a seat. I meant to wait and take Nadine back to the office as soon as she was ready. I sat down in the entrance hall and waited for what I suppose must have been as much as ten minutes. I know I looked at my watch and it was a quarter past eleven. I had just put my watch back in my pocket when I heard what might have been a shot, though the sound was muffled by the walls. Then I heard Nadine scream and the library door burst open, and she ran toward me, crying that Chadbourne had killed himself before her eyes."

"What!" Jim fairly yelled, while I confess I couldn't blame him as I felt my own brain balk at the suggested fact.

Bancroft turned his glance from one of us to the other. I saw that he sensed the unseemable sound of what he had said. "She screamed it as she ran toward me," he reaffirmed; "and I lost some moments trying to calm her a trifle before we went back to the room. She was almost unnerved with the horror of what had occurred, but at length she went with me, and God knows I found plenty to confirm her words."

"Chadbourne, the man I had left in seemingly good health and cheerful spirits not over fifteen minutes before, lay half-way between his desk which stood in the middle of the floor, and a stationary hand basin he had installed for his convenience when at work in the room. He had fallen upon

his face and was quite dead when I turned his body over. But in doing so I exposed a revolver beneath the corpse, and there was a bullet hole in the left breast of his coat, as nearly as I could judge, directly over his heart.

"I examined the weapon myself. Its barrel was freshly fouled and one shell had been discharged. After that I replaced the gun and the body as nearly as I could in the position in which I had found them, because I knew it was a coroner's case. And then before I called the police, I questioned Nadine."

For a moment he seemed to consider before he went on. "Gentlemen, I know that what I am going to say now will impress you as unworthy of credence—and yet I would stake my soul that Nadine Norgall believes every word she said to be true. I know her. I have known her for months. I—" Again he broke off and a slow flush crept into his cheeks.

I nodded and met his hesitation with a smile. He had spoken in the girl's behalf, in a tone men seldom adopt unless urged thereto by a deeper feeling than one would expect between employer and employed. "Put all the cards down, Bancroft," I advised. "There is nothing to shy at in a sincere affection. You were going to say 'I love her,' I think."

He laughed in a nervous fashion. "It's better than that, Glace," he said in a tone for the moment almost cheerful. "We're engaged."

"Congratulations on that much," I accepted. "Now what did she say?"

He frowned, coming back to the matter in hand. "She told a story no jury in the world would believe, and the worst part of the whole affair is that she was the only soul present when he died."

I felt my heart swiftly contract, and Bryce grunted at my side. "But—see here—" he began.

Bancroft cut him short: "Gentlemen, Nadine isn't under arrest but—there are two men stationed at her house and Johnson advised her not to try to leave the place without permission. Oh"—he threw out his hands—"it isn't my trouble alone, which has upset me like this. She isn't

under arrest but she is a prisoner to all intents. And the thing was so sudden. It came like a bolt of lightning out of a clear sky—”

“Steady,” I checked him. “Give us the rest of the story then and let us get to work.”

He nodded. “All right. I can’t see that it has any value, but I’ll tell it for what it’s worth. After I left the room, it seems Chadbourne took the will from a drawer in his desk and showed it to her. He even read parts of it aloud. She said he seemed almost childishly elated at the events of the morning, and the fact that she was now legally his heir. He would read a clause of the will and then look over the top of the document at her, as though seeking to mark its effect upon her, or else merely to study her face.

“And then suddenly his whole demeanor changed. Nadine says his face seemed to freeze into grimly set lines such as she had never seen it wear. Without a word, he laid down the will, dropped his hand to the drawer from which he had taken the paper, and suddenly sprang to his feet. Then while she watched, without understanding his actions at all, he ran from the desk, turning his back squarely upon her—there was a deafening report which filled the room, and Chadbourne stumbled and fell, where I found him after I came in. As soon as she realized what had happened she ran out of the door as I have already described, and—that’s all.”

If it really were all, I had to admit it sounded fully as fishy as Bancroft had declared. It was past all reason that a man who had just accomplished the object of his expressed desires, adopted a charming young woman to fill his childless life and made her the heiress of his estate, should without warning spring up and shoot himself through the heart. Only one hypothesis could explain that and that was that Chadbourne had been insane, which no one who knew the man would consider for an instant. I looked at Bryce and found him frowning, and then he spoke:

“The girl was the only person with him?”

“Yes.” Bancroft inclined his head.

“And you left her with him?”

“Yes.”

“And sat in the front hall?”

“Yes.”

“So nobody could have come in without your seein’ if they did?”

“No one came in,” said Bancroft in a rather miserable tone. “Oh, I know how it sounds. I’ve told you in advance that I knew the story would baffle belief. As a lawyer I appreciate that, Mr. Bryce.”

“He just jumped up and turned his back and shot himself?”

“That is a very concise summing up of the matter,” Bancroft sighed.

“And he was cheerful when you left him and went outside?”

“I never saw him in a more cheerful humor.”

“And you was in the room yourself—you left just those two together?” Bryce’s forehead wore a series of wrinkles as he spoke.

“Yes, Mr. Bryce,” Bancroft said. “I left them together. Mr. Chadbourne was sitting at the desk. I had just given him the money and taken the note and placed it in my pocket. Nadine says he did not rise after I left until he leaped up and—well—died. As for herself she was sitting in a chair some few feet on the other side of the desk, and did not leave that position until after the shot, when she sprang up and ran out to me.”

Bryce turned and met my eye. It was as though he asked me what I thought, and right then I had nothing to say. In the face of what we had heard, there was nothing I could say without more consideration. Only I no longer wondered that the adopted daughter of the dead millionaire should have been told to remain in the house.

“It won’t wash,” said Jim at last.

Bancroft made no response. There could be no possible doubt but that the man realized to the fullest extent the unbelievable elements in the story he had told. His face, his whole bearing, showed it as he lifted weary eyes and met my glance. And suddenly there leaped into my mind a supposition. Was the man before me in doubt himself? Was he *trying* to believe the girl’s story even against his own common-sense?

Was it possible that his presence here might even be a proof of his endeavor to shield her so far as he could? I had known men to do things like that—young men—men in love with some woman.

"Bancroft," I resumed, "I'm going to ask you to look at this thing as a lawyer rather than a principal in the matter, however it occurred. So far as I can see, your story establishes a most excellent reason for the arrest of Miss Norgall rather than yourself. Now—"

"Don't, Glace," he broke out. "That little girl never did it. She isn't that kind. I know her. She was fond of Chadbourne."

"Yet she was alone with him, and there was only one shot fired, as you proved yourself. Now three hands could have fired it. Chadbourne's, which isn't plausible on the face of the thing, or that of some person unknown—"

"Hold on!" Bancroft cut in. "Do you suppose Nadine wouldn't have seen any third person, and that if she had she would have kept silent at such a time? Be reasonable Glace."

"Then"—I said slowly—"there remains but one hand, Mr. Bancroft, that could have fired that shot."

"Glace!" Suddenly he sprang up and stood tensely erect. "I won't allow you or any other man to say that without protesting even the thought. God knows I need your help, but—if you're going to take this tack, I'll—just thank you for coming and ask you—to leave."

"Sit down," I returned. "We're here to consult, not quarrel. Your extreme sensitiveness on the point shows that you recognize its force. Now one question more. In the view of all you have told us, why is it that you are under arrest?"

He eyed me for fully half a minute before he replied: "That's simple enough. I told you I paid Chadbourne six thousand dollars on a note. I paid it in bills. He took them and laid them on his desk and I left the room. Chadbourne died and after I had listened to Nadine's story I called the police. When they came I told them the whole thing, just as I have told it to you. They sought to confirm it so far as they could as a matter of course. I was able

to produce the note, and did so, but—the bills had disappeared."

CHAPTER II.

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS.

"DISAPPEARED?" For a moment Jim gaped into Bancroft's face before he caught a deep breath. "You mean the stuff was gone?"

"Absolutely," Bancroft declared.

"But—maybe Chadbourne put it away after you left the room," Bryce suggested.

"If he did, it would have been in the desk instead of on it, where I saw it when I went out. Remember Nadine says he did not leave his seat, before he sprang up to meet his death."

I looked Bancroft full in the eye as he ceased speaking.

He nodded at what he plainly read in my glance. "So you see, Mr. Glace, there *was* one other hand, which might have fired the shot after all. I think that is what Detective Johnson believes."

"Johnson searched for the stuff?" I inquired.

"Yes. It was gone, and—well that's all."

I noted a pause in the middle of his statement but set it down to the man's mental condition more than anything else, and rose. "I think," I remarked, "that the best thing we can do now is to get over to that house and do a little search on your behalf rather than against it. Bancroft, where do you bank?"

"At the Fourth National," he said rising and once more forcing a smile. "You can prove I drew those bills, if that's what you mean. Remember I stopped to get them on the way to Chadbourne's after we left the probate court."

"Thanks," I said and rapped for the warder to let us out. "I'll do that by phone, and—I'll see that you're kept posted as to what turns up. By the way, Bancroft, when were you born?"

He met the question with a puzzled attention. I suppose to him it did sound rather odd, but I wanted the information and waited until at length he gave it and

I wrote it down, without any explanation at the time.

The warder appeared. Bryce and I shook hands with Bancroft and left the cell. And once outside the hall in the corridor which led to the front of the station I paused and looked at Jim. "Well?" I said.

Jim puffed. He drew a kerchief and wiped his brow. "It can't be done," he exploded rather than spoke distinctly. "Maybe joy kills sometimes. I've heard it did, but no guy like Chadbourne is goin' to croak himself at a time like that, and even if he did either our man or his girl musta copped th' money. Nope, Gordon, th' thing don't fit. It's th' poorest story I've heard in a whole lot of years."

"Yes," I agreed, "it is. To me that's its strongest point."

Jim gave me a glance, and a slow grin of understanding. "Somethin' in that too," he admitted at length. "Well, what do we do next? Sec here! What made you ask Bancroft about his birthday before we left?"

I smiled. Jim had a reason for asking that question, as I knew, and I did not seek to evade the answer. "The first thing I do is to get the use of a phone," I announced. "There is only one man in the world so far as I know who can explain the impossible, Jim, and I'm going to get hold of that man. While I'm about it go on out and call the Fourth National Bank and find out about those bills."

Jim nodded, and turned off without another word. I made my way to the "dog house," as we used to call a room set apart for the accommodation of the newspaper men on police assignment, which, as I knew, would probably be empty at that time of day, took up a telephone standard and called a certain number not found in the telephone-book but which none the less would get me into connection with Semi-Dual.

Semi-Dual! I pictured the man as I knew him, while I held the receiver to my ear. Tall he was, brown-haired, with a strong face, a high bridged nose and eyes, gray and deep—oh, vastly deep, holding within their liquid depths something which

seemed to hint of a knowledge surpassing that of every-day men.

And their hint was no more than the truth. Dual was what long ago I had called a "psychological physician," a man whom others might call a mystic, yet in reality no mystic at all, since he proclaimed the fact that there is nothing in nature mystical after all; that all is but the result of natural law, of natural cause and effect.

Of those higher forces of nature he was a student. It was by means of the knowledge gained in their study that he played the physician's part to troubled human souls and put straight the tangled strands of many a life. He believed, and had made me believe, too, in telepathy, chiromancy, psychometry, and astrology as well.

Oh, yes, Dual studied the stars, and drew from them wonderful knowledge of mundane affairs. Yet he was no charlatan and none knew better than he, how little credence man places to-day in the forces which he used, to bring about his results. Therefore he first gained his knowledge in his own way, and then set about to prove it in a more material fashion, that others might believe, not his art—but the truth as to whatever might have occurred.

To Bryce and me, Dual was the god in the machine. He dwelt on the Urania roof. There in the tower he had made himself a sumptuous abode, and on the roof itself he had built him a garden of shrubs and potted flowers roofed in winter by green glass, behind the circling parapet which hid it from the street. And there he lived, apart from the world of man and its distraction, yet surrounded by it, ready to step forth at any moment, when the cause of Right—of Justice demanded that he interfere.

It was on his advice that I had formed my partnership with Bryce. It was to be near him, that we took our quarters in the Urania on the seventh floor. Time and again he had assisted, directed, guided Jim and me to the final ending of some problem of human wo. A private telephone linked our offices with the tower, just as this line I was asking for now, gave him a thread of connection with the world beyond his roof.

The man was an altruist, in a practical

sense. He understood the depths of the human soul. And he worked not for remuneration—not for glory, but for the simple satisfaction of seeing justice done. Justice—eternal, immutable justice—was his creed. To Dual the assertion that “whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap,” was no more than a statement of truth. Such then was the man I called my friend, whose help I was asking now, in the Chadbourne affair.

His voice, deep, soft, almost bell-like, reached my listening ear. I brought my mouth close to the rubber circle before it and began to speak.

Not once did he interrupt. Long association had taught me how to give to his ear the essentials of a case. At the end he asked me the hour of Chadbourne’s death, and Bancroft’s age. I gave the information. I had meant to give it. It was for that I had asked Bancroft concerning the latter fact, even as Bryce had assumed when he questioned me concerning my act. For Jim was an ardent convert to Semi’s methods, though when first he met them, he had scoffed.

There was a moment’s silence, then: “Go to the Chadbourne house. Interview Miss Norgall. Learn all you may from her own account and your most careful inspection, and then, my friend, come to me.”

That was all, but I turned from the phone with a lightened heart and went in search of Bryce. Semi-Dual was enlisted in the case. Justice, no matter where its blow was aimed, would be done. Of that I felt assured. And being assured, I found myself ready and anxious to throw myself into the task to which I was sent.

I found Bryce talking to Johnson in the front office.

“I been talkin’ to Johnson about them bills, an’ he’s goin’ up to th’ house himself,” Jim began as I hastened to their side.

“And what did you learn about the money at the bank?” I inquired.

“Well—he drew it all right,” said Bryce.

Johnson sneered. “What of it? He had plenty of time to ditch it before we got on the ground,” he declared.

“Sure,” Jim agreed in a somewhat sar-

castic way. “He could have done that so as to be sure he’d be arrested, when you frisked him and found the note. He’d have mentioned the money sure if he’d cashed it after Chadbourne died.”

Johnson grinned. “Yes,” he rejoined. “I think he would, especially if, as he says, Chadbourne was shot while alone with the girl. There’s a lot to this we haven’t dug up yet, Bryce.”

“Then,” said Jim, “suppose we go start some digging now.” He turned to me. “Did you get your party, Glace?”

I nodded, and Jim took a long, satisfied breath. “Come on, Johnson,” he urged. “Let’s get on the job up there.”

“All right,” the detective agreed. “Though I don’t look for much. We’ve been over the room pretty well already. What I want to do is to question that girl without Bancroft around to interfere.”

We caught a taxi outside. It put us down after a time in front of the Chadbourne house on Park Drive, in the fashionable residence district where the old man had lived.

We had some conversation on the trip out, of course. But it didn’t amount to much. Johnson seemed to think that either the girl, or Bancroft, or both, were mixed up in the death of the aged banker, and Bryce and I were hardly well enough informed to form any definite scheme of the tragedy as yet.

We went up from the cab and in through wide front doors, passing one of Johnson’s men on the way. The detective led us directly down a hall from which doors opened right and left, to one which he opened and passed through.

Plainly as Jim and I followed, I saw that this was the place where the death had occurred. It was the workroom of a man. It was lined with cases of books and some more modern filing cabinets, now standing with closed drawers. In the center of the room was a desk, oblong, flat-topped, and at the farther end of that, and set at right angles to it, was a typewriter desk—one of those folding-leaf affairs, now also closed. Quite evidently, as I judged at once, Chadbourne, when sitting in the angle between the machine and his

desk, had merely to turn in his chair to give any such dictation as he might desire. At present a man was seated at the desk, making what seemed to have been a very thorough inspection of the drawers. He glanced up as we came in, and then rose.

"Where's th' girl?" Johnson inquired.

"Up-stairs," said the fellow, who was plainly another of the department's men.

"Get her down," Johnson directed, and threw himself into a chair.

The other reached to the end of the desk and pressed a button. By the time Jim and I had found seats for ourselves, a servitor came in.

He was an old man, with graying hair, and an almost shuffling walk. He entered the door and stood waiting. His face was a nearly colorless mask in which burned two dark eyes. I noted that his hands shook in a way of uncontrolled nerves, as Johnson requested him to ask Miss Norgall to come down.

But he turned and vanished without a word, and I gave my attention once more to the room. In a corner formed by the wall next the hall and that of what was plainly the partition between this room and the one nearest the front of the house, I saw the hand basin Bancroft had mentioned. A door midway of the latter wall seemed to lead into the room beyond, and leaning against the wall between the door and the porcelain plumbing in the corner was an ordinary folding screen, which I fancied was probably used to conceal the basin, at ordinary times. For the rest there were two windows in the side wall of the house, a fine rug on the floor, several pictures in plain frames and a mirror-faced door in the other end, whether to a closet or a farther apartment I could not then know.

The opening of the door from the hall cut my inspection short. I turned my gaze from the room to the woman who came in. She was young. Bancroft had said she was of age, but she carried the atmosphere of youth about her. She was of medium height, well formed, brown haired and as I was to learn on a closer acquaintance, blue-eyed. Now as she paused just inside the door, she was pale, and her eyes seemed

dark under her brows as she swept them about the room and parted her lips.

"Simmons said I was wanted," she began.

Bryce and I rose. Johnson followed suit. "Why, yes, miss," he said. "I want to talk to you a bit. Won't you sit down?"

I spoke as the girl went to a chair and sank upon it. "Miss Norgall, I am Mr. Glace, and this," I gestured to Jim, "is my partner, Mr. Bryce. We represent Mr. Bancroft and at his request yourself, in this painful affair."

"That don't matter," Johnson cut in. "All we want is to get at th' truth of how Chadbourne died. So, all you got to do, miss, is just tell us how everything happened, now you've had a little time to think it over, and ain't so excited as you was a while ago."

"I have already told you that, Mr. Johnson," Miss Norgall replied. "I was not excited then. I was horrified, shocked, grieved beyond words to express, but I told you exactly what I saw, and all—everything I know concerning—what occurred." She spoke in a cultured voice, surprisingly rich and full, which yet quavered now and then as though not entirely within control.

And her answer apparently did not suit Johnson at all. "Well—tell it again then," he rejoined. "Maybe there was somethin' in it I didn't just get at first."

Miss Norgall complied. She recounted the scene of Chadbourne's death. In all essential details it was the story to which we had listened in Bancroft's cell. Johnson was frowning at the end. "You had known Chadbourne quite a long time?" he said.

"All my life," the woman replied.

"He was your father's friend?"

"My father's and mine."

"He hadn't nothin' to do with wreckin' your dad's bank?"

"Mr. Chadbourne!" Nadine Norgall widened her eyes. "No. He was like a second father to me, when my own father died."

I believed her. Sincerity rang in her tone, but once more Johnson seemed dis-

pleased. For a moment he appeared to consider before he resumed: "You was adopted by him to-day?"

"Yes." Miss Norgall inclined her head. Save in defense of Chadbourne her answers were short. It came upon me she was like one shaken by grief as much as anything else.

"Why was Chadbourne in such a tearing rush to get it done to-day?" Johnson again inquired. "Your father died a year ago, and all at once Chadbourne has to adopt you in a hurry and can't even wait for a regular probate day. What was the terrible rush?"

Miss Norgall looked him full in the eye. "I do not know," she said.

"But he did adopt you to-day?"

"Yes." The girl's tone was tired.

"So that if he died you'd inherit at once?" Johnson spoke softly in what he tried to make a very casual way.

"Wait a moment, Miss Norgall; you don't have to answer that, unless you wish," I cut in.

My reward was a swift glance of resentment from Johnson. "Here, Glace, don't butt into this," he growled.

Miss Norgall considered. "Thank you, Mr. Glace," she said at last. "But I really see no reason why I should not answer. So far as I know, being his sole heir, I would inherit at once."

"And you're really and truly engaged to Bancroft?"

For the first time a delicate color stole into the cheeks of the girl. "What has that to do with it?" she parried after a time.

"Oh, nuthin'," Johnson returned, "only I happen to know he ain't any too well off, an' your father didn't leave you enough to live on, and then Chadbourne makes you his legal heir and draws a will, leavin' you—"

"Stop!" said the girl. "Surely you must possess intelligence enough to comprehend that as his adopted daughter, I would not be in any future need of support. Even a detective of this city should be able to understand that."

I heard Bryce chuckle softly and Johnson flushed as he tried another tack: "You

don't need to worry, miss, about what we understand. Now, after Bancroft left that money there on the desk and went out, you was sittin' in a chair over here on this side of the desk, right about where I am located now?"

For a moment Nadine closed her eyes. I saw her clench her hands. "Please," she said, "don't let's go over it again. I've explained it already, twice."

But Johnson persisted. "You was sittin' right about here?"

"Oh—yes—in that same chair, to be exact."

"And Chadbourne was at his desk?"

"Yes."

"An' he took this will, Bancroft had drawn, out of a drawer. Which drawer, miss?"

"The top one next to the typewriter desk."

"An' he left the money lyin' on th' desk?"

"Yes."

"An' read th' will to you?"

"Parts of it."

"Anything else on the desk?"

"Some letters his secretary had written and left for him to sign, also on the end next the typewriter," Nadine replied.

"And while he was readin' th' will to you he kept lookin' over th' top of th' page now an' then?"

"Yes."

"An' then all at once he lays down the will an' reaches into a drawer for his gun? Which drawer?"

"The same from which he took the will."

"An' jumps up an' faces over there toward th' corner with his back to you, an' shoots himself?"

"That—that was the way it appeared," said the girl.

"He laid the will down?"

"Yes."

"Where did he lay it?"

"Why—" Miss Norgall paused and seemed to be trying to decide the question in point—"I—I didn't notice. I was surprised by the change in his manner and was watching his face."

"You don't know just where he put it then?"

"No, sir, I do not."

"And he didn't say a word? He didn't say good-by or nuthin' like that?"

"Oh, no, no, no!" The girl's tones rose. "I've told you just how it happened; I don't know anything more." Suddenly her whole demeanor became that of one whose emotions are getting out of hand.

But if Johnson noted, he gave no sign. I fancied indeed that he was playing for that very result. It was in keeping with such an ending to hold this interview in the room where the death had occurred. In a way Johnson was using a mild form of third degree, or so it appeared.

"This will left most of his property to you?" he went on.

"So Mr. Chadbourne informed me, and from what he read seemed to imply as much."

Johnson nodded. "That's what Bancroft says, too, and he ought to know, since he drew the thing at Chadbourne's orders. It looks to me like th' question is, did it say what Bancroft says, or not."

"I've told you Mr. Chadbourne told me the same," Miss Norgall said.

I took a hand for the second time. "See here, Johnson, just what is the good of all this fuss about the will? You're trying to find out the cause and nature of the man's death as I see it, not how or where he chanced to bequeath his estate."

And Johnson grinned. "And that's where you're wrong for once, Glace," he rejoined. "If I could get my hands on that will, I might know quite a lot more about how Henry Chadbourne died."

"If you could get your hands upon it?" I repeated in some surprise.

He nodded his head. "Yes. I told you and Jim there a while ago, there was a lot to dig up in this case. Bancroft and Miss Norgall say there was six thousand dollars lyin' on that desk when Chadbourne died, and yet when we got here, that currency couldn't be found. Bancroft and Miss Norgall say Chadbourne drew a will makin' her his chief heir, an' Miss Norgall says he was readin' it to her, and laid it down, just before he reached for his gun. And yet when we got here after Bancroft turned in th' call, there wasn't a sign of th' thing.

Like the money Bancroft says he paid for that note in his pocket, th' will had disappeared."

CHAPTER III.

WHO KNOWS?

FOR a moment nobody said a word, and then it was Nadine Norgall herself who broke the pall of silence. And it was I whom she addressed: "Mr. Johnson appears to be laboring under the belief that the will did not contain what Mr. Bancroft and I have said. He seems to be trying to prove that we have misstated its contents—that we waited until I was legally adoped and then — then — then —" Abruptly she broke off and went on in a different tone, which rose and shook and threatened to break from blended horror and scorn. "Oh—he has my pity for having chosen his profession, if it has so far destroyed his faith in anything good or true in his fellow man, that he can entertain such a suspicion as that!"

Johnson flushed slowly, and his answer at first was a scowl. Bryce cleared his throat. "Well, miss," he began, "you see, he—"

And Johnson cut him short. "You've got nuthin' more to say then, miss?"

Nadine shook her head. "No. I've said more than I intended already, I think."

Johnson rose. He came to my side and bent down. "You talk to her," he advised. "I'm goin' out and see if my man found anything new, before we come up."

I nodded and he left the room. I turned my eyes back to the girl. She was sitting with puckered brows and set lips watching the man's exit. "The will really is missing, Miss Norgall?" I said.

She sighed and gave me her attention. "Yes."

And then she asked a question in turn. "Mr. Glace, you said you and Mr. Bryce were to represent Harvey and myself at his request. That would presuppose that you have seen him. How is he, may I ask?"

Plainly, Nadine Norgall had a head of her own, and could seize upon several facts and work them into a deduction. I answered

her at once: "Aside from a natural worry about you, and this whole affair, he is all right."

"Thank you. Is there anything I can do to help you?" she accepted and sat with hands clasped in her lap.

"Perhaps," I replied. I had been taking mental notes while Johnson had been conducting his examination and I drew upon them now: "You said there were letters on the desk to be signed, when Mr. Chadbourne was reading the will. Now—was the typewriter desk open or closed at the time?"

"Why—open. I remember that," she said in some surprise.

"What's the notion?" Bryce inquired.

"Merely to find out how nearly the room has been left as it was at that time," I returned. "That screen, Miss Norgall; is it usually standing against the wall, or so placed as to conceal the bowl in the corner?"

"It is generally set in front of the bowl," she said, quickly. "It was so placed until the police arrived. One of them knocked it over and set it aside."

"And that door with the mirror leads where?" I pointed.

"Into a room at the rear of this. It is the dining-room, Mr. Glace."

"And there was nothing to make you think Mr. Chadbourne was in any way not himself before he died?"

The girl's lips quivered. "No. After Harvey went out, he called me to him, and kissed me and called me his little girl, and we talked for a few moments before he read the will."

I nodded. "Bancroft said he wanted to speak to you alone. Miss Norgall, may I ask you what you discussed?"

Unexpectedly she flushed but she did not refuse my request. "He asked me if I didn't want to marry Harvey at once," she replied. "He—he wanted me to stay here with him, and let Harvey get another stenographer at the office. He had already broached the matter to Harvey and—Harvey—"

"Was willin', I bet!" Bryce said.

"Yes." Miss Norgall dropped her eyes and her tone was very low.

"And now," I said, "I am going to ask a painful question. Just where did the body lay before it was removed?"

Nadine rose, walked to a point almost midway between the basin in the corner and the desk and paused. "Here."

I joined her and so did Bryce. I got down and scanned the rug and rose again after a time. "Miss Norgall," I resumed, "I don't suppose you know whether Mr. Chadbourne had any enemies or not, or any callers the day before he returned here with you?"

She shook her head. "No—but—perhaps I can find out about the last." She walked to the desk and pressed the same button the department employee had used.

As before, Simmons appeared, and she questioned him herself.

He shook his head. "No, miss," he declared, "not to-day. There was a caller yesterday afternoon. Some sort of business, I think. His name was Belmore."

"Belmore? Andy Belmore?" said Bryce.

"I don't know, sir."

"Heavy set, dark complexioned fellow?"

"Yes, sir."

Bryce looked at me and I at him. I think we both asked ourselves what sort of business Belmore, shyster of all shyster lawyers—last resort of crooks in time of trouble—could have had with the dead millionaire. But this was no place to discuss the matter and I once more addressed the girl. "And there is nothing more you can add to our information?"

"Nothing of which I can think, Mr. Glace," she said, looking full in my face.

I turned toward the door in the end wall of the room. "And where does that go?" I asked.

"Into a drawing-room, Mr. Glace."

"So that it could be entered from the hall—the drawing-room I mean?"

"Don't!" Nadine cried swiftly, while her eyes went wide and her lips parted. She took a single step forward and laid a hand on my arm. "Oh, Mr. Glace—Harvey didn't do it. He didn't—he didn't. He was sitting in the hall when I ran out *after* everything was over. He—couldn't have done it. He wouldn't have done it. There was no reason."

I looked into her troubled face, and it was then I saw her eyes were blue—a deep dark blue as they sought to question mine. “Steady,” I said. “Keep your grip, Miss Nadine. All I’m trying to do is to get the lay of the land. I’m not Johnson, and I’m not trying to fasten any crime on either Bancroft or yourself. Rather I’m going to leave nothing undone to show the police and the world at large that neither of you did it, before I am done. I’m going now, but I’ll likely see you again. In the meantime, keep cool and don’t let any one scare you or trick you into any unconsidered statements. As Chadbourne’s heir you have certain rights beyond which they dare not go.”

“You’re going now?” she faltered, and suddenly it struck me she was like a child dreading to be left alone in this house of horror, with only old Simmons and the policeman on guard. Since her outburst in Bancroft’s behalf her attitude of cold calm had left her and she stood before me young, vital, appealing, warm, just a troubled little girl.

“Where are you going?” she said.

I smiled. “Wherever I go I want you to feel it is in your interest, Miss Norgall,” I told her. “Will you do that?”

“Yes.” She gave me her hand. “You are different from Johnson. I—oh, I hate him—but—you are a gentleman, and I feel I can trust your word. I—I am just going to think of you as working for Harvey and me until I see you again. Good-by.”

“Good-by,” I said and turned to Jim. Together we left the room, and found Johnson in the hall.

“Did she come across with anything at all?” he greeted our approach.

I shook my head and he scowled.

“She’s a wise jane,” he declared. “See this door here. It leads into a sorter parlor, and there’s a door from that to the other room. A feller could have slipped in, and back of that screen Chadbourne had settin’ in front of his wash bowl and popped th’ old guy off dead easy, while the girl kept his attention centered on her.”

“An’ later stuck the gun under the body you mean?” said Bryce.

“Oh, that of course,” Johnson agreed.

“What caliber was the thing?” I inquired.

“Thirty-two of an old model,” Johnson replied.

“Did your man find anything in his search of the desk?” I next asked.

Johnson grinned. “Maybe. I don’t know. I haven’t run it out yet, but—here. You boys might as well work with us as against us.” He thrust a hand into a pocket and pulled out a written sheet.

Bryce and I bent above it, as Johnson straightened it out. It was brief and to the point.

HENRY CHADBOURNE:

SIR: Four years ago it was through you I was sent into a cell. But for your interference I would to-day be a well-to-do man. When you thrust yourself into my affairs, I told I would kill you as soon as I was free. Well, I’m free now. But four years change a man’s point of view, and I find myself more in need of funds than your life. Therefore I am asking you to purchase the latter by advancing me the amount of my four years’ salary, which you can easily afford. So it’s rather up to you. If you are agreeable, you can simply run the word “Yes” and sign your name in the Personal Column of any daily paper inside the next week. I’m not signing this, because I feel sure you are fully aware of my name.

“Holy mackerel!” said Jim. “Where did he dig up that?”

“In a drawer of Chadbourne’s desk—the same where he had the will according to the girl,” Johnson informed.

“An’ it’s not very old, judging by the looks of the writin’ and the paper,” Jim went on. “I wonder how old it is. It gave Chadbourne a week to get action. Well—say—” He broke off and divided a glance between Johnson and me.

It was easy enough to complete his interrupted sentence. If the time had expired, say to-day, and the writer of the note had really meant his threat.

“All very fine,” Johnson growled, “but—you didn’t notice either Bancroft or the girl pulling anything about anybody else bein’ in that room, did you? They wouldn’t have overlooked a bet like that.”

“Just the same,” I pointed out, “this proves Chadbourne had an enemy, I think. It might not be a bad notion to look over

the files of the dailies for the past ten days and see what we can find. Chadbourne may have answered the note. If he did, that would about take the value out of the thing at the start."

"I'll have that run out yet to-night," Johnson declared. "An' if he didn't answer it, it may mean somethin' and it may not. Rich folks like him are always gettin' that sort of stuff from mutts what think they can make an easy touch."

There was some truth in his statement, of course, and I did not argue the point. "But your man found no trace of the will or the money?" I asked instead.

"No, he didn't," Johnson snapped, "and he just about took the place to pieces, too."

"And there you are," said Bryce, "the beautiful thing about this whole works is that it couldn't have happened, but did. Chadbourne shoots himself without reason, six thousand in bills disappear; a will vanishes from sight, you folks take the place to pieces, and shove the furniture around—"

"Oh, can the chatter, Jim," Johnson cut him short. "The coroner went over the place before we began, of course."

"Where's the body?" I cut in. "At the morgue or a private parlor?"

"It's down at the Stevenson people's place," Johnson replied. "I understand Doc Sharp is going to do a *post mortem* this afternoon to make sure just how he died."

He mentioned one of the city surgeons, and a rather routine performance, in cases such as this, where nothing is really left to chance, until all other clues are exhausted. Yet it struck me as almost needless here. Everything pointed to the cause of the millionaire's death from a bullet. There seemed no good reason for any such thing as doubt.

Consequently I rather stared as I made my next remark: "What for?"

And Johnson grinned. "Well, Glace, we're sort of curious to know just how Chadbourne died."

There was a twinkle in his eyes which put me on my guard. All at once it came to me that the city man was withholding something from my knowledge, and some-

thing sufficiently important to justify an autopsy on Chadbourne's body too.

"How he died?" I countered quickly. "Say, Johnson, is there any question about that?"

"That is the question," he replied.

"And that's the way you propose to work together, is it?" I rejoined. "Now, come across, or we split right here. What is there funny about this thing which you're holding out? Come on, Johnson—come clear."

He sobered. "All right," he agreed. "Now, see here. If a man jumped and shot himself like that girl says—with his own gun—what would happen to his coat?"

"There would be a hole in it, of course," I said quickly, "and if the gun were held close enough the cloth would most likely be scorched."

Johnson nodded. "Correct. And the gun would almost have to be held close enough for a man to turn his wrist and shoot himself in the heart, wouldn't it, Glace?"

"Yes," I assented, "I should think it would."

Once more Johnson grinned. "Well—as it happens, Chadbourne's coat had a hole in it, all right, but—it wasn't scorched. There wasn't even a smell of powder about it, or a grain of powder in its mesh."

I looked at Bryce. His face was a mask of surprise. Then I looked at Johnson. And while I looked, I saw not only the man but the entire horrible bearing of what he said, if true. Chadbourne had been shot from a distance—and the gun had been placed beneath him, after he was dead. Then—then—

Johnson was speaking again: "So I guess maybe you boys can see why I'm so damned sure Chadbourne was bumped off by some other hand than his own, and am keepin' my grip on the only two who by their own confession was with him at the time."

"But he was shot, wasn't he?" stammered Jim. "You know it, and you know somebody else did it. Then what's the good of this here 'post'?"

"Simply this," Johnson said. "Doc Sharp has some sort of wise dope on th' effect of bullet's strikin' force. What he's

after is to find the sort of slug hit the old man, and from that he'll figure out just about how far off the one who fired it stood at the time, and we'll know whether this girl is lyin' about somebody else bein' in that room or not."

I saw it all plainly enough and I couldn't blame Johnson really for the stand he was taking in the matter. Surely, if he were right and there was no reason to doubt that he was, then there must be some flaw in the statements of both Bancroft and the girl. And more than that the weapon with which Chadbourne was alleged to have shot himself must have been placed beneath his dead body after it had fallen. And if no one had been in the house with Chadbourne save those two and the old servitor, Simons, then what could the city detective do save set a guard over the girl and take Bancroft to jail? It was the reasonable course. It was the only course—the one which in his place I must have taken myself.

And yet I couldn't believe it. Bancroft hadn't acted to me like a man with a burden of guilt, and I couldn't bring myself to view the girl whom I had just left in the room where Chadbourne had died, as one who had killed in cold blood. She had stood beside me. I had looked down into her widened eyes. They had been dark with trouble, pleading, but surely not clouded with fear, or any sense of guilt. They had met my own regard fully. They had not narrowed nor sought to veil themselves in the least. Then what, I asked myself, had happened in that room down the hall?

Johnson noted my pause. "Gives you something to chew on, eh?" he remarked. "Glance, I've a notion this is one time you wise little guys are in bad."

His words were like a spark in powder to Jim. He liked Johnson as I knew, yet always, when they had worked together, they had differed on many points. "Oh, I don't know," he said now in a growl. "We've chewed a hole in more'n one theory you've advanced in the past. I'm willin' to admit it looks a cinch for you right now all right, but wait till the smoke clears off. Things ain't always the way they seem."

His words steadied me some way and

brought me back from the field of conjecture into which I had strayed. Suddenly, as plainly as though spoken, I seemed to hear again the words I had heard over the wire in the "dog house" at the station: "And then my friend, come to me."

And suddenly I sensed that Semi-Dual was calling me to him, in that strange telepathic way he used at times when he desired my presence and knew not where I was. And if Dual was calling it was because he was ready to enter the tangled scheme of things surrounding the end of Chadbourne's life. I looked at Johnson. "You staying here or going back?" I asked.

"Oh, I'll stick around for a while yet, I guess," he told me and smiled. "I'm goin' to chin that girl a bit about this note we found."

"All right," I agreed and turned to Bryce. "Come Jim, let's get along."

He followed me out and down to the street. On the corner below the house we caught a car. Jim sighed as we took a seat. "Son," he began, "not countin' my debt to Johnson as anything but sound, I ain't so sure but we 're in bad on this job, myself."

"You think the girl killed him?" I said.

"No, I don't," he declared.

"Then you think that Bancroft fired the shot?"

He shook his head. "I don't know what I think," he replied. "But if Chadbourne's coat wasn't even powder-marked, he never killed himself."

"Well," I said, "since neither one of us knows what to think, the best thing is to go to some one who may put us right, I guess. He told me to come up when we had been to the house."

Jim nodded. "I reckon," he agreed and said no more on the way down town.

As for myself, impatience urged me more and more. With Jim I entered the Urania's doors and caught a car through to the twentieth floor. At the top I still led the way up the staircase to the roof and into the garden warm under the westering sun.

And then as always when I went there, the place took hold upon me. It was quiet, beautiful, calm, with its growing things, the scent of which struck like some subtle in-

cense to my senses and seemed to soothe the harassment of my mind. Beyond me the tower shone white in the afternoon light. The music of a tiny fountain struck my ear. A dove cooed somewhere in the vines which covered the parapet wall. A tiny sun-dial stood beside the central path to the tower door. Its circle was carved in Arabic symbols, whose meaning I had been told:

Eternal justice—eternal right
Lie in the hand of God—from Whom comes
light.

Light—it lay all about me, pure, softly golden, as I paused and drank in the scene. Would the one who dwelt here, who had made this strange place for his abode, be able to let in a mental light on the dark snarl of human tragedy with which Bryce and I and a girl and a man stood confronted?

And suddenly I smiled. Why not? I had seen him do it before. Why should I doubt him now? And yet each time I viewed the man's calm use of the higher forces of light with a wonder which never died. I had wondered the first time I had seen it. I had wondered ever since. Only now with my wonder was blended faith. Then why was I waiting here beside the dial outside his door?

I turned and with Jim still at my heels, went toward the tower and Semi-Dual.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SUN, THE MOON AND THE STARS.

HE sat in that inner room of his I have so often described, beside his great desk, with the golden light of afternoon pouring in through a window and throwing his quiet features into striking relief. They were strong, those features. They gave one a sense of latent power, of forces held in conserved control, ready for instant and purposeful use.

And the light, too, fell on his robes of purple and white which he wore by custom when at home, flashing the purple in vivid refraction, touching the white to an almost amber glow.

Before him on the desk was a veritable litter of paper; sheets and sheets, covered with circles, with symbols, with numbers—the things I knew he used in probing the mysteries of life—astrological calculations—the media through which he asked his questions of the cosmic forces, and through which they replied. Odd? Yes, odd of course, to see a man seat himself and seek to learn the truth of death, of murder, of violence and crime by figures set down on sheets of virgin white. But I had seen him do it before, and find the answer which he sought. And my heart leaped as he lifted his deep gray eyes and met my inquiring glance.

And then he spoke: "My friends, you have given into my hands one of the most complete and finished problems that has ever come to me. In this case of a millionaire's death, the horary figure alone appears to contain all essential elements both of cause and effect, to predicate the death beyond any question, and to predicate as well—the end."

A funny little thrill ran through me at the words. Assurance had rung in my strange friend's tones. Assurance of what? He had said the end. Could he mean—could he possibly mean that already, while Bryce and I were merely confused by conflicting details and objective appearance, he had reached the actual end of the affair? The thing passed belief. And yet he had said "the end."

Bryce took the words off Dual's lips as Semi paused. "Th' end?" he mouthed. "You mean th' real end, Mr. Dual? You mean you got that far along already? That you know how the thing will turn out? Well—I've knowed you for a long time, but I never knew you to pull it as strong as that." He drew out a crumpled kerchief, sank into a chair, and began to mop his face. "Why—it ain't much more than started yet, an' Gordon an' me ain't found out nuthin' much worth while."

Dual smiled slightly as I let myself down in a chair at the end of the desk. "That," he replied, "makes small difference to such a figure as I have erected since my conversation over the wire with Gordon this afternoon. The figure, as you surely know

by now, Mr. Bryce, may run far ahead of the actual events in those other events it foreshadows. It is but a reasoning from known or given cause to preknown and certain effect. It is but, after all, a mathematical calculation, the answer to which, if correctly attained, must, past all doubt, be right."

Bryce sighed. As always, Dual's calm announcements had shaken his nerves. "I ain't no mathematician," he said as Semi paused. "But—I've seen you do it before—so all right. What have you found out?"

Semi shook his head. "Suppose we first let Gordon tell me what you have already learned."

I knew well enough what he wanted. Time and again before I had sat where I sat now and talked to the keen intelligence of this man, which seized upon each fact I named and seemed to mentally set it aside, classify it and put it away for future reference.

I began my tale. Dual lay back in his chair and closed his eyes. Thereby it seemed that he shut out all external distraction, and focused upon the one sense of hearing the entire perceptive powers of his brain. He did not move nor speak to interrupt. He lay relaxed and listened. At such times it had always seemed to me that the physical being of the man went into complete abeyance; that for the space through which I spoke, he became in all, save his vital functions, no more than a centered mind.

Concentration—the ability to shut out all—everything else and give full attention to one separate thought or thing. No man I have ever known possessed the power to the same degree as Dual.

And knowing that I spoke to his waiting brain, I told it all, the whole course of the day, our talk with Bancroft, our visit to the Chadbourne house, our conversation with Johnson, the finding of the threatening note, the fact of the coming *post mortem* and the object at which it was aimed.

At the end he sat up and opened his eyes, and once more he smiled. "Appearance—appearance," he said. "We are prone, we mortals, to go so much by that.

Thrust a straight stick into a pool of water and the stick seems bent. That is the refraction of light, as any schoolboy knows to-day. But—facts may be refracted even as light by the media through which they are seen and be bent from their true course, and so be taken amiss, and be thought other than they are. And yet facts and light are both needful things in this life we lead, and like the schoolboy, we must learn to understand the reason back of any distortion of either which may occur."

Jim sat up. "I reckon you mean this here don't look like it is," he broke out. "Well, I told Johnson something like that to-day myself."

"Johnson," said Semi-Dual, "is viewing facts through the media of his understanding and experience, Mr. Bryce. Yet in the situation as narrated by Glace, one may find both facts and light."

I caught up his final words. "You mean then that our work has been of value—that it fits in with your own calculations?"

"Yes." Dual turned and lifted a sheet of paper from the desk. I saw that it bore a circle, cut into segments by intersecting lines, and marked here and there by various symbols of astrological meaning, such as I had seen him employ before.

"In this figure," he began, "the major course, at least, of the whole affair concerning the Chadbourne tragedy is shown. As a matter of caution I shall go over it again and check it in every way I may to prevent against errors creeping in, but at the same time this horary figure is singularly complete. In it Saturn and Mercury appear in conjunction, both stationary at present, but one about to become retrograde and the other direct. Furthermore, this conjunction occurs in partile to the longitude of the sun. Such a configuration, when taken in connection with the position of certain other of the planets, would almost certainly show that two persons were jointly concerned in Henry Chadbourne's death."

"Two!" Bryce almost groaned the single word. His jaw sagged and his eyes widened with the sudden conception which seemed to have entered his brain.

Nor could I blame him myself. Dual's almost didactic statement had fitted so com-

pletely with the theory of the police that I myself was conscious of a strange premonitory thrill.

"Two," said Semi once more. "Saturn is coldly planning. Mercury is a changeable planet, facile, ready of wit, but lighter than the more positive planet with which it shows in conjunction, and hence dominated by it during the conjunction. But as both are stationary now, and about to become either retrograde or direct, both are more or less weak and therefore dominated themselves by the sun, in whose heart they are. The sun, in this figure, I feel safe in assuming, may be used to represent the powers of law, either the law of man or that higher and never-changing one, not made by human minds."

Jim nodded. His expression was one of hopeless dejection. "An' Bancroft is a lawyer," he complained. "And you say this Saturn is a cold an' calculatin' guy, an' Mercury is a changeable person, whoever Mercury is, an' I guess that ought to fit a woman, all right."

Dual gave him a glance. "You make your deductions quickly, Mr. Bryce," he said, and once more referred to the paper in his hand.

"Jupiter here is strong and swift in motion, in trine to the sun, hence in trine to Saturn and Mercury as well, and at the same time afflicted by their zodiacal parallel. Venus next appears in conjunction with Jupiter, and hence holds the same position in regard to the sun and the other two planets already mentioned, but with her influence partaking of the nature of the stronger planet with which she is placed, since Venus too is a mutable planet, taking on the dominant force of the planet with which she is conjoined."

"Venus," said Bryce, and grinned. "I guess you was right a minute ago when you said I made my deductions fast. Maybe I made 'em too fast, eh? Venus is a woman. I know that much. And there's only one skirt in this affair."

Semi-Dual smiled as he replied. "Venus is feminine in nature, Mr. Bryce, but I can hardly agree with your final statement that only one woman is concerned in this case."

"What — er — that is you mean there's

another mixed up in the thing?" Bryce stared.

"I feel assured of that," Dual replied. "Mars in this figure of mine is posited in a feminine sign. That would predicate a second female agent in the matter. I will even go as far as to give you her personal appearance, if you like. She will be dark-haired, a brunette, with a small nose, possibly pointed, and of a mercenary turn of mind. And as Mars is in square to Uranus, in square to Saturn, in square to Mercury, and in square to the sun, signifying, among other things, cold-blooded calculation and love for money, keen wit used in a wrongful cause or causes, and friction with the duly constituted authorities of the law, we may consider that she must enter into this, and that since Mars is not a weak planet in the figure, her connection will be not direct as an agent of Chadbourne's actual death, but rather that she will prove to be an accessory either before or after the fact, preferably the last."

"Hold on, I don't get that at all!" Jim exclaimed. "You mean some such dame is mixed up in this, of course, but what do you mean by an accessory after the fact? Where does that come in?"

"An accessory after the fact comes in after the primary factor, Mr. Bryce," said Dual.

"After Chadbourne was dead, then?" said Jim.

"Yes, Mr. Bryce — after Chadbourne's death."

"And" — Jim leaned forward as he spoke — "is there anything in that figure of yours showin' as Chadbourne himself?"

"Naturally." Semi smiled. "Uranus stands, I think, for the dead millionaire. It is an eccentric planet, ruler of sudden and inexplicable deaths. In this chart of mine it is retrograde and in square to Mars, and eclipsed by the moon, at the time when Chadbourne died. Hence I feel sure we may assume that it stands for the man himself, and that its position and the manner in which it is aspected indicates death by a martial tool—a revolver in this case, as we know.

"Now, in addition to all else on which I have touched, we have to consider the

moon, and the aspects which it will form from the moment of Chadbourne's death until the culmination of the whole affair. The moon eclipsed Uranus at the instant Chadbourne died. It blotted Chadbourne out. From that position it will pass to a square with Mars, to an opposition with Saturn, to an opposition with Mercury, of course, to an opposition with the sun, and from there to a sextile with Jupiter and Venus, where the case will come to an end."

"You mean it will end when the moon has gone from one to another of those positions and brings up at the last place you've named?" Jim inquired.

"Yes."

"And you dope out all this you say just from the way these planets are placed one to another—th' way one of them affects another, an' because this Uranus is blotted out, you figure him as Chadbourne, an' you pick out who did him up, by the way they're hooked up with the planet you take for him?"

"Exactly." Dual inclined his head. "Some positions are good and others are bad, and some may be one or the other, depending upon the nature of the planets which go to make up the figure, my friend. Even certain planets may be good or bad, according to their position at the time. The moon and Mercury are mutable, partaking of the nature of the other planets when ruled by them; and the same is true of Venus, if certain conditions arise. And the sun, if strong, becomes a relentless taskmaster—overriding all." His voice rose slightly at the last and rang with a strange, un wonted timbre. "In this case he proves so, indeed, and through him justice is done."

"Through the law?"

"Aye," said Dual, "through the law—the law of eternal justice. For he stands in a good position to the symbols of good, and in evil aspect to the things which are evil in this. So shall the end be brought about in God's good time, since He it was who set His fiery symbols in the sky!"

"Gosh, I hope so!" Bryce averred. "It sounds all right when you say it. But—what do I and Gordon do?"

Semi-Dual turned his eyes to me. They were deep, alive with a singular living light.

Yet his words came softly in reply: "Wait—wait on the lady moon, my friends, while she slips from spot to spot on the checker-board of days and nights."

"Wait?" I said. "Semi—you mean exactly that?"

"Wait and learn what you may to support the message of the stars and that ending they foretell when the proper time is come. For, my friends, as the tides are swayed by the moon, so are men and women swept irresistibly toward good or evil by the stars which dominate their lives."

Then indeed I felt sure. Semi knew. Despite anything which might transpire in the days and nights to come before the thing was ended, he was assured of the end. But he knew mankind would not believe—that even for Bryce, who had seen him do this same thing before, it was at times hard to accept his statements in simple faith. Hence to Bryce and me would fall the task of producing those material facts which alone mankind would accept. "Have you any special course to suggest?" I inquired.

"No," Dual said. "In this you must use your own instinctive leadings for the present, at least, being assured that the influences are such that barring the conscious outside interference of some one able to read the preordained termination, each actor in this drama of life will move as the stars direct. Should there arise a need, I shall not hesitate to suggest or direct, and so throw such conscious interference into the scales of fate on the side of justice."

Bryce drew a long breath as Semi paused and once more plunged into the blind world before our eyes, which was no wall to Semi-Dual. "But—see here. I'm willin' to do what you say. I know what you can do. I ain't doubtin', you understand; and all you've said fits in pretty well with what we know, as far as it goes. The description fits the Norgall girl pretty close, an' that mercenary business, th' love of money, hits on her havin' been adopted an' made Chadbourne's heir, an' th' accessory after the fact—might mean she was simply tryin' to cover up what Bancroft did, since you say there was two of them in it, an' th' one Mercury stands for didn't have as strong a part as was played by this Saturn guy.

"Of course that may not be right, either. You said Venus was in it, too, an' that she might be evil, provided conditions was right. But; accordin' to that, both dames mixed up in the deal are crooked, an' I can't make out which is which. Now, if you know, why don't you put me an' Gordon wise, so we can get a better notion of what we're doin' before we start out?"

That was one of the longest speeches I had ever heard Jim give voice to in my life. I judged from that the depths of his disturbed emotions, and I know that Semi did too, since he at once replied:

"Your question is natural enough, I must admit. I hope that my answer will seem reasonable to you. Some moments ago I declared that unless disturbed by outside and intelligent interference the course of this case would move step by step to a predetermined end. Intelligent interference would, of necessity, be based on definite knowledge of what that end might be.

"For fate is fate, insomuch only as ignorance prevails. To him who knows the things to come, to him who knowingly faces his fate as portended, yet resists, there is no longer fate. A man may 'grapple with his evil star,' as Browning says, and cast its threat aside, provided that he knows the power enwrapped in every soul to such an end.

"And since this fact is true, I deem it best, although I know the end the stars foretell, to hold my tongue. That conscious interference I have named must come not from the side of evil, but, if at all, from those who stand for right. And that which has been given to me—that foreknowledge granted me in this; not for myself, but for others; to safeguard them—I shall keep for the present to myself, unless some need for its use shall arise. My friend, do you understand?"

Jim nodded. "I reckon," he said. "Maybe I might get too cock-sure, if I knew, and spill something to Johnson or somebody else. An' a leak would be enough to tip over the beans. So it's just 'watchful waitin'' for Gordon an' me right now?"

"Workful waiting, I think," said Dual with a smile.

"Anyway, tell me this, if you can," Jim

went on. "Was there anything in that figure of yours that hinted at that will dropping out of sight?"

"I was positive something of such a nature would arise," Semi said. "I was not sure what until Gordon gave his report. But—the cusp of the house of money—the second house—is afflicted by Mercury first and by Saturn next, and the cusp of the house which governs such things as secret documents and wills is ruled by Neptune, a secretive planet—a portent of hidings, of hidden things in secret places. Hence Gordon's statement did not take me by surprise."

"No," said Jim. "I reckon not. I reckon it would take a mighty sudden jolt to give you a surprise. But I can see your way of dopin' it out a little bit, at least. Mercury affects the house of money first, an'—well we know about how correct that is, I guess. She was to get all Chadbourne had. Then Saturn gets in his work—an' th' will fails to show up. Them two hid it, I guess. That's what Johnson thinks too. Well, I guess all we can do is get busy and sort of help the moon deliver her punch!"

"Exactly," Dual agreed. "Work, and work with a full assurance that in the fullness of time the guilty will meet their just deserts from the law—not perhaps the law of man, Mr. Bryce, but above that—the law of God! They will reach it through the relentless power of the sun and their mutual connection with this crime. They will reach it *through* each other, I think."

"Through each other?" I broke in.

Dual inclined his head. "Planets so posited to each other and within the *heart of the sun*, must destroy each other, my friend."

"Must?" I queried again with a strange and sudden fulness in my throat.

"Must!" Dual laid his paper on the desk. To me, who knew him so well, the action was as final as the word.

"Sure!" Jim nodded his head. "After about so long somebody is going to blow up an' crab the other's game. But, see here, Mr. Dual, what about that note Johnson's man found this afternoon?"

"That is something I think will bear investigation," Semi declared. "The result

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and thrust her into a life-boat just as it slipped from the davits.

The knowledge that Jones, who was ruinously high in his fees, would charge him nothing, coupled with his aversion to meeting women, alone had prevented Holt from seeking his advice. He recalled his errand, and spoke.

"I came to book you for a ride in Seaman's quadriplane," he explained. "You remember him—a soph in our time, shark on mathematics. He has perfected a sort of superseaplane. Great chance for us!"

Jones shook his head smilingly.

"No use, old-timer! You know me. A rathskeller, with a small and select party—no women—and I'll put this cerebrum on ice and go. I respect aviation in all its forms, but don't care a hoot about seeing or doing it."

Holt grunted.

"What you doing with that odious mess, anyhow?" He pointed at the specimen on the table.

"That? Oh, I forgot to introduce you. Pardon the oversight. Meet the late Lucius Treat, who suffered from locomotor ataxia, paresis, paranoia, and a few other minor afflictions, and died leaving four promising young cretins to vote for president by and by! I'm putting a section of his brain in my projector, to see if I can identify any cellular lesions."

"You're higher up in the clouds than Seaman will ever get! Why don't you do something *practical*? Who cares a hang whether Treat has any lesions or not? Whatever he had, you couldn't cure him of, and he's dead. Why don't you accomplish something we can make use of?"

"As what, for instance?"

"Well—er—you spend all your time monkeying with the human intellect and its repulsive envelope; why not teach us how to be prophets?"

"Oh, I don't know! Just what is a prophet, anyhow? Whatever he is, he isn't a long-whiskered seer peering into the vapor of some witches' caldron. Did you ever stop to consider that in every great war of the past two thousand years, some one has pointed out that the prophet Daniel foretold it in the Old Testament? It is so to-day.

Also, that in each event of world-wide import, there have been uttered predictions covering every possible outcome? And that some one of these *must*, of course, guess right? Thereupon we get that 'I told you so' stuff. It now appears that this present debacle was foretold over and over again."

"There's something in that, of course; but you're talking of *false prophets*. I'm speaking of the genuine article, if he exists."

"Very good! When you read a properly constructed mystery story, you find in the last chapter a climax the necessary elements of whose solution were all present in the preceding pages, if you had possessed the type of mind capable of reading them aright. Most editors and many observant readers do forecast the conclusion. Well, life is a mystery plot. All the clues are present—nothing is wanted but a mind capable of winnowing the chaff out and matching up the essential fragments. In other words, a prophet needs but two things: sufficient data, and the logical *a priori* and *a posteriori* intellect to utilize it."

"Ve-ry simple, learned healer! Proving either that no such mind exists in mortal born of woman, or that the data is lacking."

"Proving nothing of the sort, my egg-headed legal friend. Such minds exist, and the data is all garnered. All that is needed is to make it available."

"Then why—"

Dr. Jones silenced Holt with a bony forefinger, stained with something unpleasant, and reeking of germicide.

"Holt, I could manufacture a prophet as easily as I can make a new nose by the gentle rhinoplastic art. But who wants to be a prophet?"

"I, for one! Ever since I was a kid I've dreamed of clairvoyance, fortune-telling, the gift of prophecy."

"You've dreamed of *bunk*. I should create, not a supernatural attribute, but a perfectly normal and material function. I should simply make available to your excellent brain the store of facts it already possesses, but cannot get at."

"Talk down to me, doc! If I've got the dope, lead me to it! How do I get to bring my powerful intellect to bear on it all?"

Jones seated himself opposite his visitor, brushing aside a clutter of empty vials, stubs of pencil, fragmentary notes on old envelope backs, a piece of skull with a silver plate set in it, and other odds and ends, to make room for his elbows.

"Do you know that men are quite likely to die of the disease they repeatedly dream they've contracted?" he asked.

"Nope! Never followed the dream-book and Mother Shipton."

"Well, it is a fact! To such an extent that we of to-day make these recurrent dreams a part of our diagnosis. Reason why: there are a lot of little telltale symptoms too obscure to impress the consciousness, perhaps even to be noted by the family physician; but the subconsciousness takes note of them all, as of everything else, and in your sleep, they are cast up on the cerebral shore. We have hundreds of such dreams, few of which we recall. Only the vivid ones are remembered. Every persistent dream is worthy of our attention, Freud assures us, and his dictum is generally accepted by the profession."

"But this is a long, long way from the gift of prophecy!"

"No, it isn't! Consider that your subliminal mind is a vast storehouse, where every impression, however trivial, is registered and filed away. This includes the myriad of seemingly irrelevant facts that we are not aware of noting at all; every bit of color, each pebble in our paths, the faintest sound, the most elusive odor, a fragment of a dozen conversations overheard simultaneously during the intermission at a play, the meaningless sequence of numbers shouted by a quarterback at a football game you saw twenty years ago, as well as the license-number of every automobile you ever carelessly glanced at, the shape of the buttons on the coat of your great-uncle, the taste of a fruit eaten when you visited India as a child—all this lumber besides what you regard as *important* facts. You never forget anything; you only *think* you do. If, now, your brain had access to this stupendous mass of information covering every printed word you ever read, every spoken syllable you ever heard, why, you'd be a sort of little god, wouldn't you?"

"I'd be the original little tin god of Manhattan!"

"And inasmuch as there is no such thing as an isolated fact, each item being a link in a chain, with its own past and future, and its interrelation to other facts, the logical mind could, from its accumulated data, predict the future exactly as a professional reader can forecast the end of a novel. Thus, to make you into a very fair prophet, I would have merely to put you in touch with your own private collection of facts."

"Simple as that, eh? Mere matter of introduction. Mr. Holt, meet your own subconsciousness! Greetings, subcon, old top! Delighted, I'm sure!"

Jones grunted.

"I'm not irreligious, as you know; I suppose I'm more or less *non-religious*. But every scientific explorer comes at times to a sort of psychic wall he recognizes as bearing the sign 'no trespassing.' In his rambles he finds a tree of knowledge, of whose fruit he knows he should not eat. Fact, Holt; I've passed up a number myself. Don't pretend to know why, but there are a few things too big for finite man to attempt. They belong to whomever you worship. Carry too high a voltage for our brains, at their present stage of development. Burn out our fuses, so to speak. Get the idea?"

"Oh, yes, as a theory. But I'd sure admire to meet up with that subconsciousness of mine!"

"That's managed easily enough. It's a shy bird—comes out at night in your sleep, or in delirium, or the hypnotic state. But it's playing with dynamite!"

"You mean to tell me it is positively dangerous to be hypnotized?"

"Not in the least! It does not even place one in the power of the hypnotizer, as popular superstition has it. Of course, if one repeatedly submits to suggestion from another he does come in time to yield more readily; but I could not hypnotize you against your will, even if I had several times done so at your request. It's not the danger of that, but of the possible ascendancy of that subconsciousness, a sort of sleeping giant, an animal without soul or sentiment, which is normally subordinate to the mind,

but abnormally its tyrant, as in the well authenticated instances of multiple personality. Good servant, poor master, you know."

"Well, I have a pretty good will, a copper-riveted digestion, and no nerves worth mentioning. I don't believe what you say, anyhow; but I'm game enough to take a chance! If you can open up that mental library of mine so I can prowling about in it and look into a few volumes, just enough, you understand, to do a few cute little parlor tricks of prophesying—"

For a long time Dr. Jones stared in silence at the faintly cynical face of Holt; so long, in fact, that the latter stirred uneasily, half suspecting that the physician was trying to hypnotize him. At length Jones shook himself and spoke.

"By George, you've no sort of business to tempt me like this! If you knew how many times I've *wanted* to try something of the sort, and was too decent to do it—afraid to, if you want to know. If your family history were not so sound, if I didn't know what a bone-headed sturdy, common sense old chap you are, I'd throw you through my window, sash and all, at the risk of ruining my crocuses planted just below. As it is—no, I'm damned if I do!"

"Quitter!" jeered Holt. "I've called your bluff!"

Jones laughed nervously. His voice actually trembled as he replied: "You win! I'll do it, and we'll see what happens!"

He rose and crossed the room to a rickety cupboard, in which he fumbled until he found what he was after: a little upright rod with a sort of a two-bladed propeller balanced on the top, made of highly polished mirrors. This he set down upon the table, once more darkened the room and then, by means of a paper funnel, focused the light of a single incandescent upon the mirrors.

"Hypnotism, as you probably know, is produced most readily by eye-strain. If you fix your gaze upon this bright object, and relax physically and mentally, you will yield as soon as your retina is fatigued. I can produce auto-hypnosis at any time. Often do it when I'm alone here and haven't time for a real sleep. Don't think of anything in particular, or worse yet, make a

conscious effort *not* to think. If I don't make the experiment now, I'll repent, and you'll lose your chance to be the only real prophet in captivity. Now look steadily!"

He turned a switch in the standard of the rod, and the little mirrors began to revolve swiftly and noiselessly.

"Didn't work, hey?" laughed Holt as Dr. Jones opened the wooden shutters a second time to the light of day.

"I didn't notice any hitch," said Jones coolly. "You were 'out' about three minutes."

"Huh! Well, I don't feel like a prophet," complained Holt, rubbing his eyes, which felt a little as they always did after following a five-reel photoplay.

"Much you know how a prophet feels! Did you expect to begin to bawl forth dire warnings before you leave the room?"

"Do you really believe you've changed a fairly good solicitor into a bum prophet just by making him stare at a silly toy in the dark for a few moments?"

"I've done *this*, my old college chum: I've roused your subconsciousness and suggested that for one week your brain shall have free access to its storehouse. One week, mind you! No longer. And if you are not glad when the seven days are past, I'm a chiropodist! I count on your mental fiber to stand the strain for that period."

"You flatter me! Meanwhile, as I propose to take in that photoplay, prophet or no, I'll toddle along. Thanking you for an interesting half-hour, *et cetera*—"

"You don't happen to feel any premonitions as to the weather for to-morrow, do you?" asked Jones, as he opened the door for him. "The reports say 'continued fair and warmer,' but I've a particular reason for wishing to know definitely!"

"Not a premonish, doc!" Holt laughed back over his shoulder. "If I'm a prophet, I'm only a stuffed one!"

The screen-thriller put entirely out of Holt's mind the curious interview with his scientific friend. Once or twice that evening it occurred to him, but merely as a transient thought. He even forgot to mention it in the family circle, as he had intended. While preparing for bed, he had

a moment of seriousness, recalling that to Dr. Jones anything relative to science was almost sacred, and that a pseudo-scientific hoax was utterly foreign to his nature. Unquestionably *he* believed what he had said.

Holt switched off the lights, and that night, if he dreamed at all, he could not recall having done so when he awakened next morning. Nor had he thought of the matter at all when he took his place at the head of the breakfast-table.

It was out of a clear sky that the first demonstration of his new power came to him. There had been the usual desultory morning table-talk; references to items in the daily paper, weather banalities, grumblings because the toast was scorched, the give and take of a meal *en famille*, when in the midst of a reply to some idle query of his wife, when his eyes were resting by chance upon the serene face of his mother, there unrolled before him as a scroll the coming three years of her life.

As if he were witnessing a motion-picture, he beheld her seized with convulsions while she was knitting in her sunny chamber; saw the confusion of many distracted members of the family running to and fro, the arrival of the doctor and the administration of digitalis. She was tenderly put to bed, the nurse came, there followed weeks of anguish and a slow breaking down of her strength and courage, until the end came. Every step he followed, until they had laid her away at rest.

It seemed to him that at least fifteen minutes must have been consumed by the grievous portrayal; and yet presently he heard himself mechanically finishing his reply to his wife, beheld the very morsel of omelet balanced upon his fork, interrupted in its brief journey by his remark, and realized by a glance at the unsuspecting faces about the table, and at the dining-room clock, that time had been annihilated for him. All that he had seen had passed in a measureless flash.

Finishing breakfast as calmly as he could, he hastened from the house. The sinister feature of the strange experience he had undergone was this: he *knew* that it was truly prophetic. He realized now that while a false prophet might be deceived as well

as deceiving, a true one could never mistake his message. He could not tell *how* he knew—but it was so.

Nevertheless, he proceeded directly to the office of a heart specialist well known to him socially, and requested him to accompany him back home, distant but a few blocks. He told him merely that he had reason to suspect that his mother was suffering from an organic heart trouble, explained that her health had always seemed of the best, and that she must not know the real purpose of the visit. Occasionally she had complained of flatulence; her color, too, seemed too brilliant for one of her years. It was arranged that Dr. Young should be introduced as a stomach specialist, and that Holt had chanced to meet him on the corner, and invited him in. Something had been said about a little medicine on one occasion when her food distressed her.

It all passed off as naturally as Holt had hoped it might. There was some good-natured bantering, his mother scolded him for fetching in a strange young man without giving her time to put on her new silk house-gown, the examination was made with much thoroughness, and Holt departed with Dr. Young, after the latter had written out a prescription for—digitalis!

His diagnosis confirmed Holt's vision in every respect. His mother suffered from an incurable form of heart disease, *angina pectoris*, and was doomed to be a great sufferer.

As he stood by the entrance to Young's home, it suddenly grew dark overhead. Looking up, they noted that black thunder-clouds had swept across the sun. The morning had been superb, fair weather had been indicated in the reports for the day. Yet, now, big drops began to dot the sidewalk, and distant thunder muttered. Holt found, to his surprise, that he clutched an umbrella he had taken from his rack, without knowing that he did so, or why he should. He went direct to his office now, arriving in a smart downpour.

During the rest of the day, nothing out of the ordinary occurred. It chanced to be a quiet week with him. He had just won a verdict in an important case, and for the present had nothing in hand but routine

work; the reading of his mail, conferences with his associates, a directors' meeting, an office client or so. He had plenty of time to think; too much time, in fact. A knotty brief would have been a godsend. That night his sleep was uneasy, his dreams monstrous but disconnected. There was nothing in them to which he could attach the remotest significance.

The thought of his mother preyed upon him. In kissing her good-by as he left the office, her womanly intuition sensed an added solicitude which he believed he had concealed.

"What is it, Tommy?" she asked, holding him at arm's length and scanning him from her faded blue eyes. "Is anything wrong? You're not overworking, dear?"

"Fit as a fiddle, mumsey," he replied, forcing a laugh; and tore himself brusksly from her.

It came to him, his next vision, as he was boarding a trolley-car. He beheld, as plainly as if he were holding the paper before him, an account of the sensational thirty-point jump of Western Copper. Half a column there was, all told, with references to an inside ring which had kept the good thing strictly to itself, and cut a mammoth melon.

Yet, when he had finished, he was still setting one foot on the car-platform, which was not yet in motion. He could not estimate the minute fraction of time during which he had seen the future of Western Copper unfolded.

Holt did not dabble in stocks at all; but like thousands of others, he read the market reports as a matter of habit, much as he read the baseball columns without attending the games. Now, without the least uncertainty, he rode on past his office to a brokerage concern he knew by reputation, and, after telephoning his bank for his balance figures, drew a check for practically the entire amount of his deposit, and purchased a thousand shares outright. Had he been a dealer, he would have bought on margin and pyramided. As it was, he felt contented with a modest thirty thousand dollars' profit.

Returning to his office afoot, he happened to glance up the towering white façade of

the new Obelisk Building, the latest skyscraper. Instantly, and in one of the mental flashes to which he was already becoming accustomed, he beheld a bulletin announcing its destruction by fire, under date of the forthcoming night at twelve.

Holt did not know the owner, nor his representatives, save by reputation. He knew nothing of the building itself save that it was the last word in "slow burning" construction—as the insurance people say—and that it housed enough concerns, with their battalions of clerks, to populate a western metropolis. He seemed to recall that a number of quasi-governmental agencies made it their headquarters, and it was possibly used by certain foreign interests, since the recollection of bewhiskered and crop-headed and ornately mustached gentlemen in frock coats and toppers, hurrying in and out of its broad portals, came to him as he paused momentarily, following the vision of the prophetic bulletin.

It seemed to Holt, distasteful as it was to do so, with no evidence whatever, his bounden duty to whisper a word of warning in the ear of whomever had the building's welfare in custody. But what on earth should he say? How introduce himself? Uncertainly he crossed over and entered, asking the starter for the agent's floor, and being ushered into a great bronze lift.

The puffy gentleman who received him at once upon glancing at his card, looked much like a walrus, only warmer. His triple chins formed a series of rings above a low, discouraged collar, and his eyes expressed perpetual astonishment.

"Thinking of taking over one of our new suites, Mr. Holt?" he barked, his bristly mustache erecting and beating time to his syllables. "Glad to have your concern with us—"

"It's not business, Mr. Fletcher," Holt nervously began, seating himself and speaking in a conspirator's whisper. "In fact, I hardly know how to explain my errand."

He glanced at the bulging eyes and bristling lips, and plunged desperately ahead.

"You do not know me, but you perhaps know of me. I am certainly not an alarmist. It has come to me that—er—that is, I chanced to overhear a word or two—I am

afraid that the Obelisk is in danger of fire this very night!"

Astonishment being Fletcher's normal mien, Holt was unable to tell whether he felt it now or not.

"Word? What word? What did you hear?"

"It was merely a fragment of talk that came to me in a crowded car," lied Holt, unable to bring himself to tell the truth. "I couldn't even see who uttered it. We—we were passing through a tunnel at the time, and though I listened, nothing more was said on the subject."

Fletcher gazed steadily at Holt.

"Well—of course I'm obliged," he said at length. "But when the Obelisk burns up, then cakes of ice will get—now—spontaneous combustion! The rate on their building is rock bottom. Mostly reenforced concrete and glass used in it. No wooden stairs or banisters or window sashes. Only the doors, and office furniture, you might say, and I leave it to you if it's easy to kindle a mahogany desk!"

"Don't seem so," admitted Holt, rising to go. "Just felt it my duty to speak of it—such a fine edifice—civic duty and all that sort of thing, you know!"

"Sure! We appreciate it—but with our force of watchmen and the materials used and everything—don't lose any sleep on our account, Mr. Holt. Have a cigar?"

Holt refused, and escaped, red of face, with the impression that Fletcher considered him mildly insane.

Nevertheless, that night when, making what excuses he could, he left home at eleven-thirty and posted himself in the deserted cannon dominated by the Obelisk, lovely in its towering whiteness as the search-lights from the harbor picked it up, he noted the pousy figure of Fletcher lurking in an office entrance across the way, and could not refrain from a grin. He was sorry that Fletcher saw him, and evidently Fletcher felt the same way about it, as he scuttled back into the shadows like a fat spider.

A policeman pounded by, trying the doors. A newsboy scampered through, empty handed and taking a short cut home. A shabby nondescript crept past, muttering

to himself, possibly some former magnate, Holt reflected, haunting the battle-field of ancient triumphs. Taxicabs shot through from time to time, taking advantage of the absence of traffic.

Eleven fifty-five; and so slowly did the hands seem to move on a big illuminated dial within Holt's range of vision that twice he drew forth his watch to reassure himself by the spinning second hand. Then, almost as if the clock hand had leaped over the last three minutes, midnight boomed forth; and simultaneously Holt was hurled against a granite wall by a terrific explosion. When he recovered his wits, flames were bursting from the second and third story windows of the Obelisk.

A long time he watched the firemen at work, as they magically appeared upon the scene. Finally he returned home and to bed.

He was aroused the following morn by a message which urgently but courteously requested his presence at police headquarters.

The pop-eyed and bristling Fletcher was seated in the chief's office when he arrived, breakfastless, in a taxi. The chief he knew slightly. After the customary desultory greetings, the police head spoke.

"Last night, Mr. Holt, the Obelisk was partly wrecked by a powerful explosive, which we have reason to believe was planted by German spies. You may not be aware that exceedingly valuable reports of their activities are kept there. Now, Mr. Fletcher, the agent naturally recalled at once your warning of yesterday. I feel sure you did not tell him all you knew. You were not obliged to, of course. Probably you dreaded notoriety, or feared lest you implicate some innocent party. I can assure you that any information, however trivial it may seem to you, is necessary to me now. You shall be fully protected, and no innocent party shall suffer even embarrassment. I have shown you my cards. Will you do the same?"

"Chief, if I could I would. But I have absolutely nothing, not even a suspicion, to voice!"

The chief smoked in silence for a moment, while Fletcher wriggled in the chair

into which he was so tightly wedged that Holt irrelevantly wondered how he had got in, or could get out. A silly picture of the puffy agent hobbling out with the chair clamped to him caused him to laugh nervously.

"You were in the immediate vicinity. Mr. Holt, when the bomb exploded," suggested the chief seriously.

A sudden resolution seized Holt. He determined to tell the whole truth, no matter how ridiculous it made him appear—the whole truth save only his séance with Dr. Jones.

"I'm going to tell you everything, chief, even though you consider me ripe for a padded cell," he gasped.

"That's right!" approved the officer, settling back comfortably. "I knew you were the sort of citizen we could rely on. Shoot!"

Whereupon Holt did. He explained that he had of late been dreaming things which later came out exactly as he had been warned. He told about his mother, giving the address of the attending physician. He related his purchase of Western Copper, on a "hunch," furnishing the name of the broker, and adding that this was his first transaction of the sort. Then had followed the vision of the Obelisk fire—there had been no inkling of an explosion—and, on impulse, he had warned Fletcher. And that was all.

Even as he finished, a morning paper was thrust through the slot in the office door, and rustled to the floor, opening face upward as it fell.

The chief glanced at it, stooped over and picked it up, and after a startled look handed it to Holt. It was a marked "extra," detailing the phenomenal jump of Western Copper, and the turmoil resulting therefrom.

When Holt, after leaving headquarters and snatching a cup of coffee, had proceeded to his own office, he was greeted with the news that it, with several others, had been gutted by a fire the night past. He smiled grimly, reflecting that he was a failure so far as foreseeing that particular and rather important event was concerned. Evidently

a prophet had his ups and downs. His visions were not subject to call. He could conceive that Daniel himself might foretell the fall of an empire, the very end of the world, and yet never dream that he should see a live lion!

Already he heartily wished the week, of which but two days had passed, were wiped off the calendar. He was nervous as a cat, slept poorly, had no appetite. He dreaded the recurrence of his visions, and scarcely thought of the tidy fortune he had made overnight in Western Copper.

Above all, his mind dwelt upon his mother. That saintly lady, whose life had been spent in doing her simple duty, and far more; in bringing happiness to a wider circle year by year, taxing her strength and her purse to ease the lot of unfortunates she hunted up. Her creed was simple, yet world wide, her faith absolute. Religion? Holt clenched his hands. Why should God allow that pure and faithful heart, that had beat for so many all these years, to throb out in final agony? Had she not at the least earned a gentle sleep, a peaceful death in her bed—as painless as a drunkard's death, in his cups? *Was* there a God? He sought to put the torturing surmises out of his mind. But he found he lacked the power.

He tried, now, to avoid thinking of his loved ones save in the most casual way. He lived in torment lest, as he gazed in his wife's eyes, there should suddenly unroll before him another of the hated scrolls whereon he should behold, written in letters of fire, her doom. He prayed for the blessed boon of ignorance. Too late, he realized the frightful isolation of those who share the gifts of the gods, who have eaten of the Forbidden Fruit.

Deity alone could endure such a blighting burden as omniscience. And deity possessed its anodyne—omnipotence! It could change the measured and implacable march of events, fend destiny from tender souls, reach down a protecting hand to the hopeless and the suffering. Or—*could* it? Such a record of the predestined future, which God could inscribe at will, could even He change a single link in its chain, disturb its connective tissue, without shattering

past and future? Because, if He could, then no such record could be written. One was forced to deny either divine omniscience, or omnipotence. The answer of course, was that to God there is no past nor future. Eternity was not an endless line, but a circle. He visioned all in a flash, even as Holt had seen his own puny glimpse of the yet-to-be.

As if his gift increased with each recurrence, his visions multiplied to a point where his brain seemed to reel beneath the awful burden. On the cars, passing along the crowded streets, in his club or wherever men congregated, a blinding series of horoscopes danced before his eyes. People in whom he took not the slightest interest, men and women he vainly tried to recall ever having seen before, casual strangers, bared their futures to him as it seemed.

He glanced at a loutish youth leaning against an L post, a half-consumed cigarette drooping from lips too indolent to hold it; and instantly the figure straightened, the eyes cleared, the color changed to a virile bronze, and Holt beheld a lean, khaki-clad man, rifle clutched in firm hand, surging "over the top" from some far distant trench.

Or, he nodded abstractedly to a great financier, and at once his well-fitting clothes took on the stripes of prison, and he was doing a lock step for hypothecating the funds of a trust he had handled for years. In the twinkling of an eye people took on new forms, new faces, and assumed, now a tailored prosperity, again the cerements of death.

Nor were his business hours encroached upon, his time stolen. The slow tragedy of a decade defiled past him while his heart throbbled once. He was reminded of the strange experiences of drug-addicts, who lived through unspeakable epochs of world transformation during the revolution of a swiftly moving car wheel, and of the minutely detailed life-history drowning men were said to experience.

But in sleep, troubled as were his dreams, he never received any prophetic visions. All, he supposed, must be based upon the mysterious stores yielded up by his subconsciousness; but he could not connect

how, or when, the facts had touched his senses. Perfect strangers stood before him, their naked history unexpurgated to his insight; he met old friends, and received not a hint of their destiny.

His loneliness was absolute. There were none with whom he could share his burden. The few who might believe him would be alarmed and repelled; others would consider him unbalanced.

The second real shock to his spirit occurred as he was watching his little son romp on the lawn. He was a sturdy lad of ten, neither precocious nor wayward. Of a sudden, Holt beheld him lying in his casket, smelled the heavy odors of flowers, saw the sun strike through the stained glass of St. Luke's, heard the shuffle of little feet as Arthur's mates of the vested choir filed past to look upon his quiet face.

With a terrible effort of will he forced the picture to pass away. He felt fatigued, as after violent physical exertion. But at least, he had evaded the precise *date* of the death. The true horror of prophecy was now clear to him. That night as he knelt by his bed, he prayed for the boon of ignorance, for the kindly curtain which he had presumptuously rent asunder, to fall once more before the blinding future.

Late upon a murky afternoon, Dr. Jones packed his old clay pipe, and sank into a broken-sprung easy chair with a grunt of satisfaction. He had succeeded in fertilizing a sea urchin's egg in a saline solution. He did not in the least need a sea urchin; there were millions of livelier, healthier ones along the Atlantic coast. But he had wished to demonstrate that he *could* do it—and he *had*.

He picked up his morning paper, as yet unglanced at, and prepared to relax. Before he had so much as run over the head-lines, his door was flung open without the preliminary of knocking, and a disheveled, panting figure collapsed into a chair opposite, glaring at him from blood-shot eyes.

"Holt! My dear fellow! What on earth is the matter? Let me get you a drink of something cold and—"

His visitor stayed him with a violent gesture.

"No! I don't want a drink of anything cold, nor hot; nor a shot in the arm, nor even any soothing professional twaddle! What I want is your attention!"

The physician regarded him with a puzzled yet affectionate interest, and settled back in his chair, puffing at his pipe.

"You have it; shoot!" he said tersely.

Thereupon Holt related in detail his amazing experiences of the past few days. Jones made hurried notes on his cuff, and two or three times interrupted with a brusque question. He seemed deeply interested, and with the unfolding of the story his absorption grew.

When Holt paused, he spoke excitedly.

"This is immensely important, old man! I can assure you that when I have been able to check up your facts with absolute precision, the paper I'll write will make us both fam—"

"Fine!" interrupted Holt, gritting his teeth. "But how about *me*? What about my horrible situation?"

"Oh—that! You are, of course, in a highly nervous state; hysterical; jumpy; all that sort of thing. Perfectly natural, too. But I shall be able to point out to you that you are not to take your subconsciousness—or rather your conclusions from its memories—too literally. I shall explain—"

"How will you explain *this*?" whispered Holt, leaning forward while his hands gripped the chair arms. "I haven't told you my latest vision! Jones, as truly as I sit here before you, I saw you, at precisely six o'clock to-night hugging and—and—kissing *my wife*! Yes, damn it! And she was returning your endearments!"

A faint color flooded Jones's pale face, and astonishment gleamed in his eyes.

"What rot!" he finally gasped. "Why I never saw her! And you know about how much of a woman's man I am, even if—er—your wife could be—ah—"

"Nevertheless, true as all this is, I am so solemnly sure that it will come to pass exactly as I have seen it, and as I have foreseen other events fulfilled, that I propose at least to be in your company from now on until six. Get on your hat and come home with me!"

Jones started convulsively.

"No!" he protested. "Lock me up—lock your wife up—do anything you like; but don't bring us face to face in this preposterous fashion!"

"Jones"—Holt's voice was quiet yet surcharged with omen—"you are a doctor. You can see the condition I am in. *Don't try to thwart me!*"

With one long glance into the other's eyes, the physician nodded, rose and took hat and gloves from a table.

"Lead on!" he snapped.

It was already well past five, when the two boarded a car at the corner; and when, without another word having been exchanged, they were admitted to the house, the hall clock showed a quarter to the hour.

The maid who had opened the door detained her master.

"That long distance call you expected from Chicago, had just come as you rang, sir," she said.

Holt nodded.

"All right! I'll take it. Jones, just be seated a moment in there, and excuse me, will you? The library, Anna!"

As the caller entered the room indicated, the telephone voice of his friend came plainly to his ears.

It was some minutes later when Holt, having finished, hurriedly crossed the hall to the library, glancing as he did so at the clock, which was on the very point of striking six.

Three seconds later he stood as if frozen, in the doorway. In the very middle of the room, Jones, the old, faithful, ascetic Jones, held his gentle, modest wife in a tenacious clinch. Her arms were about his rather frowsy neck—Jones always needed a haircut—and her smooth cheek endured, nay invited, his kisses!

Somewhat to the onlooker's astonishment, he felt no resentment at the extraordinary spectacle, which above all others, spells tragedy. Pain, grief, despair, all these gripped him to the full; but anger not at all. For he perceived that fate held them all and moved them about like puppets. Jones could no more avoid what was to be, than could he, or his spotless wife. There were certain amenities to be gone through

with, of course; presently he would do something; shoot Jones, or divorce his wife, or both. But not in hot blood!

The betrayer standing with his back to the door, Holt's wife presently raised herself a tiptoe and, glancing over his shoulder, perceived her husband.

No trace of decent shame, no fear, could he descry in her eyes. Rather, she smiled sweetly upon him as he stood there, dragging at the portières.

"Isn't it *wonderful*, dear?"

"It is!"

"But you don't seem to *realize*; it's *Frank!*"

"I *ought* to know; I brought him here, didn't I?"

Something in his voice arrested her attention. A little frown on her white brow, she added—"after all these years! My little,

lost, baby brother, who didn't go down with the Macedonia after all!"

Something gave out in Holt's legs. He staggered two steps and collapsed on a divan. Had it been three steps distant, he would have hit the floor.

His brain spun round like a giant top. A jumble of half memories spewed up by his subconsciousness danced before him.

The unquestionable similarity between their voices, and the family nose; he was not aware of having ever noted these, yet he must have done so! A trick of lifting one eyebrow—a mutual hatred of the sea—above all—"

"It's strange you didn't bring him here long ago!" his wife's slightly querulous voice broke in upon his thoughts. "You are *so* stupid! You knew my maiden name was Jones!"



A FATAL DEFECT

BY GRACE G. BOSTWICK

I LOVE him! He's dear!
 And he's got an adorable dimple!
 And combs his hair properly
 Backward, you know, with a sweep.
 He's tall and well-set,
 With a manner delightfully simple,
 But whenever I see him,
 I flee to my boudoir to weep.

I'm crazy about him!
 Precisely the sort I've been seeking
 For years upon years.
 And his eyes are the color I love.
 But, ah! when he comes to me
 Smiling and eager and joyful,
 I fly like a terrified bird
 To my chambers above.

He comes at all hours.
 He writes and he telephones daily,
 Determined to win—
 Ah, that look in his loverlike eyes!
 But saddened and sore
 At a fate that is cruel—too cruel!
 I cannot endure his dreadful, unthinkable neckties!

If You Believe It, It's So

by Perley Poore Sheehan

Author of "White Tigers," "The Whispering Chorus," "God's Messenger," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

EZRA WOOD, of Rosebloom, an elderly man, rugged but toil-marked, was robbed of eleven hundred dollars at Grand Central Station, which he was bringing to the city to pay off a mortgage on his home.

Chick, the young pickpocket who had secured the money, was so overborne by the old man's faith and optimism and a certain "virtue that went out from him," he returned the money and met his gang the same night at "The Commodore" on the Bowery, with the astounding news he was going to go "straight," and the way led to the country. Solly and Phil, two of his lieutenants, remained unconvinced, and their chief, "Sky Blue," the old man with the face and manners of a parson and the morals of a bushman, ridiculed the very suggestion.

But after helping the girl of the gang, Myrtle, to a ticket to Denver, where she was to regain her health and then her hold on the rail of the narrow path, Chick struck out westward, and by slow stages came to the Delaware Water Gap country.

Here he met up with "a native" who informed him "the name of that town over there, since you be asking me, is St. Clair."

CHAPTER XII.

"FLOWERY HARBOR."

RIGHT where St. Clair and the open country merged, there was a large old frame house in a large old garden. Both showed signs of decay. There were gaps in the white paling fence. The fruit and decorative trees had all grown into black and scrawny old age. There was a dry fountain—also white originally—wherein a badly scarred infant throttled a swan. As for the house, it could have known neither paint nor carpentry for twenty years at least.

Yet the whole place still radiated a certain mellow dignity, even a certain homely beauty—honeysuckle running over the fence; a hundred varieties of flowering weeds and bushes drifting perfume and color elsewhere; wrens, robins, and martins

contributing their note of cheerfulness and life.

And that well-known truth that any man's home is in the nature of a portrait of himself was amply exemplified in the present instance, when Colonel Evan Williams appeared through the front door of the mansion.

He always called it a mansion.

For the colonel—call him that; every one else did—likewise suggested a sort of decorative decay. And he was garbed in raiment singularly suggestive, to any one with a grain of imagination, of the same state of affairs. He and his clothes were equally well suited to each other. There was nothing sordid about them—nothing that wasn't dignified, yet homelike and friendly.

The colonel had a red face and a white mustache—one of those antebellum mustaches, very heavy, that descend far below

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the chin. He had a droopy blue eye that was at once belligerent and jovial. His whole face was jovial, albeit dignified—especially his nose, which was inclined to be pendulous and was certainly more highly colored than the rest of his countenance. He must have been a man of splendid presence in his day. In fact, there was still ample evidence of this, but now he was inclined to sag a little, was a trifle heavy on his feet—just like this old house of his.

He stood there at the top of the broad stoop like an honored heirloom from another generation. He wore a black slouch hat. He carried a gnarled, black cane.

He appeared to be waiting for something, or to have fallen into a reverie—you couldn't have told which, from his drooping, thoughtful immobility. Then, with a surprising hint of alertness, he cocked his head and listened.

From somewhere in the back of the house there sounded forth a girl's clear, strong soprano:

"He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall
never sound retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before his
judgment seat;
Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! Be jubi-
lant my feet!
Our God is marching on!"

"Dear child! Sweet child!" the colonel murmured. "If I could only spare you this!"

But there was an unmistakable craftiness about his movements, and of judgment matured through bitter reflection, in what followed. He was sentimental, but no sentimentality could master him.

From the tail pocket of his frayed Prince Albert he brought a rectangle of pasteboard. He had thought of everything. It wasn't for nothing that he had been reckoned one of the leading young lawyers of the South. There was even a loop of string through a hole in the pasteboard convenient for its suspension on the old bell-pull. He hung the card in place.

He did this to the rousing chorus:

"Glory! Glory! Halleluiah!"

Still standing there, he drew a handkerchief, also from a tail pocket—there were

two of these pockets and each appeared to be big enough to bin a sack of meal. He wiped his eyes. He blew his nose. He returned the handkerchief to its place and brought out, in turn, something that might have been a flask.

"Medicine, sir!—by my physician's order!—the only prescription you could induce a physician himself to take!"

He kept his back turned while he tilted his head. He cleared his throat. He returned the thing that might have been a flask to the storage place at the rear. He straightened up. He turned and marched with becoming dignity down the decrepit steps.

And all who would might read that here in the mansion there was a

ROOM TO LET.

It was the right and beautiful thing. You could tell it by the colonel's walk. Dignified, thoughtful, his coat-tails swinging rhythmically, he passed on down the garden walk to the unhinged front gate. He passed on up the street.

It wasn't much of a street—just a sort of country lane, formalized to some extent by other fences farther on and occasional bits of sidewalk. But such houses as there may have been were mostly hidden by trees and shrubbery.

A bluebird sang. There was a flash of red where a cardinal passed. The whole country roundabout, and, for that matter, the town itself except for two or three church steeples, was smothered in bloom of sorts—drifts of white and pink, where the apples or the dogwoods, the peaches or the Judas-trees, were calling to the bees. The bees and the birds—and that as yet invisible girl—furnished about all the sound there was—a world, therefore, set to music.

In spite of all this predicated solitude, the colonel's sortie and his subsequent movements had, none the less, been duly noticed—duly and severely noticed.

From the hedge of Osage orange, on the other side of the street, a pair of eyes had studied him with all the alert intelligence of a squirrel's. And these were the eyes of Mrs. Meckley, who lived over there—in a

little cottage as carefully concealed and, you might say, as arboreal, as any squirrel's house. A professional widow, Mrs. Meckley—perpetually lonely, according to what she herself always said, yet given to close observation, and numerous calls.

"Room to let!" she cried to herself when she made out the colonel's sign. "The old reprobate! The old miser!"

She would have departed then to spread the tidings, only, with a twinge of exquisite excitement, she saw that her news budget was in a fair way of becoming duly amplified.

"He's goin' in!"

This second comment was inspired by the sight of a stranger—an event in itself sufficient to enrich any day. The stranger had come into the street from the direction of the open country. And yet there was a certain citified air about him—as there usually was about strangers, after they had been measured and weighed by local standards.

The stranger carried a dress-suit case. His clothes were rather badly worn and in need of pressing; still there was an impression of nattiness about them—from his velour hat, with the brim turned down on one side, right on to his light-tan, cloth-topped shoes.

Mrs. Meckley saw him pause at the sagging gate, saw him look after the retreating form of the colonel as if half persuaded to run after him, then drop his glance at a faded little plank at the side of the gate which proclaimed that this was

FLOWERY HARBOR

"By crickety," whispered Mrs. Meckley, becoming profane in her excitement; "he's goin' in!"

She wasn't mistaken.

Moreover, there was an odd suggestion of romance not only in the stranger's youth and the fashion in which he was dressed, but also in the way he appeared to be impressed by all he heard and saw.

Just a vague impression that came to Mrs. Meckley, something which hadn't escaped her bright and squirrel-like eyes—her whole face and even her body were

squirrel-like—and yet something that she didn't wholly comprehend.

CHAPTER XIII.

AS SEEN AND OVERHEARD.

ALVAH MORLEY, singing as she scrubbed the kitchen, heard the door-bell ring—which wasn't surprising, in view of the fact that the bell was mounted on a spiral spring against the kitchen wall and was designed to be heard throughout the house. She stopped short in the middle of a "halleluiah." She sat back on her heels and looked at the bell with the most perfect astonishment, as at a phenomenon that had never occurred before.

But her astonishment held her for only a second or two.

While the bell was still jangling she scrambled to her feet, and untied the apron that enveloped her.

She was nineteen or so, slim, plain rather than pretty, with straw-colored hair and not very rich in color otherwise—still with a measure of that beauty which always goes with youth and flushed excitement.

She looked down at her skimpy, blue calico dress. It was clean at any rate. Her black shoes and stockings were passable. They were, for this time of day when folks were supposed to be working, anyway. But who could be ringing the door-bell at this hour?

She ran over to a corner of the kitchen where there was a towel and a small looking-glass and other toilet accessories. She jerked some water into an enameled basin from a half-filled bucket. She rinsed her hands and smoothed her hair, all with a nervous energy so speedy that she had completed the operation by the time that the old bell was just quivering back into silence.

Around in front, the stranger who had rung the bell stood there at the top of the rickety stoop and patiently waited. He knew that there was some one home. There had been the song of the girl. He knew that his ring had been heard. He had heard it himself—and the song had stopped. And he didn't even wonder what the girl looked like. Nor did he greatly care.

So there was a room to let in Flowery

Harbor! Some name! And that old gent with nerve enough to take a swig on his front door-step and still swing his coat-tails like that would most likely be the landlord. Say, this old man was human!

He stood there like that with the smell of honeysuckle in his nose and the echo of the girl's voice still in his ears and a propitious impression of the colonel on the surface of his brain.

He felt the first subtle creep of a hunch he had been waiting for.

"I—I—beg your pardon!"

He turned.

Some instinct of caution—or some other instinct less easily defined—had sent Alvah to scurrying around the side of the house through the garden instead of through the gloomy interior of the house itself. She stood there now at the corner of the building—there where the mossy brick path passed under a tunnel more or less well defined of clematis, syringa and lilac.

"How do you do?" said the stranger.

He had set his suit-case down. He jerked his right hand to his hat, but he left the hat in place. This was no lady standing over there. This was nothing but a kid.

"How do you do?" said the kid, plainly at a loss.

"Is your mother in?"

"No, sir."

"I came to see about the room. Maybe you can tell me about it."

"What room?"

"Say, do you live here?"

"My home is in Bangor, Maine."

"Well, do you work here, then? I want to find out about this here room."

"There's nobody home."

"You said it! No, honestly! Ain't nobody here?"

All this was just nuts and candy for old Mrs. Meckley across the way. She could get most of the conversation by straining a lot, and she was straining.

"The girl's a flirt," she passed judgment. "She ought to be switched."

"Only me," Alvah was saying.

Despite the sagacious deduction of Mrs. Meckley from what had already transpired, Alvah had an appearance of timidity—of

timidity touched with doubt and not a little fear, as if she were not quite certain but that she was in the presence of some one slightly deranged. She was reassured to some extent, however, by the stranger's next move.

He calmly seated himself on the none-too-solid railing of the stoop.

"Good night!" he exclaimed, in spite of the manifest morning. "When are you expecting the old gent back?"

"He was going to the post-office. He won't be long."

"Birdie's there with the goods this time, anyway. All right, Birdie. I'll wait."

Greek to Alvah; but nothing unpleasant about it. Now that the stranger wasn't looking at her, she could look at him. She discovered that he wasn't hard to look at. His face rather fascinated her. He certainly had wonderful eyes. His voice and his language were unmistakably American, but he looked like a foreigner.

She dared advance a step.

As she did so, she saw that there was something suspended on the bell-pull. She advanced some more.

The next time that the stranger looked at her he saw that she was standing as if hypnotized, staring at the announcement that here there was a room to let. There was a touch of drama in her appearance that did not escape him—the unaffected pose of her slight frame, her hands folded against her meager breast; and he noticed, without exactly appraising them, the fine line of her cheek and chin, the whiteness and nobility of her forehead. All this, nevertheless, with a touch of condescension on his part—as an older and wiser person annoyed by the persistent ignorance of a dull child.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"That sign—it isn't so—some one put it there for a joke."

"I guess you get another think," he said, without discourtesy. "I see the old gent hangin' it up himself not ten minutes ago."

"My uncle?"

"Gee, it takes a long time to get it across. Sure! The old gent that just came out of here. What's the matter?"

The girl had continued to stare at the sign, with scarcely another glance for the

visitor. But now she looked at him, squarely, the while a warmer coloring came into her face and a shadowy brightness into her hitherto rather cool, gray eyes.

"You are certain you saw my uncle put that sign there?"

"Sure! That's what I'm tellin' you—takes it out of his pocket and hangs it up just before he beats it up the street. I ain't stringin' you."

"But, oh, he didn't mean it."

She was no longer afraid of the stranger. She ran lightly up the stoop. She took the sign from the place where it hung, hid the letters of it against her breast.

"What's the idea?" the young man inquired, softly, with a direct invitation to confidence. "What's wrong? Ain't he got a right to rent a room if he wants to? Is the place so overcrowded? Has everybody got too much coin? Or don't he own the house? Or what?"

The questions merely bewildered the girl. At the same time it was evident that most of them went home.

"You don't understand," she answered, appealingly.

"You said it."

"My uncle's not always himself."

The confession hurt her; still, some sort of explanation was in order.

"You mean he's sort of hittin' up the booze?"

Her troubled eyes were her only answer. It was affirmation enough.

"You don't want to let that worry you, Mabel—"

"My name is Alvah—Alvah Morley."

"Glad to meet you, Alvah. That's what I'm tellin' you. The old gent looked all to the good to me."

"He's the finest man in the world," the girl flamed from the midst of her trouble. "Only, there are times like the present when he does things that he wouldn't do—if—only—"

"Look—" the stranger began.

But there came a diversion. The girl, with an exclamation of mingled relief and consternation ran down the steps. She was out of the gate. She had seen her uncle coming back from the post-office.

All this was as good as a play to Mrs.

Meckley, over there behind her screen of Osage orange.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. RICHARD DAVIES.

THE youth on the stoop had had a moment of hesitation. He came down the steps, however, and met the girl and the old gentleman half-way to the gate. "Ah!" the old gentleman exclaimed.

"I see the sign. I come in. I ring the bell—"

"I told him—" the girl began.

"Sir, I have the honor;" and the old gentleman, removing his hat and thrusting his stick under his arm, offered his hand.

There was a suggestion in the move that "got to" the stranger, as he himself would have said—got to him in a pleasant sort of way. The stranger had also pulled his hat, had taken the proffered hand, had done this with a quick but not ungraceful bow.

"Permit me to introduce myself," said the elder, "although that may not be necessary. I am rather widely known. Perhaps you have heard of the Williamses. We've had a fairly active part in the history of our country."

"Sure! Everybody's heard about the—Williamses."

"I am Evan Williams."

"Glad to meet you, colonel."

"Ah! I see that you are familiar with my honorary title."

"Sure!" replied the young man, who didn't understand.

"And may I be so bold as to ask you to refresh my memory. It seems to me that we have met."

"I don't believe so, colonel."

"Your name is?"

There was a perceptible pause.

"My name?"

They were still locking hands in the original grasp. Their eyes had met.

"Davies," the young man answered.

"A splendid name! One that makes you doubly welcome, sir. I dare say the Williamses and the Davies were fighting side by side long centuries ago."

"I'll take your word for it."

"And your Christian name, if I may ask?"

"Richard!"

"Richard Davies! Why, sir! Is it possible? You are doubtless a descendant of that celebrated Bishop Richard Davies—do you recall?—whom Queen Elizabeth called her 'second St. David.'"

"You may be right, at that."

"For you are Cymric. Pardon the personality, but I could tell it by your appearance even if it were not for your fine old Cambrian name."

"Do I get the room?"

"I shall be delighted. Let us inspect the premises, Mr. Davies."

"Uncle!"

Colonel Williams turned to his niece with mellow good humor.

"What will the neighbors say?" she demanded, confused.

"Say! A most stirring event! A Davies become a guest in the house of a Williams! A Celtic reunion! Didn't I tell you all the time that it would be well with us if we accepted a lodger or two? Come in, sir! We'll seal our acquaintance as gentlemen should!" He made a pawing movement with his hand to assure himself that his flask was in the old familiar place. "'Tis none too early in the morn to touch the lyre!"

There was space enough in the Williams mansion for many guests.

Beyond the front door there was a broad hall, high and long, up two sides of which ran a flight of steps to the second floor. Four large rooms opened off the hall.

"On the left, the drawing-room," said the colonel, while Alvah Morley looked on, wide-eyed, shrinking, yet with a touch of rebellion in her attitude. "On the right, the library. Back of the drawing-room, our parlor or living-room, and opposite that, the dining-room. I regret the absence of servants, and my inability to keep the place up."

"It looks good to me," breathed Mr. Richard Davies.

"As soon as I can get the estate settled—the estate of my brother, Abner, sir, to which I have devoted, not unwillingly, the best years of my life, I shall proceed to the refurnishing of the house."

"It looks good to me," the one-time Chick repeated.

He was glad now that he had given his one and only true name to the old gentleman. The hall reared its gloomy grandeur about him. There were no carpets on the floor. The paper on the wall was stained by time and leakage, for it was evident that the roof of the mansion was no longer at its best. But there was a solemnity about this acceptance of him in a home like this that at once weighted upon him and lifted him up. The place not only looked good to him; it looked almost too good.

"There's only one thing, colonel," he broke out softly, as soon as the girl had disappeared into the cavernous shadows at the rear of the hall; "you haven't said anything about the price."

"Of what, sir?"

"The room."

"My dear sir, you are my guest as long as you care to remain. I am honored."

"Ah, say!"

"Not a word, sir!"

The colonel also had noticed the retirement of his niece. He cast a further glance to assure himself that they were alone. He brought his flask from its hiding-place. He uncorked it, elaborately wiped its gullet with his hand.

"As our ancestors did under Rhodri Mawr!" he invited.

"Not for mine! I'm on the wagon."

"You mean?"

"Thanks! I'm leavin' it alone."

"Sir, I honor you. But, thirty years ago, my physician—it was—"

"Look out," the younger man whispered. "There's the young lady!"

The colonel cleared his throat and put the bottle away.

It was to a bedroom on the second floor that Mr. Richard Davies eventually carried his suit-case—a room that was larger than the back room of the Commodore, near Chatham Square; and there were windows in it that gave both on the old garden and on the far country beyond.

"It looks good to me," said the lodger.

Looked good to him? It all looked so good that it almost hurt. This was the thing he had come out to find. Lonely?

Sure! Ever since he had left New York. But he wasn't going to weaken. Not yet! Maybe, after a while he'd duck. Maybe! Why not con himself along? Maybe, after a while, he'd just naturally get sick of trying to make a living by selling soap, or other things, and nick some rube for his roll—for keeps, this time!

And then, right then, from the combination of all the things that were coming to him through the open window—sky and earth, air and bird-song—something that recalled old Ezra Wood, not as a rube, but as a white and shining giant who had exerted a strange influence over him.

It was almost as if he could hear that good old man speak again:

"The Lord have pity on us all!"

"Every day most a hundred years long, each year a happy lifetime."

"If he'd stayed in the country we might have saved him."

"Ah, hell!" he said. "This is fierce! I wonder what Phil and Solly are pullin' today? And old Sky-Blue? And Myrtle?"

Way back?

Say! This was it. Way back a million miles!

And he had become *Mr. Richard Davies*. He was glad that he had laid that name aside and kept it clean—laid it aside so many years ago that he could hardly remember when; but he did remember, indistinctly, the dark-eyed woman who had been his mother, and, more indistinctly yet, mistily, the gray specter who had been his father; the specter of a distinguished man who had been *Mr. Richard Davies* also. Then the night flame and smoke wherein his parents disappeared. They must have been living in a poor neighborhood. Old Denny, the wood-merchant, had become his foster-parent, and that was when he was eight years old.

"Mr. Davies!"

The girl was calling him.

He stepped over to the door so swiftly, and opened it so deftly, that it frightened her.

"My uncle wants to know," she recited, "if you will do us the honor of taking tea with us."

"Sure! Much obliged."

"It 'll be at about dark," she said. "Uncle likes to eat his supper by candle-light."

"Tell him I'll be there, and much obliged."

He stood there in his door and watched her go away, a pale shape disappearing in the shadows toward the back of the upper hall. Now that he thought of it, he somehow or other felt sorry for this kid.

CHAPTER XV.

UP THE STREET.

BUT, also, he felt sorry for himself. He couldn't help it. There was something about this very room that recalled that vaguely remembered home of his childhood when his parents were still alive—bare walls with broken plaster, no carpet on the floor, a somewhat caved-in bed in the corner of the room. There was even something reminiscent in the flowers, the greenery, and the bird-song.

He guessed the truth.

There was a geranium on the windowsill of that earlier home. A neighbor had a canary in a cage.

He pulled off his shoes. He partly undressed himself. He cast a longing gaze at the bed. It seemed to him that he hadn't slept since leaving the old town back there, and he always did prefer sleeping in the daytime. A dreaminess drew him. He wasn't hungry. He had eaten a hearty meal not much more than an hour ago, at a farmer's house, a mile or so back along the road, and the farmer had refused to take a cent for his hospitality. None the less, memory of this meal brought up a hundred souvenirs of savory Chinese and Italian dishes in the city he had left. Wouldn't it be great, after all, to wake up and find a dish of chop-suey at his side?

He crawled onto the bed and let himself go.

He slept the afternoon away. And, instantly, when he awoke, there flashed into his thought a clear and concise record of the girl of this house, and of the colonel, her uncle, and of the house itself. The

record brought with it a little mental groan. What was he that he should thus let them think that he was their equal? That he should take a room in this house of theirs? Set himself up as the son, or the grandson, or something, of a bishop?

The only answer to these questions was a pang of homesickness so poignant that he could have wept.

Then he listened to the silence, and the silence weighed upon him as the earth might weigh upon the chest of a man buried alive. There for a minute or so the silence was absolute. Not even a bird twittered. Not a wheel turned. No one spoke.

"I got to get back," he whispered. "I'll stick it out a day or so longer. But I got to get back!"

He crept over to the window in his bare feet and looked down into the garden. He saw Alvah Morley down there. She was picking flowers. He saw that she had changed her dress. He wondered why. And he noticed that she wasn't such a kid as he had believed her to be. More like a school-teacher she was—a white cotton dress, fresh and crinkly from the wash, her straw-colored hair drawn back in a smooth knot and ornamented with a blue silk ribbon.

What if she knew the sort of life he had led!

He wondered where her uncle was. The colonel might hit up the booze, but he was none the less the gentleman. "What am I to rub elbows with him? Even if I am Mr. Richard Davies!" And wasn't the colonel a prince when it came to speaking English? He was!

"My uncle hasn't come home yet," said the girl, as he came down-stairs after a while. "I suppose that we shall have to wait for him—unless you're in a hurry."

"Me in a hurry? Say, what do you do around here at night?"

"After supper we talk—sometimes—and sometimes I try to play the organ, only it's not in very good condition. Sometimes I read to uncle. Sometimes he reads to me."

There was almost always that provisional sometimes in all she said. As she spoke, moreover, she turned, now with acute expectancy, again with lingering patience, to

look in the direction whence she expected her uncle to appear.

"Where's he gone—the post-office again?"

"He can't have gone to the post-office," said the girl, "for St. Clair only gets one mail a day, and that's the first thing in the morning."

The sun had gone down. It was getting so dark that Mrs. Meckley, from behind her screen of Osage orange, could not make out much any more but two dim figures, one of them pale and one of them dark, seated on the steps of the stoop across the way.

"Scandalous, I call it," she repeated—repeated it over and over, always as if with the lurking hope that the phrase would serve as an incantation to bring something scandalous about.

The crickets had been singing since a long time—a chirring pulsation of sound, as if it were the sound of a mill which itself was manufacturing the material of the night. Now and then a frog croaked in. And, across the deepening blue where the stars were beginning to shimmer, a few bats zigzagged, reeled, wavered swiftly out of sight.

"Do you want me to go and find out where he is?" Davies asked.

The girl shook her head.

"Aren't you afraid somethin' might 'a' happened to him?"

She sat motionless. It was so dark by this time that he could not see her expression. If she had answered, he had not heard.

"What are those queer little chippies scootin' around up there?"

Her voice reached him, strangled.

"Those are bats."

The conversation lapsed.

"Say," he exclaimed at last; "I don't want you to think I'm fresh, or trying to butt in; understand? But I sort of feel that the colonel's a friend of mine; see? And I'm going out to look for him."

"Will you?" she panted. "Oh, if I were a man!"

"I'm a man! What's the answer?"

The clairvoyance of the strain she was under helped her to understand.

"There's a place—you go up this street

to the second corner, and then you turn to your left until you come to the last building on the left. I'm sure he's there."

"I'll just tell him you're sort of waiting."

"He may not want to come home."

"They never do. But, say—" He started to explain that he had been handling booze-fighters all his life, both friend and foe, but he checked himself. The girl wouldn't understand. He wound up by wondering where he had left his hat.

She brought it to him.

"Don't weaken," he said. "Keep a stiff upper lip."

"I will," she whispered.

But say, he wondered, what could it be like when the girl was all alone and the old gent out on a spree like this. He could see it all. The colonel had begun to get his spree properly started early in the day—maybe the night before, as it usually happened.

One thing was sure. He himself was feeling uncommonly fit. Apart from the fact that he was a little hungry, he had never felt in better shape in his life. This training out in the country was sure the real thing. His wind was perfect. His muscles had supplered up and hardened. The long sleep of the afternoon had ironed out his nerves. It was a pity that there wasn't a mill on with an open challenge. Say, feeling like this, he could just about lick anything between welter and light-heavy.

He was so absorbed in his thought, and the general fragrant quality of the night, that he barely noticed what there was to be seen of this town he had stumbled into. Not much to be seen, anyway—a few lighted windows dimly visible through black bushes and trees, a smelly grocery store dimly lit by a kerosene-lamp, a white church closed and dark, more houses in the midst of yards, then a barber-shop, and this was the second corner the girl had mentioned.

He turned to the left.

It was the supper-hour, evidently, and every one indoors. He didn't meet a soul. Say, if the yeggs ever did discover this burg, it would be good-night-nurse for the local bank or anything else they'd want to crack. But the air was sure all right.

He breathed deeply. He was feeling so

good that he shadow-boxed a little. He may have been Welsh, as the colonel had declared him to be. And the Welsh have the reputation of being a mystic race.

Was there some divine urge in all this spontaneous, unconscious preparation? And preparation for what, if not for some sort of a combat as Richard Davies—his right name—just now in his heart had hankered for?

He had just come in sight of what must have been the place the girl had mentioned, the last building up this street, brilliantly lighted as compared with the rest of the town by a number of oil-lamps with reflectors. A road-house or hotel, apparently well-patronized, with a dozen muddy autos and farm-wagons parked along its front. But what Davies particularly noticed was that there was a row in progress at that end of the building devoted to its bar.

He could hear the squabble of voices and laughter. He could catch a fleeting effect of shadows on the window—shadows that moved rapidly. He felt an instant surge of something almost like happiness, at first. This was the life. Say, this was almost like the Bowery. And he started to run.

But he was still a dozen yards from the door of the barroom when the nature of the thing that was happening struck him full tilt, stopped him and stopped his breath.

A familiar figure was being hustled through the door. That was the colonel they were flinging out, as Davies saw.

The colonel was flung out. He stumbled. He fell. He rolled.

"Oh!" A quick intake of the breath; and Davies felt as if he himself had been fouled—kicked—hit below the belt!

CHAPTER XVI.

AGAINST ALL COMERS.

THE colonel's slouch hat and his cane followed him—followed him so fast that they were in the dirt of the road at the colonel's side even before Davies himself got there.

He was enough of the fighter, both in-

stinctive and trained, not to lose his temper. Anyway, it wasn't anger that was actuating him yet so much as sorrow. In that spectacle of the old man thrown into the street he saw the wreck of a lot of things—of pride and education, and of the affectionate hopes of that girl—that poor little kid—who was waiting now, all dressed up in her picnic clothes, back there in the big old house.

He was at the old man's side before the colonel himself could make a movement of recovery.

"Are you hurt?"

"Alvah!"

"This ain't Alvah. This is your old friend, Dick. Gimme your hand. What did those bums do to you?"

He wasn't asking the question for information precisely. He had seen well enough what had been done to the colonel. But he had to say something while he was getting the colonel to his feet—had to do it to stifle his own mind if for no other reason.

The door of the barroom was becoming jammed by those who wanted to get the most out of the spectacle. Some had been pushed out of the door even, by friends behind who were struggling to get a better view. Most of the spectators were convulsed. This was the funniest thing they had seen for a long time. Gus sure had landed the colonel on his ear. But had you seen the colonel try to fight back? This would be a good lesson for the old rummy. Him talking about his honor!—and fighting duels! Some one should have landed him on his ear before.

Davies heard all this. The colonel must have heard it, too. The colonel was meek and humiliated. He wasn't greatly hurt in a physical way. None the less he had become the tottering old man. He hadn't been so drunk after all, or perhaps the misadventure had sobered him. Anyway, he cast a look of such utter chagrin, shame, weakness, appealing despair at this one last friend he had left in the world, that Davies felt something crack inside his heart.

He turned and walked straight over toward the group at the barroom door. He was so calm, and smooth, and swift that no

one could have suspected what was up. Besides, Davies wasn't looking at any one in particular. His dark eyes were off at a slant. Still, he could see everything.

He saw the two nearest members of the jovial mob. They were both big men as to weight and stature. Both were laughing.

"Go on and laugh!" Davies advised.

He swung with his right and gave a straight-arm jolt with his left. The right landed on whiskers and a jaw. The left went on and on into the region of a solar-plexus, but finally stopped against a weight so heavy that it was all he could do to push it over.

At that, he still had time and strength to shove an open-handed jab into another grinning face and jerk his elbow up under the chin of some one else.

"Laugh, you bunch of mutts!"

"He's hit the commissioner! Kill him!"

"Git out o' my way!"

"Grab him, boys! Get him! Look out! You're walkin' on Mr. Crane!"

"I'll learn you to rough-house, yuh stiffs!"

"Look out, ding-dern ye! Help!"

But it was not until he was in the barroom itself that Davies clearly perceived what he had come to seek. There was already a movement among those who had lingered at the bar to join the riot at the door. Davies had an eye for these. He sized them up *en masse*. He saw that they could have made up the average barroom crowd almost anywhere—in New York as much as in any village—riffraff, heavy respectables, lightweight sports and weaklings. But it was not for these that his attention was predestined.

He saw the bulking form of a man dressed in dirty white, bullet-headed, thick in the neck, making his way around the end of the bar, and he needed no label at all to tell him that this was the original victor in the fight with the colonel.

Everything had been going so fast that there had been no time as yet for readjustments.

They were still jostling each other over at the door trying to get a line on what had happened. Those at the bar were only sure of one thing, thus far, and that was that the

colonel had been thrown out on his neck. Gus had told them so. And Gus himself may have thought that this fresh throb of excitement back of him was merely some sort of a fresh demonstration of enthusiasm for the prowess he had shown.

Then the lightning struck.

It was blinding at first—dazzling—making it hard to see just what had happened.

But Gus seemed to know. Rough-house, as he himself would have said, was his middle name. Nature had endowed him with the thews and the constitution of a bull, yet he had passed his life in saloons—in labor-camps and mill-towns, in the black valleys of Pennsylvania, along the water-fronts of Boston, Cleveland, San Francisco.

"*Look out!*"

Some one at the bar had that much sense.

Gus ducked. He turned a little to see that a stranger had entered the bar, and that the stranger was out for blood. Why hadn't some one tipped him off that the colonel had a son or something—somebody who was likely to come back? The slob had almost pasted him one while his back was turned.

But Gus was equal to the occasion—or thought that he was. He slid his bulk back of the bar, still crouching, conscious that on occasions like this somebody was likely to shoot. He hoped that the mirror wouldn't be smashed. Still, it was better to have a smashed mirror than a bullet through the neck.

While all this was glancing through his elemental mind, his big paw had nevertheless shot out in the direction of his bung-starter—a slender mallet of heavy wood and a weapon as he had been trained to.

But he didn't get the chance to use it.

That enemy of his also knew something about barroom tactics—knew that there was apt to be an arsenal of sorts behind the wet counter. Say, this was just like a gang-fight, only he would have to be the gang all by himself.

And Davies took a short cut in an effort to reach the arsenal first. He slid right over the bar and landed on his feet. The next moment he had his two hands locked on the big barkeep's throat and was pushing him back toward the open.

It was desperate work—a welterweight against a heavy and no room to maneuver about in.

Gus flailed and kicked.

"I show you!"

"Will yuh?"

There was a crash of glass jangling down from a polished pyramid of glasses that had stood on the shelf back of the bar, and a trickle of red from the side of Gus's face.

And there they were in the open.

They stood there, face to face, a couple of yards between them, in the middle of the barroom—sawdust on the floor, a drift of blue tobacco-smoke in the air, a subsidence of racket and confusion about them.

In the midst of it all, Davies heard a number of voices:

"*Rush him!*"

"*Git the marshal!*"

"*Git a gun! Git a rope!*"

It was evident that he wasn't going to have very much time to do whatever he had to do. A look of pain came into his face. He grabbed his left shoulder with his hand, lurched a little. A feint!

Gus rushed him, believing the stranger already hurt.

As he did so, however, Davies sidestepped and met him with a left hook to the chin. Then he heaved all his strength and weight into another right swing for the big man's neck. He landed.

Something whirled past Davies's head and smashed itself against the wall. Then the mob was invading the ring.

"*Missed him! Rush him! Help! Help! 'K'out, er y'll be hittin' Gus!*"

Davies's mind flashed him a picture of something like this that had happened before—a mill in a frowzy little fighting club, and the favorite getting the worst of it, and then the riot with himself and his seconds fighting against such odds as these.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PEACE ANGEL.

HE did now what he did then. He zig-zagged, too shifty and quick for anything to hit him except by accident. He didn't have far to go. And he had a

chair. Just in time to wallop it down on the back of Gus's neck and shoulders, and the chair collapsed. So did Gus—for the moment he did—sprawled right on in the direction he had been going, legs spraddling, hands out.

Here is the thing that stamped itself on Davies's mind:

Gus was falling just as the colonel had fallen. Yea, bo, Gus had got his!

A long way of stating—and yet the only way to state it—the concept of an instant.

And then the crowd, as much as Davies himself, was aware that the collapsed chair was a very dangerous weapon—more than dangerous it was before it collapsed, for Davies had jerked it apart.

He flung the back of it like a whirling boomerang, and, before he heard the shattering of the mirror—if he heard it at all—he had jerked the solid seat of the chair straight into the welter of shapes in front of him. What he did with the rest of the chair he never did exactly know. But there he was, at last, with a leg of the thing in his hand—and also the painful but certain knowledge in his brain that the next step might be fatal.

He was ready for it. There are times when no man can turn back. This was one of them.

There was a momentary truce, at any rate.

"The next of youse guys," he panted, "who makes a false move—gets this!"

There was sufficient inspiration for a truce, especially on the part of the crowd—this stranger standing there like a black panther at bay, Gus sprawled on the floor, three or four other friends and neighbors scattered about bruised and bleeding, the big bar-mirror splintered, glasses smashed, all this as the swift sequence of a little low comedy natural to the ejection of an undesirable old customer.

But the truce couldn't possibly, in the nature of things, last very long. Another explosion was bound to follow. And one did.

Only it wasn't the kind they had looked for.

Davies saw it first. His attention had

to be everywhere. The attention of the others was concentrated on him only.

He saw old Colonel Evan Williams coming in through the outer door, which was open. He saw that the colonel was not alone—saw that he was accompanied by Alvah Morley, his niece—and that Alvah, still in her picnic dress and without a hat, her straw-colored hair tied with a blue ribbon, was very stiff and very white. She was just like a dead girl who had come to life and come walking into this place to make men feel ashamed of themselves.

She came accompanied by music, so far as Davies was concerned. In the tomblike silence that wallowed over everything and everybody like a descent of noiseless water, he could hear a fine, remote, phonographic record of that song she had sung in the morning:

"Glory! Glory! Halleluiah!
Glory! Glory! Halleluiah!"

She stared about her, whitely. She saw Davies, spoke to him with all emotion repressed:

"I was sorry that I let you come for my uncle. I waited a while, then thought that I had better come myself."

She was making a simple explanation. Her voice was cold and clear, soft yet penetrating.

Some one bawled:

"You'd do better to keep him hum."

The girl gave a slow glance in the direction the voice came from, and silence descended again. Once more she turned to Davies.

"Go on!" he adjured. "It's all right. Take the colonel home! I'll 'tend to this mob!"

All the time that he spoke—and his sentences came out sharp and fast—he scattered his glances over the others in the room. Some were looking at the girl. Some looked at him. There was a tremor of suspended action. Peril in the air.

Yellow light. Sawdust floor, with Gus sprawled in the center of it. Bar in the background. A stupid, bewildered crowd.

Tragedy. Drama.

Say, was this the village of St. Clair or the big man-eating, soul-mauling city

whence he had fled? It was a thought that frightened him, right then and there, in the midst of all this excitement.

The crowd scuffled and muttered.

"*Serves 'm right!*"

"*Who right?*"

"*Gus!*"

"*The colonel!*"

"*What's happened?*"

"*What's 'at she says?*"

"*Quit pushin'.*"

And then, Davies, thinking that he saw a movement to crowd the girl, jumped forward with his stick.

"Git back!" he grated, "er I'll send yuhs all to hell!"

There was a brief stampede which gave him elbow room. Yet the crowd was growing, swelled by fresh arrivals from other parts of the building and the street outside.

"This gentleman is my friend," the colonel cried.

"Take him out," Davies told the girl.

She eyed the crowd. She looked at him. All this was transpiring in lurid moments. The girl had put out her hand to his arm. There may have been some slight hint that she was losing her splendid grip on herself.

"I found him outside," she said. "He was trying to get in. He wouldn't go without you. Are you ready to leave?"

Davies, still ready for action, eyed the crowd.

"Sure!"

Some one else spoke up.

"*He don't leave here except he's dead er goin' to jail!*"

Again the girl turned.

"You needn't hide, Sam Bosely! I suppose your folks will be glad to know you were here drinking again when you swore you wouldn't, and that on your bended knees."

"I did not," snarled Sam.

But there were cries of "Shut up!" and "Get out of the way."

A number of the citizens were salving the fallen barkeeper. In the midst of their efforts, Gus—under his own power, so to speak—got up as far as a sitting position.

"*Bring him some whisky!*"

Gus let out a roar: "Nobody go behind that bar but me."

He moaned and rocked. He felt the back of his head.

The girl was letting her cool eyes focus on face after face. Some of the men she looked at backed away and made ready to depart.

"Beat it," said Davies. "This is my scrap. I don't need any help."

"This is my battle, sir," the colonel broke in.

There may have been those present who thought that this was a signal for a resumption of the comedy. It was about time for a reaction. And they were right in a way, but not altogether. The colonel had broken away from his niece. He was completely sobered. That was evident. He stood there solidly, with his feet wide apart, his gnarled cane gripped in one hand, his slouch hat in the other.

But again the girl interposed.

"I know you all," she said. "If you do anything to this young man you'll all be there as witnesses—you, Mr. Snow, with your sister-in-law as a character witness; and you, Hank Purvy, expecting to marry a woman whose husband's not dead yet; and you, Caspar Clark, after breaking your mother's heart."

"*'Tain't so!*"

"*She's got ye, Hank!*"

"*Ye're a liar!*"

But the girl's quiet voice dominated the other voices.

"Your license goes"—she was facing Gus, who was still staggered, but able to stand—"if it takes the rest of my life."

"My God!" bellowed Gus. "As if I ain't got trouble enough."

"Close yer yip," said a tough young farmer, shifting his eyes from the girl to Gus. "Close yer yip, yuh big fat ferriner. If yuh don't—"

The girl turned coldly to her uncle and Davies.

"Come on," she said, "we'll go."

They went.

They left the barroom without haste, and not a word or a hand was raised to stay them. Davies even lingered a moment. It was to speak a word to the tough young farmer. Just one word:

"Thanks!"

But the young farmer was even too tough for such brief amenities. He looked away. And Davies, smiling slightly, but still with that chair-leg in his hand in case of emergency, followed the colonel and his niece out into the night.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TOUCH DIVINE.

THEY walked in silence, and they walked slowly, until they were well beyond the zone of light and sound that encompassed the hotel. At first, the colonel was between Davies and the girl. They were supporting him, for he still tottered. He was like one who would have collapsed, and would have done so willingly, were it not for the strength they were lending him.

"Richard," said the colonel, weakly.

"Yes, sir."

"I trust that you were not hurt."

"They never touched me."

"They were cowards," breathed the girl with suppressed tumult.

"Not cowards," the colonel protested.

"They defied me. But they were not gentlemen. They took me unawares."

"If it hadn't been for you folks," Davies declared with ebbing passion, "I would have just about croaked a couple of those yahoos and taken my chance at the chair."

"I beg pardon," said the colonel. He explained: "I'm a little deaf in my right ear, Richard. Let me walk on the other side of you." They shifted their positions, and Davies was next to the girl. "You behaved with the utmost gallantry," the colonel pursued. "You showed your Welsh descent. 'Twas thus they fought—your ancestors and mine—under Rhodri Mawr and Owen Glendower."

"They were easy."

"Easy for one who bears the name of Richard Davies. Blood will tell. One gentleman like you is always worth a score from the mob."

Davies was silent. Should he speak up—tell them who he was and where he came from? What sort of a life he had lived? Who his associates had been? Why not?

He couldn't go on fooling a friend. And this old man was his friend. It made him feel ashamed of himself. Why not come right out and tell the colonel all about it, then make a getaway?

While he was thus debating with himself, and the colonel was talking on and on, in an effort to cover up the awkwardness of the situation and conceal his own confusion, something happened that held Davies silent, cause a faint tremor to run through him—to run through him body and soul, so he himself would have confessed had he been given to that form of speech.

And yet it was nothing much, this thing that had happened.

At first it was a mere touch on his arm.

"My father and mother passed out when I was pretty young," he had begun.

And then Alvah had taken his arm. The light and slender curve of her palm was about his elbow. At first he thought that this was a mere gesture of impulse. Then the pressure, although still light, became fixed and real.

"It is a pity, Richard," the colonel said. "They would have been proud of you."

Davies could not tear his attention away from the feel of the girl's light hand. She trusted him as much as the colonel did. That was clear. Should he let her also know that he had been a crook all his life, one of the most expert pickpockets—if he did say it himself!—that even New York had ever known? But right on top of this question came some fierce assertion from his heart that she was right in trusting him, that he was to be trusted.

It was still early, but the dark village lay somnolent about them. The maple-trees that lined the path and the vines and bushes—rose and honeysuckle, syringa and lilac—that filled the dewy front yards transformed the street into a temple, dusky, mysterious, where miracles might be performed. All this impressed itself on Davies somewhat like the charge of a spiritual mob. Should he prove himself any less of a fighter in the presence of this mob than he had in the presence of that other?

He deliberately looked at the girl, although his glance was brief. He wondered how he could have thought of her as a

kid. He couldn't even think of her as a woman—not in the terms of womanhood such as he had always known.

Tall, slender, dimly white, a look of pain and grief and desire on her face, all these veiled to some extent by a dominant courage.

"My parents also died when I was young," she said.

And her eyes met Richard's. Only for a second, and yet for a long time after he was looking ahead again he could recall the look.

"I've lived a pretty hard life," he said.

This time, Alvah did press his arm. There was no mistaking it. Nor was there any mistaking of the meaning of it.

"Brace up!" was what the pressure said.

All this time the colonel was speaking, but his words had become a monologue with himself for audience. As for Davies, he walked alone with this girl at his side. It was almost as if she herself did not exist—not as an earthly entity—so far as Davies was concerned.

What if his friends and pals back in New York could see him now? Wouldn't they laugh? They would. They'd wonder what he was up to. They wouldn't understand. They wouldn't understand that the touch of this clean and decent hand on his arm was something wonderful and strange.

Perhaps the street had become a temple where miracles could be wrought. Inwardly, Davies was panting. It was with a stress of emotion which he did not analyze.

As soon as he could, he went up to his room with the small brass lamp that the girl told him would be his. He closed the door. He found that there were wooden shutters at the window, still more or less effective despite the absence of numerous slats. He closed the shutters. He put the lamp on the floor and brought out his suit-case from where he had shoved it under the bed.

There was some spare linen and a few toilet articles in the suit-case, not much. Its principal contents comprised about half a hundred cakes of soap in small and savory packages of polished and gaily printed paper.

This thing of being a soap-agent had struck him as just a trifle better than any-

thing else when he was getting away from New York. A former friend had given him the tip, long ago, that a soap-agent's path led to pleasure and profit, should he ever care to disappear from the big town for any length of time.

Only the motive had been different from those his friend had implied. He had been starting clean, and soap meant cleanliness. And soap was something that he could talk about, urge folks to use. It was something that he liked and was fond of using himself.

He looked at the supply on hand.

Should he take it with him, or should he leave it? It was heavy. Word was likely to be sent for miles around, to the marshals and constables, the sheriffs and small-town police, to be on the lookout for a soap-agent who had roughed things in St. Clair. And yet, if he left his soap behind, wouldn't he be bidding good-by right then to this new life of his? Wouldn't he? And how long would it be before he was back at the old trade again? Easy money!

Again, in imagination, he could feel the touch of Alvah Morley's hand on his arm. Say, that was what he was running away from. And yet he would take it with him. It would be there always.

Yep!

Just when he was going to gyp somebody's leather, there would come that touch on his arm and he would lose his nerve.

CHAPTER XIX.

BOUND HAND AND FOOT.

HE closed the suit-case and strapped it. He took a bill-fold from his hip-pocket and from this extracted a five-dollar bill. He put the lamp on the decrepit night-table and the bill under the lamp where the girl would be sure to find it. He blew out the light. He picked up his heavy suit-case and made his way silently out into the hall. He hated to leave like this. He would have liked to say good-by. But what was the use? His conscience was clear. The five would cover everything.

He was half-way down the stairs on his way to the front door, moving with all the caution he could master, when a sound of

movement and voices made him halt and hold his breath.

The colonel and the girl were down there. He had believed them to be in their rooms, possibly asleep. They hadn't even come upstairs. At least, the colonel hadn't. From the girl's first words it was evident that she had been looking for the colonel, had just found him.

"You mustn't stay there in the dark," she said gently. "Come, now. Go to bed—and sleep. To-morrow you will be feeling better."

The colonel's response was an indistinct murmur.

Alvah was carrying a lamp. She and the colonel appeared from the back parlor. They paused at the foot of the opposite flight of the double stairway. They were so close that Davies did not dare to move one way or the other. At least, he was in comparative darkness. As for Alvah and her uncle, they had the light of the lamp in their eyes.

"I am overwhelmed," the colonel confessed.

He looked it. He was flabby. Shriveled would be the better word. Ten years had been added to his age. He was a man not yet recovered from a deadly sickness. His voice had that sort of feebleness about it that betokens a lack of breath.

"You shouldn't be overwhelmed," Alvah chided as she might have spoken to a misguided child.

"Alvah!"

"Yes, uncle, dear."

"I must tell you."

"What?"

"I tried to keep it from you."

Alvah put down her lamp on one of the upper steps.

"You mean about there being no more money left?" she demanded softly. She even tried to put a playful note into the words. She put out her two hands and took her uncle's hands in hers. "I know. I knew it the moment I saw the sign you put out. I was merely a little slow to believe."

"It is all gone."

"I can work, earn enough for both of us."

"The drink was my ruination."

"And then," Alvah hurried on, still with that assumption of consoling lightness—"and then, the sign did serve a good purpose."

"I muddled on, expecting the lightning somehow to strike."

"And didn't it?" Alvah drew her uncle down to a place on the steps. She seated herself at his feet. She smiled up into his face wistfully. "What better good fortune could have befallen us than to have Mr. Davies come when he did? We'll put out the sign again."

The old man awoke from his depression.

"Mr. Davies! God bless the boy!"

Davies, standing on the steps across the hall, felt a little creep of goose-flesh on his body. It was as if some one had tickled him. He cursed himself—without the use of words—for being where he was. He wanted to speak, but he couldn't speak. It was impossible for him to move.

"Could we want a better lodger?"

"He was a friend to me. He was a son. But now he'll be leaving us. It is only right that he should. It is what I should advise him to do. He was a son to me, and I have driven him away."

"Nonsense! Do you think that he's the sort who runs away?"

"No; he's as brave as a lion."

"What then?"

"He is a gentleman. I have disgraced him."

"He knows you're sorry. There's no disgrace. Fight on! Isn't that the motto you've been following all these years you've been here in St. Clair trying to settle up Uncle Abner's estate? Haven't you told me that that was what the Welsh—what the Cymry—did under Rhodri Mawr?—and what Stonewall Jackson did during the 'seven days'? Don't you suppose—don't you suppose," she demanded, while her voice fell to little more than a thrilling whisper, "that there's a Higher Power that knows all about your needs? Who can tell but that it was that Higher Power who sent Mr. Davies here?"

Davies heard all this. And he had the time to meditate it, too. For there was a long silence, and in this the girl's words echoed.

"Aye! He came as one sent by the Lord. To-night I stood at Armageddon, and it was as if I had been among the spirits of devils, and they were gathered to the battle of God Almighty, His day. And Richard came to me, Alvah—came to me like one of the seven angels bearing the vials of the wrath of God."

The colonel was running into a mystic mood.

"He taught them a lesson," said Alvah. "It was a lesson they needed. It was a lesson that they'll never forget."

"God moves in a mysterious way. I little thought, when I saw Mr. Davies this morning, that—no, I did know it. Something told me the moment that I saw his face that here was a friend, that here was some one destined to play a part in the lives perhaps of both of us. What is that the Good Book says? 'Be not forgetful to entertain strangers'—it all comes back to me—for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

Again the silence settled down. Again Davies found himself as in a state of suspended animation. He felt as a spirit might feel when hovering over the dead body that had belonged to it during the earthly incarnation.

There was one choked voice speaking from the silence: "*They got me wrong!*"

But there was another voice, small and clear: "*Why not?*"

Why not be the thing they were believing him to be? It was as if he stood on the edge of a measureless gulf and contemplated the possibility of flight.

"Did you notice," the girl asked, "how they were all afraid to move or speak as we went away?" It was a mere whisper, a question not calling for an answer. "They were afraid."

The colonel had dropped his head forward and rested it in his hands. The girl did not disturb his reflection. She sat motionless and looked off into the shadows. The lamp-light shone down on the two of them and made a picture that slowly burned itself into Richard Davies's memory. What was he that he should be treated to a picture like this? What right had he to look at it?

He stood there, flattened against the wall,

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and he was like some one or some thing that has been annihilated.

Who was this they had talked about? It couldn't be himself, although they had used his name; and this no mere sobriquet of the streets, either, but the name his father had borne before him.

He looked back on his immediate past, but the one big fact that stuck out of it—like a peak from a cloud—was the girl's hand on his arm. She had shown then the sort of faith that she had in him. It wasn't the old Chick whose arm she had taken. It was the arm of some one named Mr. Richard Davies. Yet, who was this Mr. Richard Davies?

"*Me!*"

"*No; it ain't you.*"

"*But it will be.*"

For, as yet, he was still annihilated in every respect except that of his fluttering, disrupted thought. His mouth was open.

Then the colonel straightened up. He spoke to the girl, but he did not look at her. He also peered off into the shadows.

"Alvah, you are right. Altogether right. But most right in keeping your faith in the Power that sent us this friend in need. The Lord was watching over me, even while I was writing that card. It was He who brought Mr. Davies to our door."

The girl put out her hand and caressed his face. As the colonel slowly turned his head and looked at her, Davies could see the grief and contrition in the old man's eyes. It recalled the look he had seen in the face of old Ezra Wood, and it summoned to his own heart the same vague hunger—the same white awe—that had been there that night in the Boone House.

"Alvah," the colonel said, "let's you and me—get down on our knees—here and now—and thank Him for sending us such a friend and gentleman—as Mr. Davies."

CHAPTER XX.

PARTNERS.

DAVIES fled.

He went up the stairs taking his suit-case with him. But he went like a ghost, making no more noise than a shad-

ow. Perhaps he wouldn't have cared so very much if he had made a noise. There are crises in the lives of every one when the ordinary conventions—and even the ordinary decencies, so called—count for nothing. And this was one of them.

He reached the room he had deserted only a few minutes before. He went in. He closed the door behind him. He dropped his suit-case on the floor. He wilted back against the door and stood there, mentally haggard if not physically haggard, and stared unseeingly into the gloom.

But he was not altogether bereft of vision.

Only what he saw was the series of pictures he had brought back with him from the hall, chiefly the last picture of all, wherein an old man and a young girl were kneeling side by side humbly thanking God for sending them such a friend as Mr. Richard Davies.

By and by, Davies recovered possession of himself to such an extent that he picked up his suit-case and thrust it back into the place from which he had taken it. He relighted the lamp. Several times he paced the length of the room. He stepped over to the door, finally, and opened it wide. It was not long before the thing happened which he had expected.

There was a knock at the side of the door, and there was the voice of Colonel Williams asking him if he had not yet retired.

"Come in," Davies invited.

The colonel came in. He said something about the possible desirability of extra covers for the bed, the unseasonable coolness of the nights. Davies smiled upon him, thrust forward the single chair in the room, which was near the bed. He held the chair while the colonel eased his weight into it. Then Davies seated himself on the bed.

"The covers and everything are all right, colonel. But I'm glad you came. I was wanting to talk to you."

For the first time since the colonel had entered the room, their eyes met and held.

"Richard, I have come to apologize."

"No apologies are needed—not from you."

"As one gentleman to another—"

"Wait a minute, colonel."

Davies was still smiling, but there was a

whiteness in his smile, as he himself could feel. What he could not feel, perhaps, was how deeply brilliant his dark eyes burned in the yellow twilight made by the little lamp. The colonel, looking at him, must have had a vision of mystic warriors on Welsh battle-fields. But the colonel waited.

"I've got to tell you something," Davies went on. "My parents were all right. I believe they were. I know they were. See? But I've spent most of my life among grafters and thieves." He lurched out the rest of it hurriedly. "I was one myself."

The old colonel wasn't looking at him any longer. He hadn't shifted his eyes, precisely. It was rather a change of focus. The colonel was looking, mistily, through him and beyond him. His old face—misty eyes, droopy nose, white and monumental mustache—had become a portrait of earthly wisdom. It was a very human face, humorous and sad. The colonel had made a slight gesture with his hand. Otherwise he did not express himself. But Davies was finding it easier to go on than he may have expected.

"It was the easy money that made it seem so good to me," he said. "Easy money, even when I was a little shaver and could swipe a tool or something from a new building or a sidewalk where I was supposed to be collecting firewood. A trip to John the Junkman, and there you were! And there were two or three times when I thought that I was going straight, but it was easy money that always switched me back—in a phony gambling-house—where I put down a ten and saw it turn into fifty, and I left the fifty and saw it run to a thousand. But I never went back. I was always too wise for that. I would never get caught. And it was like that when I brushed up against a young swell in the Polo Grounds and almost everything he had dropped right out of his pocket into mine. Easy money! Easy money!"

The colonel nodded his head slowly several times, and at the end of a nod, with his head lowered, he kept it that way and remained motionless.

"Until at last," said Davies, "I did take a tumble to what it all meant and what it was all leading to.

"You never get anything for nothing. You've got to pay the price for everything you get. I saw it right. I saw it whole.

"And if I didn't want to pay the price like all the other thieves and grafters—or almost all—it was me for the country where I could work it out—something of what I owed—or all of it, even—square myself altogether—you understand—out here in the country where the decent people live, and you don't have to lock your doors at night, and where every other person that you meet ain't a grafter or a crook."

"I understand," the colonel murmured, and he slowly tugged at his silvery mustache as a preliminary to further expression of his own. "I understand."

"I wanted to tell you this," Davies continued, his voice going smaller. "I may be sticking around here for a while, you know, just to see how things turn out. But I couldn't do it and let you folks go on believing that I was something that I ain't."

His diminishing voice came to a rather abrupt pause, as if he had suddenly discovered that he had said everything that he had to say.

The colonel was looking at him again—out of the top of his eyes.

"I understand, Richard," the colonel announced. "I've known all along what you were. What you've been telling me has merely confirmed my first judgment of you."

"You knew—"

The colonel slowly reached for something that made a weight in the tail-pocket of his coat. It was something that did not come easily. It required considerable time and effort to extract it. When it did come, it revealed itself as the colonel's flask. There was still a finger or so of whisky in it. The colonel held the flask up where it would catch the light. He slowly rocked the liquor back and forth.

There, for an interval, Davies may have been expecting the colonel to pull the cork, invite him again to take a drink. There would have been nothing surprising about such an action. In the world Davies came

from this was the usual climax to an emotional passage.

But the colonel, still with the flask in his hand, got thoughtfully to his feet.

"—knew that you were sent," he murmured.

He trudged over to one of the shuttered windows opening on the garden. He pushed a shutter open.

Davies, watching him, saw the colonel uncork the flask and empty its contents into the outer darkness. He saw the old man remain there, apparently absorbed in thought for yet a moment or so longer, then toss the flask away.

A midnight funeral!

The flask fell into a bed of pansies that Alvah Morley had been cultivating down there ever since her advent in the old house. The pansies grew lush, and were generous with their flowers—purple and soft and faintly fragrant. There can be no earthly record of what the pansies thought when the bottle arrived among them. But they accepted it without protest, received it tenderly—gladly, one would be tempted to believe—the expiatory sacrifice of some fragile human flower!

Pansies for thoughts!

The colonel remained for a rather long time at the window, letting the breeze of the night blow in upon him. It stirred his white mustache and the folds of his coat.

When he turned, there was a different look in his face. His expression conveyed an appearance of enlightenment, of added wisdom—a wisdom no less human than was habitual to him, but not quite so terrestrial perhaps. He smiled gently at the youth who was watching him.

He put out his hand.

Wondering a little, yet touched with understanding, thrilled not a little with some quiver of relief that was almost joy, Richard Davies got up and seized the colonel's hand.

"My boy," said the colonel, "my boy—"

"I was afraid—"

"A man need never fear any one but himself."

"I couldn't let you believe—"

"A man is not hurt by lies, sir, but by the truth; and the truth won't hurt him

when he's right. God bless you—and good night!”

CHAPTER XXI.

“WELCOME TO OUR CITY.”

THERE may have been something in that aphorism of the colonel's about the truth being salutary so long as a man was right.

The news of what had happened at the hotel the night before had spread. This news alone would have been enough to make Davies a person of note in St. Clair—one to be considered and looked up to, especially by the ladies of the town; and, far from being hurt by the inevitable untruths stitched onto the fabric of fact, these added details merely increased his renown.

But Davies wasn't caring very much what people said, either one way or the other. “A man is injured not by lies, sir, but by the truth! And the truth won't hurt him when he's right.” That was good enough for him. And he prepared to set forth on his day's work.

So did Mrs. Meckley.

Mrs. Meckley had gone to bed late and had risen early. She had done this with a pleasant consciousness of duty. Some one had to keep St. Clair posted as to the doings across the street. It was barely nine o'clock when she sallied forth. She had already caught a distant glimpse of her neighbor, Mrs. Sanders, troweling bulbs in her front yard a hundred yards farther on toward the center of town.

“I just saw that young man,” Mrs. Meckley began.

“Who? The one that kicked up the rumpus last night at the hotel?” Mrs. Sanders turned to the black earth and scooped out another bulb.

“What say?”

“Thought everybody in town knew about it by this time.”

“I just saw him saying good-by,” Mrs. Meckley persisted weakly.

“Better say good-by. I reckon he's about done his share.”

“You mean flirting—”

“Serves 'em right, guzzlin' an' smokin'!”

Mrs. Meckley thought she saw a lead. She dropped her voice, narrowed her eyes.

“There was a light in his window till after midnight,” she tempted.

But Mrs. Sanders hadn't wasted all her ammunition, not by a jugful. She gathered up her bulbs in a small box, made a straining effort, and got to her feet.

“I'm talkin' about Deacon Crane and County Commissioner Miller gettin' their faces smacked, and that little squirt of an Ed Hall—I should think his mother *would* go out with a new silk dress on every week—gettin' his lip split; not to speak of the riffraff that usually does hang around the saloon, all gettin' a tannin'.”

“Milly Sanders!”

“Learn 'em a lesson. They ought to 'a' knowed he was the colonel's adopted son.”

It wasn't long before Mrs. Meckley discovered that she was in a hurry—that she was already late, in fact—on an errand that would take her further on her way. Even so, she wasn't quick enough. She saw that she was behind her schedule the moment her eyes lit on the faces of the Beverly sisters. They also had the news.

Only, this time, Mrs. Meckley wasn't unprepared. She whispered something into the somewhat wilted ears of the sisters.

“But he hasn't ever been married,” said the elder Miss Beverly.

“That's what I'm telling you,” said Mrs. Meckley, and she whispered again. “And I think it's just scandalous, the old reprobate aiming to marry off the girl like this to his own son. Well, good-by, both of you. I got to be trotting along.”

She trotted, and the Beverly sisters decided that they would go out in the back garden to see whether Mrs. Mintner was still at her curtain frames.

“I don't see why she persists in calling the judge a reprobate,” said the younger Miss Beverly with a touch of malice.

“No,” said the elder, with perfect understanding. “She's been setting her cap for Colonel Williams long enough; goodness knows!”

“And he never would look at her,” said the younger Miss Beverly, pinking up.

Meantime, Mr. Richard Davies, with that aphorism of the colonel's in mind and con-

scious that he had come off first best in the proceedings of the night before whatever might be said about it, started out to see what sort of an impression he could make on the town as a soap-agent. He remembered the instructions that had been handed to him on a printed card at the soap-head-quarters in Greenwich Street:

Work every house.

If they look poor, remember the poor are easy.

If they look rich, tell them so, and they'll fall.

He had his suit-case with the half-hundred cakes in it, also a deck of business-cards. His first try was the house right across the street—a little house back of a high hedge; but no one was home and he had to leave a card.

The next house he tried was up the street, where a woman was digging bulbs.

"Good morning," he said. "Harvesting your onions?"

The woman looked up from her work, recognized him as the town's latest arrival. She smiled as she said: "These were early tulips."

"I know you don't need it," he said amiably; "but I'm introducing the new Saporino line of Mexican mystery soaps. The name sounds rather bunk; but they really are good soaps; use them myself."

He gave Mrs. Sanders the help of his hand. She was old enough to compliment him frankly:

"You're a good advertisement."

Any one would have been justified in saying as much. He was clean, immaculate, even though he was a little shabby.

"Well, you see," he confessed; "I love this soap so much I feel as if I was doing folks a favor by letting them have it—twenty-five a cake and better than a novel or a play."

"He ain't the bruiser they were makin' him out to be," said Mrs. Sanders, looking after him.

He had made the sale.

He could have cleaned out his entire stock to the Beverley sisters. He knew that he could, the moment that they pounced upon him with their eyes. It was evident that he had been well advertised. The ruction at the hotel had been a good thing after all.

The elder of the two addressed him from the porch:

"Good morning, Mr. Williams."

"What's that?"

"Aren't you Colonel Williams's—er—"

Davies got a portion of her meaning.

"No relation," he smiled. "I wish I was. I'm introducing the Saporino line—"

And he recited his familiar patter.

"Isn't it rather expensive?"

"Use ordinary soap to get the rough dirt off, although we recommend our customers to use the Saporino line exclusively. Ah, go on, and take a dozen cakes. Two bits per! I could tell right away that you ladies had been to New York and knew all about the Saporino line—"

With Mrs. Meckley as an advance agent, his fame was reaching into quarters where it hadn't reached before. But Davies was cautious. It was almost too good to be true, this glad-hand welcome he was getting wherever he went. He scented something in the air. Nor was he very long in finding out that he was right, and what the danger was.

He had just sold his last cake of soap when he saw a familiar figure sauntering along the maple-shaded street. It was that tough young farmer who had threatened to give Gus a wallop on his own account the night before.

Davies was glad to see him. He was tired of talking to women. He strolled up to meet him.

"Hello," he said.

"Hello," and the young farmer, with a shrewd glance, backed up to lean against the fence.

"Come and have a cigar with me," Davies invited.

"Don't care if I do."

There was a small cigar and candy store across the street.

"Give us a couple of your best cigars," said Davies to the alert but unshaven young merchant behind the counter.

"Nickel straight," said the merchant, taking two cigars from a box in the glass case.

And his eyes were as keen as a hawk's until he had his dime.

"Here comes the bus for Pleasantville,"

the farmer remarked softly and casually when they were outside again.

"Let her come," said Davies, only mildly interested. "I guess this town will hold me for a while."

The other snorted softly.

"It 'll hold you longer 'n you think, if you don't watch out."

"On account of what happened at the hotel?"

"That's what started it. But nobody wants nothing done about that for fear of gettin' drug into court themselves, like Miss Morley said. But they've got the constable primed up to run you in for sellin' without a license."

He shot a swift glance up the street toward the center of town. His voice speeded up a notch.

"And here he comes now!"

CHAPTER XXII.

JUSTICE: THAT'S ALL.

HIS first instinct was to run away. Without looking particularly he could see that his chances for flight were good. The street was loosely gardened to left and right. The open country at no place was far away—meadows, flowing corn-fields, patches of wood. His suit-case was empty. There would be no great loss if he abandoned it. He had always hated the prospect of jail. Now, with a splurge of feeling, he knew that he was hating it more than ever—even though it should mean but a day or two—on such a feeble charge as peddling soap without a license.

His mind was working fast.

The constable, moreover, was taking his time.

Davies flashingly reviewed his previous life, the change that had come into it—and that change particularly which he had experienced since his arrival at Flowery Harbor.

It helped him to check his instinct to run. It helped him to check that other instinct, which was to bluff—play the indignant, assume the rôle of injured innocence, threaten reprisals in a political way. That was Solly's way.

"What are you going to do about it?" the young farmer asked.

"Square myself," Davies replied. "So long! Thanks!"

Davies met the constable at the side of a low fence fringing a garden. Beyond the garden was a lane. There was another lane just across the way, and this ran off down a slope between other garden fences to a willow hollow. There was still a good chance to get away, but all the time Davies was getting a better grip on himself.

He and the man of the law surveyed each other.

The constable was a man of middle age—a trifle fat, a trifle dirty, but keen-eyed and efficient. He was chewing tobacco. He slowly masticated. He spat to one side. His eyes came back to Davies's eyes.

"I reckon," he said, without other preliminaries, "you know who I am."

"You're the constable."

The other squinted down at a nickel-plated badge on the lapel of his coat. He burnished it with his sleeve.

"And you're the young feller," he said, as if announcing a happy surprise, "who's been sellin' inside the corporate limits without a license. I guess I'll have to ask you to step along with me."

"I'm ready."

"You seem to take it sort of cool."

"Why shouldn't I? I haven't been doing anything wrong. I didn't know I had to have a license."

"Ignorance of the law ain't no defense," the constable recited.

"I'm willing to get a license."

"I suppose so," said the constable, with a flash of malice, "now that the crime has been committed."

The constable was still leisurely. There was an air about him of preoccupation, of not having said all that he had to say. And Davies noticed this.

"What do you think I'd better do about it?"

"That's for the squire to say, although he do generally follow my recommend."

"And what's that?"

"The lock-up." He snapped out the words. "It largely depends on what I say

—and on what you might call public sentiment.”

“With no chance to get off with a fine?”

The constable slanted a meaning look at Davies. He casually glanced up and down the all but deserted street.

“Now you’re beginning to say somethin’,” he mused.

Again he shot a look at Davies.

“Well, come along,” he said. “We’ll be gettin’ off to the lock-up.”

“Have a cigar,” said Davies.

“Don’t mind if I do.”

He took the cigar that the prisoner offered and bit the end from it. Davies held a match for him.

“Do you mean that I might get off all right with a fine?”

“How much money you got?”

“I don’t know, but it ought to be enough.”

The constable lowered his voice, spoke a little more quickly than he had spoken hitherto.

“I ain’t one of these here officers that won’t listen to reason,” he averred with a touch of nervous eagerness. “I’m broad-minded enough, if it comes to that. Got to be, b’ heck! I got a family.” He wasn’t altogether hardened. He appeared to be a little disconcerted. He ran on, with a trace of nervous laughter. “Some folks went through here just the other day, bustin’ the speed-limits in one of these here big purple cars, and they’d been goin’ on like that yet if I hadn’t nabbed them, and the feller who was steerin’, he says to me, just like that, says he: ‘Be you one of these here officers that won’t listen to reason?’ ‘How so?’ says I. ‘Why,’ says he, ‘if you ain’t,’ says he, ‘mebbe you’ll let me pay the fine right here and now,’ says he.”

“How much was the fine?” Davies inquired.

“In his particular case, it was a five-dollar bill.”

“Can’t I pay my fine right here?”

“Not right here,” the constable whispered, “unless you’re mighty keerful about it.”

“I’ll be careful.”

Davies was as good as his word. He cast a cautious look about him. He turned his face to the fence and deftly drew his bill-fold. He counted out five one-dollar bills. But the constable was not so cautious. At any rate, the sight of the stranger’s money seemed to interest him more than any chance of some one discovering his method of executing the law. His keen eyes counted the five bills as Davies counted them, and also took note of all the other money in the fold.

“I reckon,” he breathed, “that your fine will be just twice that much.”

“You ought to go to some bigger town,” said Davies briefly, after the transfer had been made. But he kept his temper. “How do I know that they won’t make trouble for me when I go to get my license even now?”

The constable was in high good humor.

“I guess you needn’t worry about that,” he said. “Just let on like nothin’s happened. Keep your mouth shut, and nothin’s goin’ to hurt you. Catch the four seventeen.”

“But I want to be all on the square,” said Davies. “I expect to stay here a while. I’m not going out on the four seventeen.”

“Oh, you’re not!”

“You’ve let your cigar go out,” said Davies. He lit a fresh match. “And you’ve let some ashes fall on your coat.” He brushed the constable’s collar lightly while that officer was busy with the match and the gift cigar. “Can’t you go around to the town hall with me and tell them there that I’m all right?”

“I’m sorry,” said the officer; “but it’s just about my dinner-time.”

They sauntered along together for perhaps a distance of fifty paces, and all this time there was a sort of buzzing in Davies’s brain. Then, what was that the colonel had said about men being hurt by the truth, unless they happened to be right? Davies eyed the constable.

“I thought,” he said carelessly, “that you had a badge.”

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

On and Off



A "SHORTY KILGOUR" STORY

YOU didn't know that I am an actor, did you? Not many people know it and among those who do, the excitement isn't violent. At present, of course, I am not engaged in treading the boards. My duties call for strict attention to about seven square miles of alfalfa land, besides which I do a little light livery stable work, run the ranch tractors and perform miscellaneous errands for old man Treadwell.

Jim Caldwell likewise is an actor. Some people out here admit that he is a mighty bad actor, when he winds up on too much of Joe Flynn's hand-made rum. But what I mean is that both Jim and me have qualified on the dramatic stage. We may never see our names in electric lights over a theater entrance, but we have both felt the thrill of the descending curtain and the scattered applause.

All of this happened a long time ago, before Pop Treadwell captured us and harnessed us up to his rolling ranch. Now we are plain, unvarnished hired hands, doing our best to keep the cattle in shape, but once we were more or less famous and it happened because Jim could drive four horses.

We had been fooling around Springer, Idaho, waiting for a job with a medicine outfit, but something happened to the show and it began to look like Jim and me would

have to move out of our boarding house or pay the woman. One afternoon, we wandered disconsolately out of town and stopped on the brow of a long hill to meditate and figure on the immediate future. Off in the distance we could see a cloud of dust, and when it came nearer, we observed wagons and figures.

The lead wagon had three cross seats, and on these sat eight or nine sad-looking individuals, including a gent wearing a clean collar and a silk hat. Behind the first wagon came a vehicle laden with trunks. That was the entire parade. The man driving the baggage wagon was having trouble with his horses. He had four of them, and when the caravan reached our hill the baggage wagon slid into a gully and a few of the trunks dropped overboard.

"What would you say that is?" Jim asked me.

"Looks like a theatrical troupe," I returned. "They have a lean and unfed look about them that makes me think of actors."

And it was, too. It was Hatch's All-Star Cast, arriving in Springer to regale the populace with the spoken drama. At least, they expected to arrive in Springer, if they could get their baggage wagon out of the chuck-hole.

Mr. Hatch was the gent with the slightly soiled silk hat, and about the time the

unfortunate driver spilled the trunks into the road, Mr. Hatch burst into as flowery a flood of profane language as I have ever heard. There were some ladies present, but apparently, they were accustomed to high-powered words.

Jim and I wandered over to the trunk wagon and helped the big Swede load up the derailed baggage, and during the operation. Mr. Hatch took off his lid and reproached his driver. Finally he turned on Jim.

"Can you drive four horses?" he asked.

"Yes," said Jim.

"Do you want to drive them?"

"Sure!"

"Get up there, then," Hatch said. "You're elected."

"What about my friend?" Jim asked.

"Does he want a job?" Hatch inquired.

Jim nodded.

"All right," said Hatch, looking at me. "You don't look like a very brilliant person. Maybe I can make an actor out of you."

So I climbed up beside Jim and while neither of us knew it at the moment, that began our dramatic career. We then and there joined Hatch's All-Star Cast. That night we watched the company playing "East Lynn" in the Springer Opera House, sitting down in front on free seats.

"Well," said Jim, at the end of the second act, "I never tried it, but if that's acting, I can act."

"Me, too," I agreed. "Right now, I'm a better actor than half of this company, and I never tried it."

The leading man was tall and wore a mustache. The leading lady was a dame of uncertain years, named Hazel Hammond, and the main thing about Hazel was her diamonds. She had about half a quart of jewels and Joe Marmon, one of the actors, told us they were real diamonds. Later on, another member of the company adopted them and left on a freight train, so I suppose they had some value.

Joe Marmon was a nice, quiet guy, with a bald spot. He was the company genius and had once written a play called "On the Border." Other members of the company informed me that Joe had stolen this work of art from an old-time play. Anyhow, whether he wrote it or just rewrote it, old

man Hatch produced it now and then, with the full company. There seemed to be a demand for "On the Border," and whenever the call was loud and clear, Boss Hatch put it on.

But in the past, the play had always sort of fallen down. It got so that Hatch swore he would never present it again, and the reason was that the play depended for its big smash upon the dynamite explosion at the end of the second act. That explosion had been turning out a fizzle and Hatch got tired of it. He always advertised a good explosion and the people came expecting a good explosion, and they never got it.

About ten days after Jim and I joined the All-Star Cast, the company headed north into the Robbers Roost County. This is a long, fertile valley between some saw-toothed mountains, and as the railroads don't run up there, the towns in the Robbers Roost territory rarely get to see a show with regular actors. There is only one way into the valley, and that's the way we went, over a rocky, rutty trail, with Jim and me driving the baggage wagon and the rest of the cast coming behind.

It took us two days to get to Five Falls, and when we arrived we found that the town consisted of a solitary hotel and one other building, which was part livery stable and part theatre. We got into Five Falls about dusk and looked about for signs of a town.

"Where is the place?" Hatch asked the hotel owner, in some astonishment.

"Right here," said the man. "This is Five Falls."

"I don't see any town," Hatch went on, grieved. "We're supposed to give a show here to-night, if this is the place. Where are all the people?"

"Oh, they'll be in, all right," the man answered. "They've got to tend to their milking. If I was you, mister, I wouldn't begin my show till nine or ten o'clock."

So Hatch followed the hotel man's suggestion. We postponed the opening hour until ten o'clock, and when the curtain went up, there were three hundred people in the house. They came from points twenty miles off, and right after supper we began to

see the lanterns on the end of wagon poles as they crept into town through the darkness.

In the course of our dramatic wanderings through a sterile and barbarous country, we came upon the town of Huttersville, and I wish to state at this juncture that I will never forget Huttersville or Mr. Hutter, the dumpy little man with the chin whisker, after whom the town was named.

Huttersville is a little burg buried behind some raw and rocky mountains, and the mail comes in once a week from the civilized outside world. Old Man Hutter owns the town. It is his own private and personal village. He began it, reared it tenderly, and now guards it with a parent's stern love. To guard it right, he carries a couple of guns on his hips, and when our little theatrical troupe reached town, we immediately began to hear horrendous tales about what a rough guy old Hutter was.

Up to this time in our joint and several careers with the company, neither Jim nor I had drawn down any money. The ceremonial of pay-day was unknown in Hatch's All-Star Cast. It was a custom among the actors to go without salary and be content with having their board and lodging paid, and while this struck us as a novelty, still, Jim and I didn't want to break any established customs, so we said nothing. We were eating pretty regularly and had no desire to trifle with our luck.

Jim's salary was ten dollars a week and mine was nine dollars each seven days, only Jim never got his and neither did I.

Furthermore, neither one of us had yet done any real acting on the stage, among scenery and surroundings. I did all my acting in the barn with the horses, and Jim acted with the baggage and scenes. When we complained to Hatch that we were hired to act a little, he said to wait till he produced "On the Border," in which we would be sure to find a couple of toothsome parts. So we waited patiently.

II.

IN Huttersville, Hatch's All-Star Cast busted loose with "Orphan Annie" before a full and enthusiastic audience. Old Man

Hutter inspected the performance, just like he inspected every performance, standing in front in a belligerent attitude. Before the curtain went up, the old coyote made a speech to the audience, advising decorum and calm. He swore profusely during this speech, but no ladies walked out on him. He threatened to climb up in the gallery and kill a mess of small boys if they yelled or pounded with their feet. Then he waved a kaiserlike hand and told the show to go on and it went.

Hutter was a small, fattish man, with a bald head and a red nose. It was his custom to observe each and every performance given in the theater from the center of the stage, at the point where the middle aisles runs into the footlights.

I noticed this strange habit of his at once. He used to watch the performance, standing with his elbows resting on the stage and his chin in his palms, staring up at the actors. If they said something he didn't like, he stopped the show and balled out the unlucky guy before everybody. And if he didn't like the drama, he stopped everything, put out the lights and told the audience to go home. He was one little autocrat, this little Hutter guy; and as I said, he carried a couple of guns on his hip to give his remarks the proper emphasis.

Along about this time, Jim and I began to feel that Hatch wasn't going to let us act at all. We stood there in the alley back of Hutter's Opera House one night early that week, discussing Hatch and his persecution of us.

"He ain't never going to let us act and that's plain," Jim said to me. "We're just good enough for the rough work around here."

"He said he would give us a couple of swell parts when he put on 'On the Border,'" I argued. "Why don't he put it on?"

"Yeah, why don't he?" demanded Joe Marmon, the author of the play in question. "It ain't doing the right thing by me, either. I wrote that play and it's a bird. He's doing me an injustice and the people all want to see 'On the Border,' too. Even Old Man Hutter asked Hatch why he didn't put it on."

"Well, why don't he?" I demanded.

"Because Hatch says the explosion in the old mill at the end of the second act always turns out rotten," Joe explained, and that's the first Jim and I knew there was an explosion in the piece. "Hatch says that explosion is always a fizzle and spoils the piece."

At that moment the sole proprietor of Hatch's All-Star Cast came suddenly out of the stage entrance and busted into our confab.

"Well," Mr. Hatch demanded, having heard the final part of Joe's speech, "wasn't that explosion a frost the last town we played it? Am I right or wrong? Is there any good playing 'On the Border' with an explosion that sounds like a robin laying an egg? Ain't that explosion the main thing in the show? That's why I won't put the thing on in this town or any other, even if Old Man Hutter demands it."

"Say, Mr. Hatch," Jim said suddenly. "You mean that you would put this play on and give me and Shorty a chance to act, if you only had a good explosion?"

"Sure," said Hatch, and then, being in a hurry, he walked away.

Jim watched him go down the alley and turn into the street and then turned to me.

"Shorty," he said, "you been eager to do a little acting and now your time has come. Likewise, I have yearned to get up there and show these birds some real acting, and I am about to have my fling."

"He said he wouldn't produce 'On the Border' till he was sure of a first-class explosion," Joe Marmon said, glumly.

"And he's going to have a first-class explosion," Jim returned. "Have you got the manuscript so's the company can learn this piece?"

Joe said he had it up in his trunk at the hotel and Jim told him to dig it out and have copies made for all members of the cast.

"And have a couple for me and Shorty," Jim added, "because this is our first opportunity."

When we were alone a little later on, I inquired what all this meant.

"You heard what Hatch said, didn't you?" Jim demanded.

"Sure; that we have to have a real ex-

plosion instead of the usual fizzers. What's that got to do with it?"

"Well," Jim went on, with a proud and thoughtful smile, "you don't know it, because we weren't acquainted then, but I'm one of the best little explosion experts in the world. Back in my home town in the old days I used to be the Fourth of July king. I got up all the home-made cannons and mortars. They used to depend on me to produce a lot of loud noise and I made good. What I don't know about explosions, noise, and excitement ain't worth knowing. So when I heard that there was nothing between us and a chance to act but a good explosion, I knew our chance had come."

"You mean you're going to undertake to make the explosion?" I asked.

"At the end of the second act of 'On the Border,'" Jim went on, "there has got to be a good, loud explosion in the old mill—one that will convince the audience. And up to this time, the company has been shy one high-class explosion expert. If I'd only known why Hatch was backward, we would have acted long ago."

"Well," I said, somewhat pleased, "I didn't know you were a gunpowder shark, but that ain't important, anyhow. The main thing is that he puts on the show and then we get our long and patiently waited opportunity."

"We do," said Jim. "And we won't have to wait long."

And we didn't, either.

Jim and Joe Marmon got together and then held a consultation with Boss Hatch. Joe probably explained that Jim Caldwell was the man the company had long needed, and when Hatch was assured that Jim knew all the technical details about a good, bang-up explosion, he consented to have the thing announced.

Old Man Hutter was informed officially that "On the Border" would be performed in New York style by the Hatch All-Star organization on Friday night, and the old coyote was pleased. He wrote out the announcement on the back of a playing card, which he nailed to the pole in front of the Hutter's barber shop, and the townsfolk began to talk about the thrilling melodrama.

Jim came to me with pride glowing in his eyes and brought the news.

"I'm to play the part of the hero," he said, "and you're the villain. You annoy me all through and at the end of the second act you hit me on the head with the gun and tie me up to the burning powder keg."

"It sounds reasonable," I remarked. "What do I say first, right after the curtain goes up?"

We didn't have all the time in the world to study our respective parts of hero and villain because Friday night was approaching fast, but we went to work and I learned what I had to do without any trouble.

Meantime, Jim and Joe Marmon were busy learning their own lines. But what was more important, they were out rustling a class one explosion to insert at the end of the second act and thus make good with Manager Hatch. They had promised him and they were doing their best.

I didn't know what steps Jim was taking, and if I had known, my own part in "On the Border" would have been different.

To begin, the explosion was to take place in the old mill. The hero was called upon to be tied up to the burning powder keg by the scheming villain, and just before the mill blew up, the beautiful heroine was to dash in and unloose the hero's bonds. Then the mill went up and that's what had always proved a failure in the past. They couldn't get the mill to go up with the proper amount of authority. The audience simply snickered at the explosion scene and told each other it was a cheesy exhibition. It was this that Jim was attempting to overcome, using, as he said, his Fourth of July experience of olden days.

I have always known that Jim was a nut, but I did not know Joe Marmon well enough to catalogue him. He was not only a nut, but he was a simple-minded, credulous, childish, durned fool. He went along with Jim Caldwell while that wild-haired hyena prepared the explosion material, and about these details I knew nothing until later on.

The first thing they did was to buy eight or nine pounds of very black gunpowder, which they packed into a defunct lard-can. They then prowled around Hutter'sville

until they discovered a beer-keg. It was an old-fashioned, solid oak beer-keg that had never known a weak moment in its life. Thus equipped, Jim and Joe wandered back to Hutter's Opera-House with their material. They put the top on the lard-can and made a neat hole in it. Then they placed the can carefully in the bottom of the beer-keg and began packing it in. They used pieces of wet paper, bits of wood, small rocks, sand, gravel, mud, some petrified turnips Jim found back of a grocery, and various other ingredients. When they got through packing, the lard-can was tightly wedged inside the beer-keg. They then ran the fuse up through the top and nailed the top back onto the beer-keg, after which Jim announced that they were now ready for a good, thrilling explosion in the mill scene.

And they were! Believe me, that explosion scene never had a chance of turning out a fizzle after those two maniacs finished up their preparations.

"Shorty," Jim explained to me that Friday afternoon, "we're going to have one peach of a blow-up. Old Man Hutter will be surprised. And Hatch will be pleased. This ain't going to be no fizzle, and don't you forget it."

As stated, I didn't know the details of Mr. Caldwell's preparations. I only knew that he seemed mighty sure the explosion would thrill the Hutter'sville audience. Nothing happened until about six o'clock that evening. Jim passed me in a hurry, going into the dressing-room, and paused.

"Shorty," he said, "I forgot to get a fuse. You rush out somewhere and buy a good fuse. We can't get along without a fuse."

So I put on my hat and started out on a still hunt through Hutter'sville to find a fuse.

I got into all the stores that were still open, but no fuses. Business had been very quiet in the fuse line, they told me, but finally I got a guy in a hardware-store to patch up a home-made fuse, and, while it wasn't a very workmanlike object, still it would burn with surprising speed. He used paper and string and powder, and what else I don't know. I took the fuse back to Jim, and he thanked me.

Later on I was sorry I bought that fuse.

Then the people of Hutterstown began to move toward the Hutter Opera-House to witness the performance of that sterling melodrama, "On the Border," by Joseph Marmon, presented by Lemuel Hatch and his all-star cast. The town was filled with suppressed excitement. Joe Marmon was trotting around in circles, and every one else was more or less fidgety. I didn't know whether I knew my lines or not.

"Shorty," Jim said to me, fixing his make-up on, "this is going to be a big night in our lives."

"I believe it," I said.

III.

So it came about that the house was crowded the night Jim and I began our artistic career. Every seat in the gallery was occupied by a palpitant gent, all ready to be thrilled. There was not a soul in the building that hadn't come to be there when that old mill blew up.

Old Man Hutter appeared toward the start of the show and assumed his dictatorial manner and his impudent position down there at the foot of the center aisle where it runs into the footlights. The theater was heated in the good, old-style way with a pot-bellied coal-stove, which was going pretty good that night, it being a mite chilly outside. It was one of the roundest, reddest, and fattest stoves I can remember, and it is impressed upon my mind forever.

On the opposite side of the theater, and near the stage, was a piano that opened up the back. That piano was a priceless institution and the proud boast of Hutterstown, because it was the only instrument of harmony in town. It had been hauled into Hutterstown on a wagon at a tremendous outlay of time and money, and Old Man Hutter regarded it with great love and esteem. It was a highly polished piano, and whenever the man wasn't playing on it they kept it wrapped up in a Mother Hubbard, which the man always threw back with great ceremony.

The first part of "On the Border" found me as nervous as a schoolgirl with

her first young man. I not only forgot my lines. I forgot everything I had ever known, including my name and color. But we blundered along somehow. Jim was heroing all over the place, and I forgot whether he remembered his lines or invented stuff as he went along.

Joe Marmon hadn't been seen during the first act, and I found out later that he had got himself accidentally stewed toward supper-time and was therefore detained somewhere, but he blew into the theater some time during the second act. He came over and stood by me just before I hit Jim with the butt end of a gun.

The action was like this: Jim was the curly-haired hero, and I was trying to get rid of him, so I hit him with the gun, dragged his unconscious form into the old mill, tied him to the keg of dynamite, and blew him into smithereens. Only just before the explosion, the beautiful heroine came on the run, undid him, and dragged him to safety. Then the piece called for the explosion.

Just before my time to dash out onto the stage and hammer Jim with the gun, Joe Marmon began talking to me. At first I didn't get the drift of his conversation, but gradually it dawned on me that he was explaining what a good explosion this ought to be. He said it ought to satisfy Lemuel Hatch, Old Man Hutter, and all the townspeople, because great pains had been taken by him and Jim to prepare it.

I was trying to keep my mind on the lines I would have to say in a minute, so I only half heard what Joe was saying, and, anyhow, his breath bothered me. I had a lot of things to do, because after I hit Jim with the gun, I tied him up with a rope to the dynamite, and then strung my fuse across the stage and lighted the far end of it. And about one second before my cue to leap out came, I heard Joe talking distinctly.

"Yeah," Joe was saying, "they ain't a soul can find fault with this explosion. If this don't startle them, I don't want a dime. There's ten pounds in that tin can, anyhow."

"Ten pounds of what?" I demanded, my mind turning to Joe and his breath.

"Gunpowder," Joe said solemnly. "Smoky, old-style gunpowder, packed in tight. Jim and me, we hunted high and low till we got just the can we wanted, and when I say she's going to puff hard, I tell the truth. When you light that fuse, don't you hang around this theater, Shorty. The minute you touch her off, you start out through the alley door and keep on going till it's over. I won't be here myself, and I know what's going to occur."

There were about nine people on the stage, and it dawned on me that maybe a catastrophe was at hand. I felt a sudden coolness in the region of my feet, and I remembered what a liar Jim was, and also what a blundering ass.

If Joe said they had ten pounds of stuff packed in that beer-keg, there was no reason to doubt it, but the news had come too late.

It was my time to start out and hit Jim with the gun, and I did. I hit him good. He went down on the stage in a heap, and the audience hissed me. Then I bound Jim up to the keg and prepared to light the fuse. And if ever there was a job that looked distasteful, that was it. But it had to be done.

I lighted the fuse and then dashed around the flies, telling those not in sight of the audience to duck out into the alley. Then I ran around to the handle with which we let down the curtain, because I knew that the curtain had to come down fast. I found somebody's overcoat and wrapped it around my head, and when I looked out on the stage, the fuse was sputtering across the dim light, and Jim was struggling like a maniac with his bonds. The poor nut had enough sense to want to leave that keg.

Before Jim got his ropes loose, the heroine ran in and untied him, and he picked her up in his arms and made a wild run for liberty and the alley door. Joe Marmon had ducked out, and what I had said had spread a sort of young panic back on the stage, so that nobody was there except me and Old Man Hutter, with his chin in his palms, and Ollie Secord. Ollie was another member of the all-star cast, and in the explosion scene he was supposed to

stand in the wings, holding an armful of barrel-staves. At the right moment Ollie was instructed to toss his barrel-staves up in the air and let them crash down on the stage, making the noise louder and more realistic. He stood right behind me, and wouldn't duck out into the alley.

"You'll get killed, fool!" I whispered to him. "This is going to be a bird. Go on out."

"I got to stay here and throw these staves," Ollie answered, "and I'm going to do it."

But he never did. Because right then the beer-keg blew up.

And believe me when I say she blew up right.

By this time, I was scared purple. With my coat-collar hiding my shrinking form from the coming catastrophe, I cuddled against the wall, holding the curtain-handle, and the last thing I noticed was Old Man Hutter, standing with his chin in his palms and his elbows on the stage.

Never in this world was there such an indoor explosion. Nowhere in the history of civilization can you find a record of such a man-sized bang. That barrel rose about four feet off the floor and let go, and it was just the same as shooting a seventeen-inch shell through a plate of butter.

Ollie Secord never did hurl the armful of barrel-staves onto the stage. No. The outburst caught him in the midst of his act and lifted him into the air. When he landed, he was blown part way through the side wall, and he was covered with broken barrel-staves and denuded of some skin.

The shock knocked me down before I could twist the curtain-handle once. It picked profane Old Man Hutter up and tossed him back against the red-bellied coal-stove, where he seriously burned both arms before he could crawl off under a seat.

On the stage, directly above the old mill, was a Rochester oil-lamp, about as large and rotund as a vinegar-barrel. The explosion hit that Rochester lamp, blew it up against the ceiling, and flattened it out to the thinness of a pancake. The darn lamp stuck against the ceiling.

Every board on the stage was busted and splintered. Rocks, sand, gravel, pieces of

tar paper, and plain clay mud flew hither and yon, and that sacred piano with the self-cocking back was a wreck. They later on picked about half a ton of debris out of the entrails of that shining implement of melody.

In a way it was funny, and in another way it was not. In all that crowded audience not a soul was hurt, except for maybe a scratch or two. The beer-keg exploded over their heads, and the gravel and stuff was blown clear through the house, above the heads of the audience. Later on, I personally picked chunks of rock as big as an egg out of the wall at the rear of the theater.

Every window in the theater was blown out, and all the windows in the hotel next door were shattered into fragments.

Old Man Hutter picked himself up and began one of the loudest and most profane speeches in the history of the town. Jim Caldwell was out in the alley when the thing blew up, and he did not return to see how good it was. In fact, he concealed himself in a livery-stable all night.

There was no third act to "On the Border." The audience indicated that it had about enough of the dramatic art for one night, besides which some feared the roof of the place was coming down.

And when the excitement died down, I was arrested. That's the good part. They swore I was the guy that bought the fuse, which was true. The entire town had seen me light that fuse, so there could be no argument about it. I was charged with malicious destruction of property, endangering the safety and lives of an orderly people, carrying concealed weapons, arson, disorderly conduct, and having no visible means of support.

Furthermore, the next day I was sued on six different counts by people who said

I had damaged their property with my explosion. And all this time Jim Caldwell remained out of sight, which was just as well, because Hatch was looking for him with blood in his eye, and Old Man Hutter had said in public that all he wanted was one shot at Jim.

It looked like I would spend a long time in the Hutterville jail, but Hatch bailed me out toward nightfall and made arrangements with the people who were demanding my life. I sneaked around in the darkness, intending to go to the hotel and see what could be done, and as I passed an alley entrance I heard a hissing sound. It was Jim, hissing at me from the livery-stable.

"Come on out and get killed," I said to him, and not any too kindly.

Sneaking through the darkness he paused. "Sherty," he said, "it looks to me like you and I ought to move on out of this town."

"Yeah," I said, "you have a great gift of vision. Why don't you look ahead a little when you handle explosives?"

"They wanted a good one, and I gave it to them," Jim said defensively. "Nobody can call that a fizzle."

"No, but they came near being able to call it a funeral," I rejoined. "I'm just out of jail, on your account."

"Let's leave," Jim whispered. "Something's sure to happen to us. Besides, I'm hungry. I've been living on oats."

Then and there Jim and I ended our dramatic careers. We started through the darkness, having no ambition except to put distance between us and Hutterville. Next morning a man driving a team of mules caught up with us, and that's the way we got back to civilization.

So, as I said at the start, Jim and I are actors, in a manner of speaking, though to look at us now you might not suspect it.

JANIE FRETE PUTS OVER A KNOCK-OUT

A SHORTAGE IN PERFUMES

BY RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Author of "The Green Sachem," "Trail of the Otter Pelts," etc.

A NEW FOUR-PART SERIAL BEGINNING NEXT WEEK

The House of Skulls

by H. Bedford-Jones

CHAPTER I.

I BUY A HOUSE.

I MET Balliol as result of answering an advertisement in a Los Angeles paper. It looked like just what I wanted. Here is the ad to speak for itself:

FOR SALE—Twenty-acre ranch, fine house, complete equipment. Ten acres walnuts, eight pears. Electricity. Water abundant. Income, five thousand dollars, but will sell cheap for cash. Near lake north of San Francisco.

John Balliol met me by appointment for luncheon at a down-town hotel. Instantly I saw that something was very wrong with him.

He was a fine-looking young fellow, but was terribly nervous; he must have smoked ten cigarettes with the meal. That, if you happen to know, is purely a city habit. Then, he had a way of glancing swiftly over his shoulder as though afraid something were about to come at him; and his eyes wandered, flitted with lurking suspicion.

He was afraid of something.

But he was a gentleman, a man of education. One or two things he said gave me the idea that he was a Harvard man, but he kept very close-mouthed about himself. He had a queerly aggressive manner, the manner of one who fights yet knows that he is licked. Also, he wanted to sell and get his money at once—before the following night.

"But you're not a rancher, Mr. Desmond," he said, suspicion in his eyes. "Why are you interested in my property?"

I laughed. "Largely because it's a sacrifice for cash," I replied. "I'm no rancher, but a sedate artist of a sort. Being a bachelor, I practise interior decoration; but I paint pictures as a preferential occupation. In the past year I've made so much money through supplying really worthless but gorgeously blended interiors to war profiteers, that my general physical condition has gone flooey, if you get my meaning! The New York medicos sent me to California. The Los Angeles medicos have ordered me to get on a ranch up north, where the climate is more bracing and not so deadly monotonous."

"I get you," he nodded briefly. "Know anything about ranching?"

"I can stretch an easel between rows of pear-trees, can't I?"

At that he laughed, and for a moment lost his nerve-tensed expression.

"I need money," he said after a bit. "I need it badly—before to-morrow night. I got the ranch several years ago; I've been improving it steadily, and the house and property are now in first-class shape. And, I've spent a lot of money on it."

"Reason for selling?" I inquired.

"Strictly private." He looked slightly flurried, but his eyes remained steady. "Merely because I need the money, and need it more badly than I can tell you.

It's a grand place up there, Mr. Desmond! Deer are a nuisance; you can shoot wild hogs any time. If you like fishing, Clear Lake has the best in the State. In two or three years, after they get the boulevard through from Frisco, that whole valley will be opened up and land will be out of sight. At present it's twenty miles from the railroad, and I can't honestly brag of the roads—"

He got out a map of Lake County and showed me the lay of the land. When I saw that the lake was thirty miles long, that his place was only a few miles from Lakeport, the county-seat, that it was in the heart of the hills, and within easy distance of the big trees and of San Francisco itself, I warmed up to the subject.

"Well," I said, "what's the price? Lowest cash."

"Ten thousand cash—if I can get it before to-morrow night."

That looked queer to me. Ten thousand for a place bringing in five thousand a year!

"You want the money by to-morrow?" I said thoughtfully. "I have an old friend in one of the banks here; he'll handle everything for us. He can make thorough inquiries as to the title, and so forth, by wire. If it's as you say, and if the title's clear, we can know by to-morrow noon—and I'll take it. Otherwise, not."

He drew a long breath. "I'm satisfied, Mr. Desmond. By the way, if you put through the deal, would you consider buying a car? I drove down here in mine—a Paragon four-passenger roadster. I'll not need it, and I'm already offering it for sale. If you haven't a car, you'll find it the best bargain on the market. Cost me five thousand about four months ago, and I'll take a thousand cash—before to-morrow night."

"All right," I assented cautiously. "If you're willing to have the Paragon agency here, give her the once-over."

He was willing to have any kind of investigation made, either of the ranch or of the car. Inside of an hour my bank had the ranch matter in hand, and promised me a complete report the following morning. John Balliol and I went to the Paragon agency on Olive Street, where his car was laid up, and I found no report was needed.

The car was strictly a beauty, in first-class shape. She was not exactly an economical car, but she would give good service for years—a nifty, high-class job all around, as the Paragon agent described her. I liked her so well that I bought her on the spot, ranch or no ranch; and I've never had cause to regret the bargain.

That night I spent a good deal of time wondering about my friend John Balliol. He had all the earmarks of a gentleman; but for all I knew he might be a rank fraud. Not a word had he said about himself, other than I have set down here.

If he had not been in a hurry, and if his ranch was as described, he could have obtained twenty thousand for it—easily. And his car was salable for double the price I had paid. He was, obviously, in the position of one who is madly sacrificing all that he has in order to raise quick money—"before to-morrow night," he had said. Of course, it was none of my affair aside from the business end of it.

At ten the next morning I went to the bank, where Balliol was already waiting. The cashier beckoned me into his private office and spread several telegrams before me.

"Everything looks correct, Mr. Desmond," he stated. "In fact, everything is correct. The title is flawless, and the land is worth much more than is asked."

"And this Mr. Balliol himself?" I said. "Will you satisfy yourself that he's what and whom he says he is?"

The cashier grasped this somewhat involved query and nodded. Then he summoned Balliol to join us. At first Balliol was inclined to be insulted; then we made him realize that to hand out ten thousand in cash to a man without identification was somewhat risky. He immediately calmed down, and not only produced all kinds of papers, but had himself identified by one of the largest banks in the city, just around the corner from my own bank. In short, John Balliol was all to the good.

"You attend to the transfer," I said, when Balliol produced the deeds to the property and handed them to the cashier. The latter nodded and left us alone.

"Now, Mr. Balliol," I said, when I had

written the check and was waiting for it to dry, "this deal is going through. In fact, it has gone through. I wish, as between gentlemen, that you'd tell me anything you know against the property—why you're giving it away."

He turned a little white under his healthy tan, and fished for a cigarette.

"Can't do it, Mr. Desmond," he responded. "It's—well, it's private, absolutely! Nothing whatever against the property, upon my word! I got into a bit of trouble, however, and had to have the money. That's all."

Of course I asked no further questions, and the deal was concluded on that basis. I had made out the check to him personally, and he did not cash it, but took it away with him. He did not even ask the bank about *my* standing, which made me feel rather ashamed of my insistence regarding him. But, as we separated with mutual expressions of good will, I saw him walk away—and glance again over his shoulder with fear in his eyes.

He had two checks, amounting to eleven thousand of my money; and I had his ranch and his car. And that little Paragon boat, believe me, was a wonder! It was a distinctive car, with a specially built body, and the color was bright canary-yellow—light enough not to show dust easily. The top had plate-glass and solid curtains, and was a deep maroon in hue. Taken all in all, the car could be recognized several miles away as the only one of its kind on earth, particularly as the wire wheels were a bright pea-green. The top was low and deep, of the back-curved variety which effectually hides the driver and passengers.

Speaking for the New York decorator, I could not say that Yorke Desmond was exactly wild about the color-scheme of that car. I forgot this in the beauty of her performance, however. Later on, perhaps, I would have the paint changed.

According to John Balliol, I would have nothing on earth to do except to sit around while my walnuts and pears grew, and rake in the shekels when they were ripe. Everything was bought on the hoof, as it were, so I did not even have to pick the fruit. This suited me, naturally. Of course, explained

Balliol, the ground had to be cultivated once or twice a year, and the pear-trees had to be sprayed in the summer, but all equipment was on the place. Such mild diversions would but relieve me from the monotony of having nothing to do.

As they say just off Broadway, it listened good.

It was noon when the sale was consummated, as I have described. Within an hour I had two extra cord tires reposing on the hind end of my new car, and a complete outfit of maps from the automobile club, and an outfit of suit-cases on the running-board. By two o'clock I had packed up my belongings, shipped my artistic impedimenta by express to myself at Lakeport, and at two-five I was heading toward Hollywood and the coast highway north.

My mental attitude was precisely that of a child with a new toy. I wanted to drive that Paragon bus for all she was worth, and only the fear of speed cops held me down. I was wild to get up to my new ranch and see how the walnuts and pears grew. So, having nothing particular to keep me in Los Angeles, I got on my way without delay. Either I had bought a wondrously good thing, or I had somehow got wondrously stung—and the chances were that I had not been stung!

By six o'clock that evening I was safely arrived in Santa Barbara for the night. Ahead of me were the alternate patches of boulevard and most abominable detouring which constitute the State highway to San Francisco, and I was supremely happy in the way the Paragon rustled along.

That canary car, with the green wheels and maroon top, certainly attracted attention; this was the only fly in my ointment. I am essentially a modest and retiring man, and I abominate being taken for some ornament of the film industry. Any one who had ever seen that car would remember it to his dying day, and I never passed a car on the road that my rear-sight mirror did not show me the occupants craning forward for another eyeful of my beauty. All this bothered me, but caused me no particular worry.

I could not forget, however, the peculiarity of John Balliol's manner. I felt

sorry for the chap; felt rather as though I had taken advantage of a man when he was down. Elated as I was over my bargain, I thought to myself that if the ranch panned out, I'd send him an additional five thousand later.

But I could not forget him as I had last seen him—glancing over his shoulder as though half expecting something to pounce on him.

CHAPTER II.

I MEET A LADY.

IT happens to be the case in California that the Los Angeles newspapers circulate north, and the San Francisco papers circulate south, until they overlap and die. They circulate swiftly, too. I was up and out of Santa Barbara before seven o'clock, and had the last Los Angeles edition in my pocket when I went to breakfast. The point of this digression will arrive in its proper place.

Beyond glancing over the headlines of my paper, I did not look through it, but jammed it into my overcoat-pocket for later consumption. If only I had read that paper, things might have happened otherwise—or they might not. All's for the best!

I got off in a drenching fog and drizzle of rain, which, I was assured, was the usual southern California "high fog." There were no speed cops out at this time of day, so in half an hour I was finishing the twenty-odd miles of boulevard north of the city, by which time the fog was breaking and the sun streaming forth gloriously.

The worst road I ever took, or ever hope to take, befell me then and there. It was a détour, and there were miles of it, alongside the newly constructed but unfinished boulevard. Then I swung into a bit of presumably finished road, with unfinished culverts at the bottom of each hill; the first one nearly took my head off when we struck. Then more miles, and long miles, of plain road—about as bad as the détour; then boulevard again, thank Heaven, that lasted! This took me until eleven in the morning.

Consulting my road maps, I found that

I was close to a town—the name I have forgotten—and should reach San Luis Obispo for luncheon, with fair road most of the way. Being in a hurry, I stopped in the town long enough to buy gasoline, and I happened to stop at the first gasoline sign I saw, which was near the railroad station. Recalling the circumstance later, I remembered that my car was headed north, quite obviously.

While the tank was being filled, a north-bound train passed through without a stop, and the garage man said that it was the "flier" from Los Angeles. It had left there some time the previous night, and passed here "regular as clockwork." Naturally, at the moment I thought nothing whatever of the incident.

"Good highway all the way to San Luis," observed the man, while he made change for me. "No speed-cop out today, neither. The boy got run into day 'fore yesterday, so burn her up if ye want! But keep your eye skinned north o' San Luis, partner. Gosh! Say, ain't this car a real oriole, though!"

Thanking him, I climbed in and proceeded to "burn her up." The bad roads of the morning had delayed me, and I was anxious to make time. I made such good time that I passed the limited train just before reaching San Luis, and, finding that it was still on the good side of noon, I determined to push on to Paso Robles for luncheon.

About twelve thirty I was in Paso Robles, still untouched of any speed-cop. Leaving my car before the garage in the main street, I began to skirt the block from store-front to store-front in search of luncheon. Now, I do not want to pain the good citizens of Paso Robles; but I was too ignorant to go back a block to the big hotel; I merely asked for a restaurant and was directed accordingly. So I had no kick coming.

At last, on the other side of the block, I found a place, settled down to a table, and to my surprise found the food really endurable. As I ate I continued my perusal of the morning paper. It was the only Los Angeles paper in those parts, I imagine—for I saw no other there or north of there.

The paper was in two sections. And on the front page of the second section was a photograph of John Balliol.

As I glimpsed that picture I felt a premonition, a fore-warning. Beneath it was his name and nothing more. But to the left was a three-column story, entitled: "Scion of Prominent Eastern Family a Suicide." Above this heading, after the custom of that particular paper, was another heading in very small type, being the quotation: "One More Unfortunate."

It was just as well that I had about finished my meal, for now I was past eating. The thing stupefied me, left me blankly dazed; and to think that I had carried this paper with me all the way from Santa Barbara!

I plunged into the story, eager and horrified. There seemed to be no mystery at all in the affair, so far as the newspaper was concerned, except that there was no mention of Balliol having any money. He had merely plugged up his room and turned on the gas; this he had done shortly before midnight. An hour later the thing had been discovered and the story had broken in time for the newspaper to cover it fully in the last edition.

Friends of Balliol had volunteered that he had left a sister, whose whereabouts were totally unknown, and an uncle in Boston. Balliol's father had been a prominent Boston lawyer, who had died some years previously, leaving his family absolutely nothing. Balliol himself had made a little money after leaving college, and some years before had gone on a ranch in the northern part of the State. There he had struggled along, fighting a losing game against the lean wolf, poverty, and so forth. In desperation he had come to Los Angeles, had tried to sell his ranch, and had committed suicide. The story was played up absolutely as that of a man weary of striving against the world, and had evidently been obtained from friends of Balliol.

For that very reason it left me dazed and bewildered! Four months previously, John Balliol had bought a five-thousand-dollar car—a fact of which the newspaper was ignorant. That did not look like the grim wolf stuff. He had expressly told me

that the car "cost him" that amount—not that it had been presented to him.

Of course he had wanted money very badly on those two days when I had seen him. But he had got the money; so why the deuce had he killed himself? The paper stated that his hotel bill in Los Angeles, where he had been stopping five days, had been unpaid, and that his personal effects amounted to nil. What the deuce had he done with my eleven thousand dollars, then? The thing began to look queer.

Investigating more thoroughly, I discovered that Balliol had been known at the bank which had identified him for me; but that he had no account there. One of the bank officers had known him at college. That was all. Nothing was known about his having sold anything to Yorke Desmond; my checks had not been found upon him, and neither had my money. By the time this information came out, the paper would hardly consider it worth reviving the affair. Balliol had killed himself, the present article made a plausible story, and nothing else mattered. He had certainly "gone west" of his own volition and act, and motives were unimportant.

Yet I knew that he had not killed himself because of poverty! The man had been afraid of something—that was it! As I sat there and stared at the paper, I felt absolutely convinced that, if the truth were known, John Balliol had killed himself to escape from something that had made him a nervous, fear-filled wreck! What had happened last night to make him plunge over the brink?

Realizing of a sudden that I was outstaying the noon hour and my welcome, I paid the waitress and asked to use a telephone. By dint of paying the fee in advance, I got Los Angeles by long distance, and presently was speaking with the cashier of my bank.

"Yorke Desmond speaking," I informed him. "I'm at Paso Robles and going north to that ranch I bought. Just saw the paper about Balliol. Did he cash my checks?"

"No, Mr. Desmond," returned the cashier. "If they are presented, we'll take every step to verify the indorsements, of course. It seems to be quite a mystery."

"All right, thanks. Address me at Lakeport in case of need."

I rang off and left the place, stuffing the newspaper into my pocket. One thing was certain: the reporter had got the wrong steer from Balliol's friends! Balliol had *not* killed himself because of poverty—not in the least. Why, he had told me that he had furnished his ranch-house with all electric appliances and the best furniture he could get in San Francisco! No; his grim struggle had been one fine little myth. But it had satisfied the press, and had evidently been meant to satisfy the press—why? To keep the real truth concealed, of course. His friends were shielding him.

It was none of my business, but I could not help checking up on my private convictions. First, John Balliol had been afraid of something—either something in his past, such as disgrace which was hounding him, or something tangible and terrible in his present. Second, this fact was known to those in most intimate touch with him, and was being kept quiet.

Thinking thus, and being more or less absorbed in my trend of thought, I came back to the main street and my bright-hued car. A crowd of natives were standing about in admiring comment, which tended to make me want to get away from there. I jumped in and released the brake, pressed the starter, and was off. Regardless of warning signs, I went through town on second at a pretty good clip, then eased down into third and hit for San Francisco at an even thirty.

"Damn the whole affair!" I said aloud. "What if those checks were stolen from him last night—"

As the words left my lips, I heard a subdued gasp, then an exclamation. It came from the rear section of my car! I flung one startled glance over my shoulder, then I switched off the mag and put on the brakes. As we came to a halt, I half turned in my seat and stared blankly at the young lady and the suit-case.

She was staring at me just as blankly—more so, in fact; she seemed undeniably frightened. She had the suit-case on the short, rear seat beside her, and it was a very good suit-case, of expensive make.

"Who—who—what are you doing in this car?" she stammered, anger creeping into her voice.

I was up against it, somehow; just how, I was not at all sure. She seemed perfectly sane, and I liked her voice immensely. I liked her face, too. It was a healthy, sensible sort of face, and it was exquisite into the bargain. She was dressed in a traveling suit which spelled something better than California tailoring.

"Who are you?" she demanded, half startled and half angry. "Answer me! What are you doing with this car?"

"Driving it, madam," I answered. "I—er—I trust you don't mind?"

She stared at me again. I removed the big, yellow goggles, pushed up my cap, and threw open my duster.

"Now," I said comfortably, "we're on an even basis. Since you wear gloves, I presume you are not a Californian—probably a mere Californiac. I hope you won't think me offensive when I say that this is literally a charming surprise! Probably there's been a mistake somewhere. I don't see possibly how I can have got into the wrong car—"

"Stop that nonsense!" she cried out; and I observed that she had very blue eyes, and remarkably pretty eyes. "Drive this car back instantly!"

"Back—where?" I inquired. "Back—"

"Have you stolen this car?" she flung at me as if she really thought I had.

"No," I said, and laughed. "No, madam. This car is protected from theft by reason of its color. No thief would attack it! The car belongs to me, it really does," I went on, for her appearance of fright sobered me. "If you doubt it, look at the prescribed card here by the dash, which was legally affixed before I left Los Angeles. It bears my name and the car's number—"

"Do you dare pretend that *you* are John Balliol?" she flashed out scornfully.

"Heaven forbid!" I said gravely. "Balliol's dead. I bought the car, madam, day before yesterday. Only an hour ago I saw in the paper an account of his death—"

I cursed the impulsive words. For she stared at me, her eyes slowly widening in

horror, the color ebbing out of her face; then she collapsed in a dead faint.

CHAPTER III.

I RECEIVE A WARNING.

I HAD never had a fainting lady on my hands before, except once when Mrs. Wanderhoof, of Peoria, saw the Fifth Avenue apartment I had decorated for her, and looked at the bill. In that instance, Mr. Wanderhoof had assumed charge. But in this instance—

We were out of sight of Paso Robles, and there was not a soul nor a house in view. There was no water to throw on the girl's face—she was no more than a girl, I judged—and the radiator water was apt to be dirty. So, not knowing what else to do, I swung over into the rear seat beside her and set her slim, drooping body upright against the cushions. As I did so, I was relieved to see her blue eyes flutter open.

Then I remembered a flask of whisky in the door-pocket, and produced it. I got the screw-cup to her lips, but at the first taste she pushed it away.

"Thank you," she said in a low voice. "I—I am very well now."

She seemed unable to take her eyes from me; the color slowly crept back into her cheeks, but in her eyes I read a bewildered fear.

Then she said something strange:

"You said—they killed Jack after all!"

I was puzzled. Jack! Oh, she must mean John Balliol. The poor girl—I must have given her a stiff jolt!

"No," I said gently. "No one killed Balliol, madam. I have the paper here with an account of it; it was suicide. May I ask if you are a friend of his?"

She seemed to shudder slightly, and drew a long breath.

"Yes. I am a—a friend," she said in a low voice, and flushed. I had the uneasy conviction that she was lying to me. "Your words were—a shock. I saw him only last night, before my train left—or, rather, yesterday afternoon.

"When this car passed the train this morning I felt that it was he; I knew we

were ahead at Paso Robles, so I left the train and waited—and I saw the car and got in. When you came along, I thought it was Jack—and meant to surprise him—and when you spoke I discovered—"

She broke off, the words failing her. That told me the whole story, of course. Even from the train she had not been able to mistake this accursed car!

"But," I objected gently, "you must have known that Balliol could not be ahead of you if you saw him just before your train left—"

"But it was only six last night when I saw him! And my train did not leave until nearly midnight—there's been a wreck somewhere, and the trains were all held up. It never occurred to me that he was not in the car—"

She broke off again, staring at me.

"My name is Yorke Desmond," I said, trying to make matters smooth. To my dismay, I saw her eyes widen again with that same startled expression. I could have sworn that she had heard my name before.

"I met Mr. Balliol two days since, on business. I bought a ranch from him, in fact, and bought this car to boot. I'm on my way up to the ranch now. If, as I presume, you were *en route* to San Francisco, I shall be very glad to place the car at your disposal."

She looked away from me, looked at the horizon with a fixed, despairing gaze. My dismay became acute when I perceived that she was going to cry. And she did.

"Oh!" She flung up her hands to her face suddenly. "Oh—and to think that it took place last night—right afterward! And now it's too late—"

A spasm of sobbing shook her body. Not knowing what else to do, and feeling that I had been a blundering ass, I went for a walk and let her cry it out. All my married friends tell me that crying it out is the only solution.

As I paced down the roadside, I found myself extremely puzzled, even suspicious. She had admitted to me that she had seen Balliol the previous evening. But first, when she had not been on guard at all, she had cried out: "They killed Jack

after all!" Upon hearing that Balliol was dead, she had immediately taken for granted that "they" had killed him! Things looked rather badly.

The initials on her suit-case, which I had seen, were M. J. B. Was she a Balliol? No; she had said that she was a friend, and had distinctly said "friend," not "relative." And she had been lying about it, somehow; a minute later she had lied when she told of seeing Balliol the previous night. For her train had *not* been late! It had left Los Angeles a little before midnight, on regular schedule. "Regular as clockwork," had said the garageman as the train had passed us. I remembered that incident now.

This girl must have known Balliol pretty well. She had seen him last night, and he had gone from her to his suicide. And, by Heaven, she knew it! She was lying!

Well, this conclusion gave me quite a jolt, to be frank. That girl did not look like an ordinary liar, and she did not lie with practised ease. Why should she deliberately set out to deceive me? I could not see any light whatever. And the mysterious "they" whom she took to be Balliol's murderers!

The whole affair was strictly none of my business. As I walked back to the car, I took out my pipe and filled it. This girl was in trouble, and my best course was to mind my own affairs and ask no questions.

When I had regained the car, I found that the girl had composed herself and was now staring at the horizon again—a poor, crumpled bit of exquisite femininity. I removed my cap and addressed her.

"Madam, it seems that there has been a mistake somewhere. Please consider me at your service in any way possible! If you want to get to Frisco, we can reach there to-night, I believe."

Her gaze came to me for a moment, and she drew a deep breath.

"Thank you, Mr. Desmond," she said quietly. But she did not give me her name. "Jack told me of selling his ranch to you, but did not mention the car. That was how my mistake came to be made."

Her lips quivered, and she looked down. Then she forced herself into calm again.

"If—if it would not be asking too much, will you take me on to San Francisco with you?" she pursued. "I'm very sorry indeed to have made this terrible blunder."

"It will be entirely my pleasure, madam," I returned rather pointedly. But she did not take the hint, and obviously intended to keep her identity to herself. So I got into the car, and, as I did so, removed the paper from my pocket.

"Here is the newspaper in question," I added, handing it to her.

She took it in silence and leaned back again.

I started the car, and we went on.

For the remainder of the afternoon the two of us exchanged scarcely a word. Once or twice I attempted to divert her thoughts by comments upon the road or the country, but she discouraged my efforts quite visibly. I was too occupied with the road, which again alternated good with bad, to let my mind dwell upon the mystery of the girl.

We made time, however. I took the chance of speed-cops, and let out the Paragon on the good stretches. To my satisfaction, we got into Salinas a trifle before seven o'clock, with fine boulevard all the rest of the way to San Francisco.

"We have about a hundred and twenty miles ahead," I remarked to my companion as we rolled into Salinas. "We had better get a bit to eat here, for we can't make Frisco before ten or eleven o'clock. I imagine you had no luncheon," I added hastily, seeing a refusal in her eye, "so I must really insist that you eat something."

She had been crying again, but assented composedly to my request. We located a Greek restaurant, and went in together. After a cup of execrable coffee and some alleged food, we felt better.

"Now for the last lap!" I said cheerfully as we came out again to the car. "I haven't much faith in the speed-cop myth, so we'll let her out while the going's good. All set?"

"Yes, thank you," she responded, settling herself in the rear.

We started north, and the Paragon flitted along like a bat out of purgatory. She was a sweet boat for speed. When it got

gloomy I threw on the headlights and the big spotlight which formed a part of her equipment, and we zoomed past the California landscape in the finest fashion imaginable. These vast stretches of country were entirely different from the driving around New York, and I liked the change immensely; it was intoxicating!

Then we came to the extraterritorial suburbs of San Francisco, after getting through San José and Palo Alto and safely past the military camp. I am not at all certain where the spot was, but I know the Paragon was hitting a pretty good clip when into the zone of light beside and ahead of us flashed a man on a motorcycle. He passed us like a flicker, then he slowed down and extended his hand.

"Good night!" I remarked, with sinking heart. "There was a basis for the myth after all!"

When we were halted, the motorcycle planted itself at my elbow, and the officer took out his pencil and pad.

"Know how fast you were going?" he inquired.

"I'm afraid to guess," I said meekly. "Your word's good, officer."

"I made it fifty-eight," he observed. "Also, there's a headlight-law in this State, and you've got a blaze of lights there that would blind a shooting star. And your tail-light is on the bum. That's three counts. You seem to be sober."

"Thank Heaven, I am!" I returned. "Anything else?"

He grinned, and took down more information about me than would have filled a passport. Then he gave me a slip and told me to report to a certain San Francisco judge at ten in the morning.

"Isn't there any way out of the delay?" I queried. "I'm trying to get north in a hurry."

"So I judged," he retorted. "Too much of a hurry. Well, I must say you've took it like a gent— Tell you what! Run along with me, and we'll drop in on a justice of the peace. This is a first offense, so you can give bail—and forget it. See? Of course, we're not supposed to give this info, but—"

"But you're a gentleman," I added,

"and I'll make it right with you. If you can fix that tail-light of mine, I'd appreciate it!"

"Jolted out o' contact, I guess," he said a moment later. "Go ahead!"

Half an hour later we were once more on our way, with full instructions as to the proper rate of speed; and I was minus fifty-five iron men, and lucky to get off that cheaply. But the whole thing had delayed us so that it was hard on midnight when we saw the gay white way of Van Ness Avenue off to our left. I halted the car and turned around.

"Asleep, comrade? No? Well, if you'll be good enough to give me orders, I'll take you wherever you're going."

M. J. B. gave me the name of a hotel on Sutter Street where she was known favorably, it seemed, and instructed me to drive up Van Ness. She appeared quite at home in the city. I followed her instructions, and ten minutes later drew up before the doorway of a quiet family hotel. I helped her out of the car with her suitcase, but she refused to let me take it inside for her. She held out her hand.

"Thank you, Mr. Desmond, for your kindness," she said earnestly. "And—I've been trying to think over what's right to do. Would you take some very serious advice from me?"

"I'd take anything from you," I said, smiling. "Shoot!"

"I am not joking, Mr. Desmond," she made grave response. "Please, please do *not* go on to the ranch! I can't give you any reasons; but I mean it deeply. For your own sake, do *not* go on to the ranch! Not until the end of the month at least. Good-by!"

She picked up her suit-case and was gone, leaving me staring after her.

CHAPTER IV.

I HEAR A BULLET.

OUT of sheer decency, I had to seek another hotel, naturally. I did not pay much attention to M. J. B.'s warning. At midnight, after a tremendously hard day's ride in a car, after a stiff

shock and a fainting-spell, the girl would be in pretty bad nervous condition. I took for granted that she was overwrought, and let it go at that.

As I wanted to reach Lakeport the next night, and had a plenitude of bad roads ahead, I was up and off at seven the following morning. Ferrying over to Sausalito delayed me, and before getting to San Rafael I was off on a détour which took me around nearly to Petaluma. The road was fair, but outside Petaluma I picked up a tenpenny-nail held upright by a scrap of wood, and it took one of my cord tires in a jiffy. Fixing that held me up a little while.

I got to Santa Rosa in time for an early luncheon, and discovered that I was going to make Lakeport in the afternoon, barring accidents. This was good news. I also discovered that the last place I could get any liquid refreshment was at the famous tavern kept by one McGray, on ahead. So, about one o'clock, I drew up before the wide-spreading place, in the shade of the immense oaks that shade the tavern-grounds, and went in to get a long, slim drink.

In view of the after-developments of that same day, it might be well to set down that I had one drink, and one only. Upon returning to my car, I came to an abrupt halt in some astonishment. A young man was standing by the off rear wheel, and he was not observing me at all. He was well dressed, but rather swarthy in complexion; this country was full of Italian, French, and Swiss grape specialists, as I had learned coming north, so there was no stating the antecedents of the young man. What interested me, and seemed to be absorbing him, was the fact that he had a knife in his hand and was industriously pecking away at one of my rear tires!

At times I yield to impulse, and this was one of the times. I reached that young man in two jumps and banged him solidly into the car, then jerked him upright and planted my fist rudely against his nose, allowing him to sprawl in the dust.

He picked himself up and went away in a hurry, swearing as he went.

"Of all the infernal deviltry!" I ex-

claimed as he vanished among the trees. "That fellow certainly had his nerve—"

I was relieved to find that he had effected no damage, beyond a hole in the casing that had not yet reached the breaker strip. Taking for granted that he had had a drop to much, I climbed into the car and departed.

Within no long time I had reached the village of Hopland, my destination on the highway. From here a toll-road ran over the hills to Lakeport, and I turned off without pause in the village, thankful that the end of my trip was in sight—as I thought.

That road was a brute—thick with dust, barely wide enough for two cars to pass, and with crumbly edges and a sheer drop at that, and a steep up-grade for five solid miles! In places it was a very beautiful road, winding up between forested growths of redwoods and giant conifers. As I nursed the Paragon up that road at fifteen miles an hour I had plenty of time for reflection.

Back to questions again. Out of the general muddle these had resolved themselves into certain distinct and coherent queries; and they fell under two heads:

John Balliol: 1. Whom had he been afraid of, and why? Unknown. 2. What had brought him to suicide? Not poverty, certainly. 3. What had he done with my checks? When they were cashed I would know. 4. Why had he needed the money by a certain night—the night he was to meet M. J. B., the night he killed himself? Unknown.

M. J. B., the Fair Unknown: 1. What was her connection with Balliol? Mystery. 2. Did his suicide hinge on his meeting with her? Problematical. 3. She had said: "They killed him!" Were "they" microbes or gunmen? Unknowable. 4. Why her warning against my going to the ranch?

My answer to that final query was: "Because she liked me!" It was a satisfactory answer, too. It made me glow happily. I had always been a sedate bachelor, but I must say that M. J. B. was the most attractive girl I had ever met, and to find her interested in me was, to say the least, very pleasing.

My only regret was that I had left her in

San Francisco. I thought of going back to the city as soon as I had inspected my ranch—

Just then I observed that my radiator was boiling, what with the grade and the hot sun; and ahead of me was a spring beside the road, with a turn-out. I halted the car at the turn-out, baled cold water into the radiator with a rusty tin can, and sat down to smoke and let my engine cool off. It was a cool and pleasant spot, under lofty pines.

I was just knocking out my pipe when I heard voices and the creaking of a vehicle. Around the sharp bend ahead came a horse and buggy, the latter occupied by three men. All three carried rifles and knives, and beneath the buggy trotted a big hound. They nodded to me and drove to the spring, letting the horse have a mouthful. Obviously, they were natives.

"Good afternoon," I returned their greetings. "Why the artillery? Sheriff's posse?"

They grinned and laughed.

"Deer season opened yesterday," one of them replied. "Thought you'd come up from the city for the same reason."

"Not I," was my answer. "Plenty of deer around here?"

"That's what they say—but there ain't none when we want to get 'em. Most of the folks in Lakeport are out, from the Chink laundryman to the sheriff."

They drove on down the trail, but as they went I could see that they were looking back and making observations—probably on my car. Until they passed out of sight at the next curve they were still staring backward and discussing something: either me or the car. I took for granted that it was the car, and it was.

The deer season did not interest me particularly, because I have no taste for hunting. Cursing the foot-thick dust in the road, I got into the car and went on.

At last, to my deep relief, I attained the summit of the divide, where the toll-gate was located. I paid my dollar fifty and had a magnificent view of Clear Lake in the distance amid the hills, then started downward. The descent was steep enough and winding, but three miles of it brought

me to the floor of the valley, in a region of jackpine and brush and hogbacks.

And, as I turned a quick curve, there before me in the road stood two deer—does. For the fraction of an instant they gazed at me, then they flung away. Like brown streaks they went over the nearest hill and were gone. Instinctively I halted the car, gazing after the graceful creatures. A moment later I shoved my foot toward the starter, but I was still staring at the hillside; instead of touching the starter, my foot touched the accelerator—and touched it with a particular pet corn. I smothered an oath and leaned far forward to clutch my aching toe, for the stab of pain was acute. And, as I leaned over thus, a bullet came exactly where I had been sitting, at about the height my head had been.

I know it was a bullet, because I *heard* it—and because the effect was terrific. It plumped through the rear of the top, on one side; it passed above me, and its shrill song was lost in a rattling smash of glass as it took the top half of my wind-shield into slivers. Then came the crack of a rifle to prove that it was a bullet.

If I had not happened to lean over, and to lean over pretty far, that bullet would have finished me—sure!

My first instinct was to start the car and get away; then I checked the impulse and slid out to terra firma. Some one not very far off was shooting recklessly, and it made me angry.

Hopping out in the road, I stared around. Naturally, I saw nobody. If any hunter had mistaken that maroon top for a deer, he was not advertising his mistake to me.

"Shove fer home, Balliol!" cried out a rough voice. "Shove quick, or he'll give ye a closer one!"

The voice came from somewhere behind and to the left of the car. Balliol! I was being mistaken for Balliol—and there was no mistake being made!

As this astounding fact percolated to my brain, I wasted no time asking questions, but climbed into the car, started her up, and rolled away from there in a hurry. Balliol! Who in the name of goodness was trying to assassinate John Balliol?

In that rough voice from the hillside

had been a deadly earnestness which had impelled me to flight; it brought home to me in a flash that I was up against something serious. Under the blue sky, under the hot August sunlight, the thing was extremely matter of fact. I thought again of the young man who had been jabbing my tire, and of the warning administered by M. J. B. The sequence was pretty plain!

Absurd as it seemed, this land-cruise of mine was actually taking me into perilous waters.

It was the fault of the car, of course; people thought that Balliol was driving it. As I rattled across a bridge and entered upon excellent dirt roads, the realization cheered me immensely. Balliol had admitted that he had gotten into trouble up here of a private nature. Well, the minute his enemies discovered that I was not John Balliol, but Yorke Desmond, I would be left alone! Yet why, in such case, had the girl warned me? I gave it up.

With a suddenness for which I was unprepared, Lakeport jumped into my immediate foreground. I had anticipated a county seat of some importance, but I found it a village struggling along the lakeshore, with a single main street and outlying residences. The valley had been settled by Missourians back in the fifties—and they were still here.

Presently I descried a charming square and court-house, with a fine new Carnegie Library down by the lake front. Except for a couple of docks and some moored launches and houseboats, the lake front consisted of reed-beds and was not beautiful. But the lake itself, with the mountains opposite, was magnificent!

Volcanic action had done its work well in this place, and it was the sweetest spot I had seen in California. Once the town was wakened from its sleepy repose, it would be a second Geneva.

As the deed to my ranch had been sent on here for recording, I drove direct to the court-house, left the car, and walked up to the county recorder's office on the right of the main building. There I found everything in order and awaiting me. I inquired for the sheriff, meaning to set him on the

trail of my near-assassin, but found that he was hunting deer. So was every one else in town who could get away, even as my hunter-informants had stated.

I walked half a block to the bank, with whom my Los Angeles bank had corresponded. The bank was closed, for it was after four o'clock, but I telephoned and obtained admission. I presented my credentials to the banker, an extremely cordial chap, and asked directions to my property. He showed me exactly where my ranch lay and outlined the road.

"Tell me one thing confidentially," I inquired; "do you know why Balliol left here? Do you know anything against that property—any reason why I shouldn't have bought it?"

"Certainly not!" he answered with evident surprise. "Balliol left because of his health, I believe, and for no other reason. The property is absolutely good, and a give-away at the price, Mr. Desmond! You got a good thing."

He was in earnest, beyond a question. But as I sought the street again I found myself wishing that he had phrased it in some other fashion than "because of his health."

After my late experiences, it had an ominous sound!

CHAPTER V.

I DISCOVER SKULLS.

I STOPPED at the hotel that night and the next morning departed to my ranch.

It lay about twenty miles from town, by road, as I had to get around Mount Kenocti to reach it. By water it would be much closer. The ranch lay at the edge of the lake, and Balliol had done his clearing with the eye of an artist. The house itself was built of rough-hewn timber and cement, and was admirably situated at the edge of a small bluff over the water; about it stood gigantic white oaks, while the orchards ran back on the other side of the road.

Although I had half expected more excitement on my trip, I met with nothing untoward.

In Lakeport I had loaded up with camping supplies, a bit of forethought which came in handy. As I ran down the side road to the house and opened up the gates I was filled with delighted anticipation; with half an eye I could see that the place was a gem of beauty! The gates open, I ran the car inside, then shut the gates again. I was in my own domain at last.

Fortunately, I had telephoned the electrical people on the previous afternoon, so that I found the electricity turned on—the place was on the power-line, which in California gives right to the juice, whether it be in a desert or a mountain cañon.

Of course, one expects to get something for ten thousand cash; but as I opened up the house and saw what things were like, I was astounded.

Balliol must have laughed in his sleeve at finding me to be an interior decorator. The place was furnished—and literally crammed—with things which, in New York, would have been beyond price. They had come over with the Missourians in prairie schooners, and Balliol had bought them at various farms for a song.

There were two rosewood pianos, one an importation from Holland; several ancient clocks, with original glass, in running order; the chairs were fiddlebacks of crotch-mahogany; there were two satinwood cabinets, genuine Sheratons. And the beds! Each of the two bedrooms was furnished complete in walnut; not the burl walnut of late Victorian days, but the old carved French walnut of the earliest period. All in all, that furniture was a delight to the heart.

On the more practical side, the place was ready for use, from the bedding to the electric stove in the kitchen. By the time I had investigated everything and opened up the house, the morning was nearly gone, and it was about eleven o'clock when I descended the short path that ran down the bluff to the lakeside. Here was a boat-house, with a short dock beside it; when I had gained access to the boat-house by means of Balliol's keys, I found a launch of small size but sturdy construction, and a fine Morris canoe. Fishing-tackle strung

the walls, and in one corner was a drum half filled with gasoline.

I took out my pipe and sat down in the launch. Not only was everything here which Balliol had described, but more—much more. To think of what I had dropped into astounded me. It was much too good to be true!

The acres of fruit-trees, which must be worth a good sum as income property, could no doubt be rented to neighbor ranchers. I resolved to see about it at once. All I wanted was this house and what was in it—no gentleman's ranch for mine, but a gentleman's country home.

My ideas had changed since seeing the place. Brought face to face with pear and walnut trees, as it were, I lost enthusiasm; fishing, tinkering with old furniture, and painting suited my lazy inclination a good deal better.

"I'll get something to eat," I said, knocking out my pipe into the water, "then I'll try out the launch and visit the neighbors, and see about renting the orchard. It has a crop on right now, so it ought to be a good thing."

I trudged back up the path, and when I reached the house I noticed a curious thing. The foundations were of cement, and a low cement wall-foundation ran the full length of the front veranda. There were a number of curious projections from that cement, and when I came up to the wall and examined them I found that they were human skulls!

The gruesome find rather staggered me. They were real skulls, set in the cement wall so as to project three or four inches, and they were in good condition. I am not superstitious, and I had no objections to this scheme of decorations on personal grounds; but it struck me that Balliol had carried his search for novelty just a bit too far.

"It's only a step from *beaux arts* to bizarre," I reflected, "and my friend Balliol seems to have taken the step. Where did he get 'em. I wonder? Two—four—six—an even half-dozen! Wonder if he put any more inside? I didn't notice them—"

I hastened inside the house, my thoughts

on the big hearth and chimney of cobbles; but I confess that to my relief I found it was quite lacking in further remains. All the skulls were outside.

With that, I paid little more attention to the matter, practically dismissing it from my mind—and for excellent reasons. I passed out on the veranda, meaning to go around to the car at the side of the house, and get my provisions; but at the first step I came to a dead halt, with a cold chill at my throat.

Upon the cement floor of the veranda were wet tracks; they began at the door and ended abruptly in the middle of the floor.

Yet the veranda was empty.

Those were not the tracks of a man. Something in their very appearance sent queer horror rippling through me, sent my gaze quickly over my shoulder at the empty house.

I had been gone not twenty minutes; these tracks were still wet, and whatever had made them must have come from the lake while I was down there.

Undeniably shaken by the mystery of it, I rushed back through the house to the back door. Absolutely nothing was in sight; I ran around the house, past the car, and saw nothing.

At the edge of the bluff I could see the shore-line below—and it was deserted.

I came back to the veranda and stared again at those tracks, now fast drying. They frightened me; there was something about them vaguely unnatural! And never in my life had I seen anything like them. Of course, I had opened the wide veranda windows, and a bird might have walked in, then flown out and away—

But, a bird of this size? A bird from the lake? There was no other water, except in the well behind the house, from which the house itself was supplied by an electric motor.

And were those the tracks of any bird alive? I doubted it. The size was immense; the shape was that of a small central foot, with four immense toes—and beyond these the marks of long claws, unless I were mistaken!

What was the thing—monster or halluci-

nation? I tried to argue that I was self-deceived, and I failed miserably. There were the wet prints on the cement before my eyes, slowly drying away! They could not have been made more than a few moments before I returned from the boat-house.

I felt suddenly prickly cold and very uncomfortable, and turned into the house. To go ahead with luncheon was, for the moment, impossible. I went into the living-room, and, as I passed one of the two pianos, I suddenly descried a book-lying open upon it.

I paused to glance at the book; to my astonishment I saw upon the printed page a cut of the exact print which I had seen on the veranda. Beneath the illustration was the legend:

Fossil imprint of Pterodactyl, Marsh Collection, Yale College.

The realization smote me like a blow, as I leaned over the book and read. Balliol had left that book open here, of course! Balliol had seen the same prints—or had he seen the thing itself? Had he seen the living actual pterodactyl, the creature that had become extinct when the world began, the flying dragon of myth and legend? He had seen the tracks, at any rate, just as I had seen them.

This proved that I was under no delusion about those prints. But—was the thing credible? It was not. The bowl of this lake was an ancient volcano, the whole valley was of volcanic creation; mineral springs abounded; a few miles distant were quicksilver-mines; the water in my own well was mineralized. Now, I had read stories about prehistoric monsters coming back to the world *via* extinct volcanoes and bottomless lakes, and so forth—stories, that is, which were purely fiction. Had such a thing really come about here in Lake County, California, upon my own ranch?

"Not by a damn sight!" I exclaimed, throwing the book across the room. "Balliol was frightfully nervous; I'm not. He may have been frightened out of here by his imagination—but I'm going to be *shown!*"

Then and there I dismissed the unnatural

fears which had shaken me. If the creature existed, I would shoot it; if the whole affair were one of those queer mental quirks which come to all men, if the prints were caused by some natural agency not at the moment obvious to my deduction, well and good.

I went around to the car and hauled in my provisions. The electricity was on in the house, and I got the electric range working and managed to make myself a fairly decent meal. At times I found myself desirous of casting quick glances over my shoulder, at windows or doors, but I repressed it firmly. I was not going to get into Balliol's condition if I could help it.

Lunch over, I dragged a rocker to the veranda and enjoyed a smoke, with the beauties of the lake outspread before me. By reason of a deep inundation of the lake-shore, the bluff on which my house was built faced almost due east; opposite me, across the bight, I saw the roofs of a farmhouse, doubtless my nearest neighbor in that direction.

It occurred to me that if I wanted to talk business, the noon hour would be an excellent time to do it.

So I went down to the boat-house again, opened up the water doors, and filled the boat's tank with gas. She was in good shape, and almost with the first turn of the wheel the spark caught. A moment later I was chugging out into the lake, feeling intensely pleased with myself, and I headed directly down to my neighbor's dock among the tules or reeds.

The neighbor himself I found sitting on his front porch. He was a brawny, bearded man of stolidly slow speech, Henry Dawson by name. I introduced myself as the new owner of Balliol's ranch, and was in turn introduced to Mrs. Dawson and two strapping Dawson boys. They all eyed me with frank curiosity.

I lost no time in setting forth my business. Dawson, like all farmers, was content to let me talk as long as I would. When I cautiously broached the subject of renting my land, however, he nodded his head in slow assent.

"Ought to rent," he stated, as though he thought just the opposite. "Maybe. Don't

know as folks would want the house, though."

"I want that myself," I said. "What I want to rent is the fruit land. Could you handle it?"

At this direct assault, he hemmed and hawed. He was a very decent chap, however, and when I made it clear that I was not after extortionate rentals he came around quickly. I could see that the house had killed the place, for some reason.

"Just what's the matter with that house?" I demanded, while he was making up his mind about rental. "Is it those skulls in the front wall?"

"Blamed if I know," he rejoined slowly. "Reckon it's that, much as anything. Gives folks a creepy feelin'."

"Why didn't Balliol get along there?"

He gave me a slow stare. "Get along? Why, I guess he got along all right. He was kind o' queer in his ways, ye might say; but he got along right well, Mr. Desmond."

"Where on earth did he get those skulls, though?"

"Dug 'em up right on the ground, I heard. He done all the work himself on that house, except what he hired done. Guess it was an old Injun cemetery; there was a heap of Injuns here in the old days. Quite a bunch here yet. They sent 'em to a reservation, but the poor devils got homesick and were 'lowed back. Right prosperous farmers, some of 'em, to-day. Well, about that orchard, I reckon we can manage it if we settle on the right terms."

We settled, then and there, at terms which were satisfactory to both of us.

CHAPTER VI.

I BUY A GUN.

I ASKED Dawson about big birds, but he said there was nothing larger than a buzzard around the lake; and presently I went home again. The rest of the day passed quietly, and after writing a few letters, chiefly on business, I went to bed and slept the sleep of the just.

I was well satisfied with my new home, and for the coming six months my partner

in New York could run the decorating business without my aid, so there was nothing to worry me.

The next morning I was up and off early, this time in the canoe, and got in an hour's fishing before sunrise. Although it was distinctly the wrong season for fish, I trolled down along the shore off the reed-beds, and picked up two fine bass, both over three pounds.

About sunrise I headed for home, well content with results. I wanted to visit Lakeport this morning, chiefly to see if there was any news from my Los Angeles bank about those checks. That Balliol had struggled along in poverty on his ranch, as the newspaper account had said, was quite absurd; that he had died in poverty, with eleven thousand dollars in his pocket, was entirely nonsensical.

Across the little bay from my place I paused suddenly. I had already learned from neighbor Dawson that Balliol had obtained his skull-decoration from relics of the red men, so their gruesomeness was removed in some measure. But—that did not explain what I now saw.

As it chanced, I had found a pair of field-glasses in a niche in the cobbled chimney, and had brought them along. Now I raised and focused on my house; rather, on the front wall under the veranda, where the skulls were located. To my uneasy surprise, I found my eyesight corroborated. The eyes of those six skulls were gleaming and flaming with a brilliant crimson!

Optical delusion? Not a bit of it. Reflections from the rising sun on the concrete which filled the skulls to the bone-level? Not a bit of it; such reflections would not come in a scarlet flame from the eyes of each and every skull. They were reflecting the lurid sunrise squarely at me, of course; but those hollow eye-sockets were filled with red fire.

I dropped the glasses, seized the paddle, and spurted for home, savagely determined to run down the uncanny hoodoo which had settled on this house of mine. As I drew nearer to my landing, I could see those red skull-eyes flaming more and more distinctly. There was no optical illusion whatever.

Then I was in the boathouse beneath the bluff, and of course the house was shut from view. Making fast the canoe, I paused to pick up a broken oar to serve as club, then ran up the path. Puffing, I gained the bluff in front of the house.

"Confound it!" I exclaimed blankly. "Am I going off my head?"

The crimson flame was gone from the skull-eyes. There was not a sign of it. In the sockets the white cement came close to the surface, and there could be no mistake.

I was completely taken aback by this startling development.

Of course, I told myself, there must be an explanation. Perhaps the sand in the cement was glassy, and at certain angles reflected the sun—that would be plausible in a single instance, but it would not do for twelve eye-sockets. Whatever the explanation might be, it was certainly beyond my comprehension. Then, again, the color of those eye-sockets had been a distinct blood hue.

As I stood there staring at the cement wall, I jumped suddenly. From the kitchen of the house came a banging crash, and I remembered a double boiler I had set out on the stove. Some one—or something—was in the kitchen, and had knocked it over!

Swearing under my breath, I leaped to the veranda and ran through the house. Now, I glanced at every room in my course, and I can swear that the house was absolutely empty. So was the kitchen when I reached it. Yet by the stove, whence it had obviously been knocked by some direct agency, the double boiler lay on the floor, a pool of water surging from it, and running directly to the stove from the doorway—but not back again—was a single line of muddy tracks. They were the tracks of the pterodactyl!

I was staggered, right enough. A prehistoric monster with a wing-spread of twenty-five feet does not hide easily in a bare kitchen; yet I looked around as if expecting to see the brute before me. Then I rushed to the windows. The yard was absolutely empty. The monster might be somewhere in the encircling trees; it might

have flown out and down to the lake while I was coming through the house; but, by the gods, it had been *here*. Those muddy tracks on the floor reassured me, certified to my sanity and common sense.

Hastening outside, I looked around. The barn, which served as garage, was empty. I could discover no hole about the house where any such beast could hide. I flung my club whirring amid the nearest trees, and strode back into the house.

"Damn it!" I remarked as I set about cooking my two fish. "I'm going to get a shotgun and settle this mystery. I don't believe in fictionists' dreams coming true; and as for this flying dragon, I'll settle him with buckshot if I get one crack at him."

The red eyes of the skulls had paled into insignificance before this mysterious visitant, and I forgot the lesser matter for the time being. That double boiler knocked off the stove, and those muddy tracks, settled the pterodactyl once and for all as a living creature, and I meant to go after him. I only regretted that I must have missed him by less than a minute.

My second day in my new home was beginning in a way to make me realize why Balliol had come to Los Angeles with the jumps riding him.

An hour after these things happened I had closed up the house and was chugging merrily away from the boat-house in my launch. Navigation was no difficult problem here; I merely had to head straight up the lake, which I did. The voyage was monotonous, as are all launch trips in ordinary craft, and as I throbbed along the wind-ruffled water the memory of M. J. B. recurred to me with a twinge of self-irritation that I had not even her name.

Why had she warned me? And who was the dark-complected chap who had cut at my tires back at McGray's Tavern? And who had fired that shot at me? These were perplexing problems, but M. J. B. was more perplexing yet. I once again pictured her face before my mental vision, the trim sweetness of her, the capable manner which she wore, the energetic womanhood that lay in her blue eyes—

"Hang it!" I exclaimed. "I'm getting

romantic—it won't do, Yorke Desmond! You'll never see that girl again, so forget her."

Easier said than done. I was still thinking of her as I tied up to the dock at Lakeport and walked up-town past the library to the main street. And within five minutes I was thinking of her again.

The telegraph-office was a dingy little place, messages being received here by phone. When I inquired for any wires, the young lady in charge handed me an envelope. I found it to be a night-letter from the cashier of my bank in Los Angeles. It read as follows:

Check for ten thousand, cashed yesterday First National, San Francisco, returned here this afternoon. Indorsements John Balliol, Martha J. Balliol. No further developments suicide. Good luck with ranch.

The ulterior meaning of this message gradually percolated through my brain, and I wandered forth to a bench on the courthouse square and sank to rest.

The check had been cashed the same morning I left San Francisco, and it had been cashed by Martha J. Balliol—no other than my M. J. B.! No wonder she had seemed to know my name, when she must have borne in her pocket-book that check of mine! Balliol had given it to her the previous night, just before his suicide; so much was evident.

But—she had been Balliol's sister, then! Why had she not admitted her identity? Perhaps she would have done so, I argued, but for the news of her brother's death. After that, to find herself traveling in her brother's car, with the man who had bought that car and the ranch to boot, must have disconcerted her immensely at first. And after telling me that she was a friend of Balliol, she probably had lacked the nerve to confess her white lie and give her real name. Perhaps she had merely considered it unnecessary.

I felt relieved. Folly though it undoubtedly was, I had indulged a secret conviction that M. J. B. was Balliol's sweetheart; now she proved to be his sister, but although this fact afforded great relief, it none the less gave me new anxiety. I have

always noticed that girls, especially very charming and attractive girls like Martha Balliol, are all too seldom free and heart-whole. Somebody else always seems to get acquainted with them first. That was one reason that I was still a bachelor!

But never had I met any one like Martha Balliol. The more I thought about her, the more I felt like a fool for having left her in San Francisco as I had done. At last, realizing that I had bungled everything very sadly, and that it was now close to noon and I was hungry, I got up and sauntered toward the bank seeking information. On the way, however, I passed a hardware store, and bethought me of the pterodactyl. There was an attractive display of guns in the window, so I entered and besought the proprietor to sell me a shotgun.

"Want a license, I s'pose?" he inquired amiably. "I'm the game warden here, y' know. I dunno why you're goin' after deer with a shotgun—"

"I'm not," I rejoined. "I'm going after pterodactyls, and there's no closed season on *them!*"

He rubbed his chin, and with a mystified air agreed with me. "Well, I reckon not. Say, you the man just bought the Balliol ranch?"

"Yes. Desmond is my name."

"Stark's mine. Glad to meet ye. Seen any ghosts around there yet?"

"Ghosts?" I met his eye, and he chuckled. "What do you mean?"

"Well, that place is built right close to where the old Injun chiefs is buried, and I hear tell they's ghosts around there at times."

"Nothing doing," I rejoined cheerfully. "Not so far, anyhow. Where's the best place to get a meal in town?"

"Well, ye might go several places, but if I was you, I'd go up to Mrs. Sinjon's, back o' the court-house."

He directed me, and leaving the shotgun until after luncheon, I went to the boarding-house back of the town square.

Ghosts, eh? That was a new angle. Had the natives played unpleasant jokes upon John Balliol, because of his skull decoration? No; the very notion was silly.

Grave, stolid farmer folks like Dawson were not given to such trivial foolishness. Besides, Balliol's affrighted nerves must have come from months and years of fear, not days or weeks. And jokes do not extend over months and years.

I found the boarding-house simple and thoroughly delightful, the cooking wholesome, the company very mixed, ranging from a stage driver to an itinerant preacher. It was a warm noon, and conversation flagged. I was just finishing my meal, when, in the intermittent and broken-off speech of farming men, two workmen at the other end of the table spoke.

"Heard young Balliol's sister come in this mornin'," said one.

"Uhuh," said the other, and looked toward the stage driver. "Good looker, Mac?"

The stage driver glanced up. "Got *him* beat all hollow," he observed. "Come in on the morning train. Going up the lake, I reckon."

I paid for my meal and departed, feeling a bit dizzy. Balliol's sister! What the deuce was she doing here?

Calling for my gun at the hardware store, I arranged about mail at the post-office, then went down to the dock. And out on the dock, all alone, *she* was standing!

CHAPTER VII.

I MAKE DISCOVERIES.

TO see me sauntering along with a gun under my arm, seemed to cause her some alarm. And, too, she seemed very self-repressive; her greeting was cold. Then, with a quick change of mood, she smiled.

"Are you going hunting like every one else, Mr. Desmond?"

"I am, Miss Balliol," I responded.

An adorable flush stole into her cheeks, but her blue eyes did not falter.

"I must apologize for that," she said simply. "It was abominable! But at first, I—I said that I was a friend—"

"And you turned out to be a sister," I cut in. "Please, Miss Balliol, don't explain; I figured it out for myself later on,

and I understand perfectly. But, if it is not an impertinence, may I ask: what on earth you're doing here? This is an outlandish place in which to meet any one—particularly a person of whom one has thought so much and often."

Her gaze dwelt upon me thoughtfully, searchingly, even suspiciously.

"To be candid, Mr. Desmond, I hadn't the least intention of confiding in you," she stated coolly. "But I can't help believing that you *are* honest—"

"Oh! Who said that I wasn't?"

"You implied as much—by buying my brother's property here."

"Thanks," I murmured, feeling pretty well dazed.

"I am going to Dawson's farm for a short visit," she went on. "If you care to see me there, I'll be very glad to explain matters fully. I think the up-lake launch is about due."

I did not know anything about the up-lake launch, but I took chances.

"No," I said positively. "She ran on a mud bar this morning and is stuck with a broken propeller. If you want to get to Dawson's, will you let me take you in my launch? There's not another to be hired, I assure you. Besides, it will let us talk on the way."

I have a suspicion that she knew that I was lying; but if so, she did not mind. At all events, she accepted my invitation. As she had only her suit-case, we were chugging away from Lakeport inside of ten minutes. She added to the mystery by stating that Dawson's took boarders, and that, while she was totally unknown here, she had determined to pay a visit to the lake on business. I began to feel somewhat uncomfortable.

"There are several things to straighten out, Miss Balliol," I observed. "First, your remarks about my honesty. Then, if you remember, when I told you about your brother, you exclaimed that 'they' had killed him—"

She whitened a little.

"Please!" She checked me swiftly. "Let me take things in order, Mr. Desmond. I should not have made that remark about your honesty; it requires another

apology from me. Now, let me get these things out."

She opened her handbag and began to look over papers. Meantime, she went on to give me some idea of her brother's past life, and of her own.

Balliol, senior, who had been a wealthy lawyer in Boston, had died suddenly, six years previously. He had left few resources except a family residence near Boston, and two small, undeveloped ranches here in Lake County. Martha Balliol had at once fitted herself for a position as stenographer, remaining at home with her mother. John Balliol, a boy nearly through Harvard, had come to California and had set to work developing the two ranches on Clear Lake.

He had worked like a Trojan, too. As the girl told me of what he had accomplished lone-handed, I felt a pang of pity for him. Two years before this present time, he had sold one of the ranches for a handsome sum. He had sent a large part of the money home to relieve conditions there and pay off the mortgage on the family home. Then, meaning to bring his mother and sister to Clear Lake, he had built his house on the twenty-acre ranch, and had built it well. The work had taken him nearly a year, for he had done most of it with his own hands.

During that time, however, some trouble had developed. To balance this, he had made money off his crops, and had ordered his Paragon car, specially built. What with one thing and another, he had spent every red cent that he could raise, being confident of the future.

"Then," went on the girl, "the trouble increased. What it was, I don't know; I can't find out! He only wrote about it once, and then he sent this photograph. It explains itself, so far as I can discover. Jack must have made an enemy of this man, and took his picture while they were having an argument. That was like Jack—he had no lack of nerve."

"Or of nerves either," I added to myself, as I took the letter and picture which she handed me.

The picture was a kodak snapshot of a very angry young man shaking his fist at the camera. There was no doubt about

his anger; a snarling, venomous rage was stamped all over him! As I recognized his face, however, an exclamation escaped me; for, beyond all question, it was the same swarthy young man who had tried to cut my tires at McGray's Tavern

"What's the matter?" broke out Miss Balliol. "You know him?"

"I've seen him," I commented. "Tell you about it in a minute."

Beneath the picture was written: "John Talkso registering rage."

Taking the letter, I read a marked paragraph. It dealt with the same John Talkso, a name whose very queerness made me wonder what nationality the young man could be. Balliol had not explained this, but had written:

Am having more trouble with the individual whose picture I enclose. However, I hope to obviate further trouble with him. The whole thing is so silly that one hesitates to write any explanation. Don't worry about it.

That was finely indefinite, was it not? It was.

"About six months ago," resumed Miss Balliol, "we got into terrible trouble, and I was afraid to write Jack about it, because we were trying so hard not to increase his worries. Mother was very ill and we had to mortgage the house again; then a private bank failed—a bank in which father had left us a block of stock. The stock had never been any good, and then on the failure of the bank we had to pay a tremendous assessment to secure the depositors—and that finished everything for us. Mother died suddenly. When it was all over, I wrote Jack what had happened. Then I went back to work."

I did not hasten her recital, and she paused for a few moments. We were chugging merrily down the lake, and the heat of the sun was relieved by a cool breeze which brought stray locks of Martha Balliol's hair about her face in distracting fashion.

"It was a hard blow to Jack, of course," she went on. "Now, what has happened I don't know and can't discover, Mr. Desmond. He wired me a month ago to meet him in Los Angeles at once—he wrote little or nothing in the interim. I came to Los

Angeles and he did not turn up; I could not get into touch with him at all. Then, one morning, he called me up on the telephone and told me to catch the night train for San Francisco, and to meet him at the station an hour before the train left.

"I felt that something terrible was happening, but he gave no explanation. When we met at the station, he was a nervous wreck, and he was frightfully mysterious about everything. He told me to go on to San Francisco and that I'd hear from him *en route*."

"How did you recognize his car from the train?" I broke in. "You'd never seen it."

"No, but he had sent us the colored pictures when he had ordered it built, and he had sent photographs of it after he had received it—it's such a distinctive car that no one could possibly mistake it!"

That was true enough, as I had discovered.

"Well, that night at the station," she pursued, "Jack gave me an envelope and said to open it after the train had started; he made me promise him. Then he kissed me good-by and said not to worry, that he had fixed everything all right for me. That's the last I saw of him, Mr. Desmond. Later—on the train—I opened his letter and found your check to him, with this note."

She handed me a note in Balliol's writing, which read as follows:

DEAREST SIS:

The game's up as far as I'm concerned; you'll hear about it soon enough. They were too much for me at the ranch. They drove me out, to put it bluntly. If I hadn't had too much cursed pride, I might have done otherwise; but I fought them, and now they'll get me sure if I go back.

Besides this, I've got in bad with another deal. If I go through with it, then you'll lose everything, and I can't face it. I guess I'm pretty well broken down, sis. I've been a fool, that's all. There's only one way to secure to you what can be secured, and I've taken it. I've sold the ranch for ten thousand, which is far below its value, and enclose the check. Cash it immediately in San Francisco. Good-by, dear little sis, and make the best of it.

JACK.

That was on the face of it a cowardly letter, considering that an hour later Balliol

had killed himself; but I could not help remembering all that he must have endured and fought for in the past years.

"Still we haven't solved the secret of the mysterious 'they,'" I observed, "except that John Talkso, whoever he is, is concerned in it. This letter, too, speaks of another deal—vague and mysterious as ever. Miss Balliol, do you have any idea why you brother did what he did in Los Angeles?"

She shook her head. His suicide was still a mystery to her.

I told her about my encounter with John Talkso, and with the shot from the hills. She had warned me in San Francisco merely on impulse, for she had felt that there was something vaguely but distinctly hostile about that ranch; also, she had been distrustful of me, for she had imagined that I might have been concerned in some conspiracy to beat down the value of the ranch and get it cheap. There is the contradiction of woman for you!

Well, inside of twenty minutes we were on a solid footing of friendship. I managed to convince her as to my entire ignorance of the trouble; and I could see that the poor girl had been driven nearly wild by the mystery which had shrouded Balliol's latter days.

As we drew up the lake, I suggested to Martha Balliol that she might care to stop at the ranch and look over the house.

"There may be books or other personal belongings of your brother's that you'd like to keep," I explained. "Really, Miss Balliol, I'd feel much relieved if you'd go through his effects and take everything that you'd like to have. I've felt very badly over the deal, because I've seemed to take undue advantage of his circumstances; and I feel as though some reparation and expiation were due you."

Later, I thought, I'd add at least five thousand to the purchase price of the ranch, but of course this was not the moment to broach such a matter. Since it was early in the afternoon, Miss Balliol thanked me and consented to stop in at the ranch, for Dawson's lay just across the bay and we could run over there in ten minutes.

Accordingly, we ran in to the dock, and

on this occasion there was no red flare in the skull-sockets. Nor did I say anything to her about the skulls, for the subject was not a very pleasant one to bring before the girl's mind. I was careful to steer her up the hill and then around to the side of the house, and as we reached it, I heard a bell buzzing away.

"Hello!" I ejaculated. "I ordered the telephone unplugged this morning—the instrument was in, of course. Some one's calling to see if the line's working, maybe. Go right in and make yourself at home, Miss Balliol—I'll answer the call."

The telephone was in the kitchen, and a moment later I was at the instrument.

"Yorke Desmond speaking!" I said. "Hello?"

It was my friend the banker at Lakeport speaking; and what he had to say was one little earful—it certainly was! What he wanted from me was the address of John Balliol, for no one in these parts seemed to know that Balliol was dead. I wanted to know why he wanted it.

Being a banker, he was mighty hard to pin down and hold on the mat; but at last I made him cough up the information. It appeared that some time previously Balliol had gone on the note of a friendly rancher to the tune of six thousand dollars. Fire had wiped out the rancher's property—this was over in High Valley—and the man himself had broken both legs in an accident; and it was up to John Balliol to make good the six thousand, now overdue.

"What date was it due?" I demanded. The banker told me. That note had become due the day *after* I had bought Balliol ranch!

"You listen here," I said, thinking fast. "I'll come in to Lakeport to-morrow and see you; and I'll make good that sum. Savvy? Never mind my reasons. I owe Balliol that money, so I'll explain further to-morrow."

I rang off and dropped into the nearest chair.

Light on the subject? I should say so! This was the "other deal" to which Balliol had referred; and he sure had been a fool to indorse the other man's note. He knew it, also, and knew that to make it

good would wipe *him* out. That was why he had given up the fight.

He had sold out his ranch to me at a give-away price, in order to secure the ten thousand to his sister. He had given her the money, then had killed himself. He had left no estate whatever. Whether or not the law could reach that ten thousand, I did not know; at all events, he had, of course, figured that it was safe to Martha. The banker had told me that Balliol had sent back one thousand from Los Angeles—the thousand which I had given him for his car, of course.

This explained Balliol's haste to get the money. It did not explain the enmity which had existed between Balliol and this John Talkso, but of that I took little heed at the moment. Instead of giving Martha Balliol the extra five thousand, I would pay it over to the bank, clear Balliol's name, and square myself with the dead man, as I looked at it. Martha Balliol need never know of it.

I had figured this out to my own satisfaction as the best possible course, when from the front of the house I heard a cry, followed by a scream. Then I remembered that cursed pterodactyl, for the first time!

CHAPTER VIII.

I GO HUNTING.

MARTHA BALLIOL had fallen against the cobbled chimney of the fireplace, and lay in a crumpled heap, arms outflung. To my horror, I thought her dead—then I saw, upon the floor, the muddy tracks of the flying dragon. She stirred a little, and at the motion, I leaped for the door.

The room was empty save for the girl, but I knew that the creature was somewhere close at hand—and I had left the shotgun in the boat!

I went down the path like a madman, secured the gun, tore open the box of shells, and as I ran back up to the house I loaded both chambers. As I came to the doorway, I saw that Martha Balliol was sitting up, holding one hand to her head. She stared at me.

"What—what was it?" she exclaimed.

"That's what I want to know." I turned my back on her, perhaps ungallantly, to seek some sign of movement from the yard. Nothing stirred. If the thing had been here, it had gone quickly; it had vanished among the trees. "I heard you scream—"

"Something—some one—came up behind and pushed me." Martha Balliol was standing now, and anger was flashing in her blue eyes. "I heard nothing at all; the surprise made me scream, and I must have fallen against the stones, here—"

She suddenly saw the tracks upon the floor, and paused. Her eyes widened with a swift fear as she pointed to them. I nodded carelessly, then left the door and placed a chair for her.

Without exaggeration, but omitting nothing, I told her about the skull-eyes which I had seen only that morning, and also of the pterodactyl. She listened in silence, but her incredulous gaze made me squirm a bit.

"You speak as if you believed it," she commented at last.

"Look at the tracks for yourself!" I countered. Then, getting her Balliol's book, I showed her the illustration in question.

That shook her fine scorn of the story. She declared herself quite unhurt and refused to let the matter drop; but sat in thoughtful silence for a little.

"There's something queer about this house!" she said at last, and rose. "Let's look at those skulls, Mr. Desmond! I believe Jack said something about them in one of his letters, but I don't remember the exact words—they were Indian relics, I believe. He did not say that he was building them into the house!"

Together we went outside, and while she inspected the skulls, I scrutinized the trees and shores, but vainly. The devilish thing had hidden itself absolutely, and I could see no particular sense in going to find it.

"I can't honestly say that I care for this scheme of decoration," declared Martha Balliol. "Jack was always given to odd notions like this, however. As for your story of the red eyes—well, I'll pass on it when I see them for myself! Now let's go

up and look at the house; that is, if you still care to have me do so."

"Do you still want to?" I queried, surprised by her coolness. "You've had a shock—"

"I've been very silly, you mean," she corrected me severely, as we walked toward the steps. "About this prehistoric thing, Mr. Desmond—didn't you say that the steps always came in to the center of a room, then ended? The foot-prints, I mean. Well, that does not look right to me. Of course, the creature *might* have come so far, then have flown away—"

"You admit there's a creature, then?" I struck in.

"I admit there's something to make those tracks," she said, and laughed merrily. "I wish I had looked over my shoulder when I felt the shove!"

"Perhaps the confounded place is haunted," I said gloomily.

We spent half an hour going over the house. Miss Balliol picked out a few pictures and other things which she would like to have, and I promised to pack them up for her. She was planning to stay for a week or two with the Dawsons.

Although she did not say it in so many words, I realized that her reason for coming here had been to settle the mystery which surrounded her brother's death. And she would settle it. There was no doubt that within a few days she would find out about that note at the bank. The other trouble, the trouble which had smashed Balliol's nerves and which was somehow concerned with John Talkso, whoever he was, lay in the background unsolved.

So, when she had finished with the house, I told her frankly what the banker had just telephoned to me. To be more exact, I told it with some additions and evasions, for I did not think it necessary to say that I was paying off the five thousand. I got around that by saying that the creditor had paid up, having unexpectedly gotten some money, and that the banker had phoned to let Balliol know it was all right.

Beyond question I got things a little involved, but Martha Balliol did not probe the story. To her mind, her brother might still have been living had he only learned

in time that he would not have to meet the note. It was a sad business, of course. Out of justice to the dead chap, I felt in honor bound to relate his reasons for suicide, which did his heart better credit than his head.

Yes, taking it up and down, it was a sorry and a sordid and a dashed brave little story. Balliol was a fool and a coward, perhaps, but the thing he did was done in a bravely silent fashion.

Martha Balliol cried a little, and tried to laugh a little; but she finished with a clear and sober understanding of why her brother had killed himself. Then she said that she thought I had better take her on to Dawson's by road, the sun being pretty hot on the water; so I went out and got the car ready. And I kept the shotgun handy.

The road, which ran down along the lake shore, was very dusty—the dust was six inches deep in places. This did not trouble the Paragon, of course, and we hummed into the Dawson yard in fine fettle. Mrs. Dawson was there to receive us, and under her wing Martha Balliol vanished almost at once.

I paused to help myself to a few nectaries from a tree near the house, then set forth for home. I drove rather fast, for the road was good; and I got almost to my own place when something happened. Both front tires blew at the same instant!

Fortunately the Paragon was a heavy boat, or we'd have gone topsyturvy; as it was, I almost went into the trees. Of course cord tires do not act as those had acted without very definite reasons. The reasons were in the shape of stout nails, set in scraps of board which had been buried in the dust. I am afraid that I said some very unscriptural things as I drove home on the rims.

Who was the miscreant? The thing was intentional; those bits of board had been planted since I had left home. I cursed some more, while I sat working on the tubes and then pumping up the refitted tires sufficiently to reach Lakeport and an air hose.

One thing was sure: I had inherited John Balliol's enemies! Of this I had no further doubt. If some one were lurking about the

place, it was a case of catch or get caught! And the afternoon was young, or young enough, to do a good deal of catching in!

With these brilliant deductions crowding me into action, I began to use my head a little. Obviously, I had two sets of enemies—human and inhuman. The human type was very possibly the man John Talkso. The inhuman was the pterodactyl. I was as much concerned over one as over the other; and as I abandoned my tire labors and glanced up at the house, a sudden scheme struck me.

I picked up my shotgun and sauntered around to the front of the house. For a moment I stood at the lip of the bluff, watching the water and the shore, planning just what I would do. Then I hurried down the path to the boat-house, and beneath its shelter laid the gun in the canoe and covered it with fishing tackle and some burlap. After this, I shoved out and paddled down the shore, away from Dawson's.

Since I kept close in to the shore, I was in five minutes beyond sight of my place, and to any one watching, was off for a fishing trip. But I jerked in to shore and landed before I had gone fifty feet farther. Pulling up the canoe, I stowed it among the bushes, took my shotgun, and struck directly up the steep slope.

It was a hard scramble, but I made it, and in fifteen minutes I gained the road, hot and puffing. I was not a mile from the house, and I went down the road at a good walking clip, certain of being unobserved. The trees to either hand effectually concealed me.

When at length the trees opened up to the left, I had an excellent view of my house and farmyard. I paused, made myself comfortable among the trees, got my pipe going, and began to watch, flattering myself that I had flanked the entire place very neatly. I was well placed to see whatever was going on. But nothing was going on, it seemed. Things happened around that place in bunches, and just now was a quiet moment.

I sat with the gun over my knees, and reflected that this had been a crowded day. It was very nice to think that Martha Balliol was just across the bay at Dawson's

farm. The neighborhood seemed very agreeable to me. Of course, the poor girl was overcome because of her brother, but this was a grief which lay in the past; she had nothing unhappy ahead of her. I wished that I were as sure of the same for myself—

Then, abruptly, in the sunlight-flooded clearing around my house, I saw that for which I had been watching and waiting!

CHAPTER IX.

I MEET JOHN TALKSO.

IN plain sight of me, walking out across the open space toward my house, was a man. He carried a bucket in one hand, and a basket in the other hand. These he set down at the veranda steps, and then turned, scrutinizing the lake and shore. His face showed clearly.

A low word escaped me as I watched. I recognized that face on the instant; he was no other than the enemy of John Balliol, the man whom I had met at McGray's Tavern—the man with the queer name of John Talkso! An instant later he had vanished inside the house.

"Now," I said to myself, "here's one mystery about to be solved in a hurry!"

A moment longer I waited. Talkso appeared again, stooped over the basket he had been carrying, and then went around to the front of my house; what he did there, I could not see. He reappeared, took up both bucket and basket, and went into the house.

I started for the house with the gun under my arm, both barrels loaded.

When I got safely over the gate and into the yard, I knew that I had my man this time; there was going to be an explanation! To judge from his attire when I had seen him at McGray's Tavern, this Talkso had money—and he was going to settle what he owed me, chiefly in the matter of tires. What he was doing in my house was another thing. And if he had fired that bullet at me from the hills—

At that juncture I heard the telephone ringing. The kitchen windows were open, and I stole toward the back entrance. An

instant later, I heard a man speaking at the telephone: Talkso was answering the call! His infernal impudence made me chuckle, for at the instrument he must be standing with his back to the door. He was playing directly into my hand!

"He's not here—out fishing," I heard him say. Somebody, obviously, was asking for me. "Who's this? Oh, hello! This you, Sheriff West?"

There was a moment of silence, during which time I gained the back door and paused. Talkso was standing at the telephone, right enough, entirely unconscious of my presence.

"The hell you say!" he exclaimed suddenly, a snarling intonation in his voice. "None of your cursed business what I'm doing here, Mr. West! What? You come out here if you want to—I'll be gone by then."

Again he paused, and again made angry response to the sheriff.

"Nonsense! You've nothing on me—don't try bluffing *me*, Mr. West! You can't do it. That shot? Go ahead and tell Desmond all you want! You know damned well you can't prove anything on me, and I know it too! I'll have Desmond out of here inside of a week—oh, I won't eh? Much you know about it!"

With a snarling oath, he slammed the receiver on the hook.

As he did so, I pushed open the screen door and stepped inside. Talkso caught the squeak of the door, and whirled about like a cat.

"I guess the sheriff was right, Talkso," I said cordially, over the sights of my shotgun. "Hoist your hands—thank you; that's the way it's always done in the films. So the sheriff's coming out here, eh? Good thing. He can take you back with him, unless we come to terms."

Talkso stood perfectly motionless, his hands slightly raised. The surprise of my appearance had confounded him; but now passionate rage convulsed his swarthy features, and in the snaky blackness of his eyes flickered a scornful hatred. The contempt expressed in his eyes rendered me uneasy.

"You!" he uttered, flinging the word at

me in almost inarticulate fury. "What d' you think you're doing, anyway?"

"I don't think," I assured him. "I'm perfectly confidently about it, my friend. By the way, did you fire a shot at my car the other day, mistaking me for Balliol?"

"I wish to hell the bullet had got you!" he foamed.

"You're a charitable cuss. And since then, you've given me a lot of tire trouble, to say the least. What's the idea, anyhow? What's back of the feud between you and Balliol?"

He seemed to take no notice of the question.

"You poor fool!" he said scornfully. "I could have killed you any time in the past day or two—"

"Well, you didn't," I chipped in. "Come ahead and loosen up! Let's have an explanation!"

To my horror, I realized that he was coming at me; he had the silky, invisible movement of a snake. To blast the life out of him with that shotgun was impossible. He seemed to be leaning forward, leaning toward me, farther and farther—and then he was in the air and on me.

He gripped me and the gun together, and we struggled for it. I was ready enough to drop the gun and slam into him with my fists, but I saw no use in letting him perforate me with my own gun. So I hung on, and we fought it out by arm-power.

In the middle of it, we lost balance and went to the floor—and the shotgun went off with a deafening explosion, between us.

I realized quickly enough that I was not hurt, and rolled backward, leaping to my feet. Both barrels had exploded, sending both charges into the telephone, which hung wrecked and useless against the wall. Talkso was not hurt either. First thing I knew, he was up and coming at me with a yell, brandishing the shotgun like a club.

According to jiu-jitsu experts, the easiest thing in the world is to lay out a man bearing down on you with a club. As it happens, I am not a j.-j. expert.

Talkso had been an easy mark in the road by McGray's, but he was something else now. He shoved the butt of the gun

into my stomach, and when I doubled up, he slammed me over the skull with the barrel. Then he swung up the gun for a finishing stroke.

By this time I was just beginning to realize that it was me for swift action or the count, and I came out of my dream. To be candid, it is only in books that two men get into a hot mix-up and follow the Queensbury rules with meticulous chivalry; in a real scrap of real men, it's hit hardest with anything that will count!

I followed the most natural rules, and being backed against the stove, I went for Talkso with an iron skillet that was handy. I ducked the gun, banged him over the ear, and then swung the skillet on his wrist. He dropped the gun in a hurry, and to even matters I dropped the skillet and began to finish off his education.

He knew something about fighting, and he tried to fight, but that skillet had him groggy from the start. In about two minutes he was trying to get through the door, so I let him out—and hopped right after him. I caught him by the pump, and laid him out finely.

When he came to himself, I had him tied wrists and ankles with dust-cloths from the car, and was wasting good mineral water pumping over his torso. In spite of all my kindness, however, he would do nothing except splutter curses at me, so finally I tired of trying.

"Very well, then, lie here and talk to yourself!" I stated in disgust. "When the sheriff gets here, maybe we'll learn a few things."

I was dead right about that, too!

CHAPTER X.

I BUILD A WALL.

ON the morning after my encounter with John Talkso, I was working like a beaver on the skull wall in front of my house. I had been working there since dawn.

In front of the wall, I had a solid framework of staked boards, edge to edge, six inches from the wall's face. The end spaces were closed with other boards.

From the shore I had toted barrow-loads of sand until my palms were blistered, and from the barn behind the house I had brought a couple of sacks of cement which had lain there unmolested. For lack of a mixing bed I was utilizing a depression in the rock at the head of the path. Bolders of all sizes were handy, and with these I had partially filled the space in front of the wall, enclosed by the boards.

I mixed my concrete rapidly and after four or five batches had been shoveled into the gap, my work was done. The former face of the wall, together with the protruding skulls, was nicely buried behind six inches of concrete.

I was lighting my pipe and vastly admiring my handiwork, when I heard a voice.

"Mercy! What on earth is the matter with your telephone? Here I've walked all the way over here just to see if the pterodactyl had eaten you up—"

It was Martha J. Balliol, flushed and laughing.

"Hurray!" I exclaimed. "I've been building a wall—sure, the phone is wrecked! But I have a few things to show you; important things, too! Come up to the veranda and sit down while I explain."

"But are you a mason?"

"No," I said. "I'm a pterodactyl—and I can prove it."

When she was sitting in one of my porch chairs, which I placed in the middle of the veranda floor, I excused myself and got the bucket and basket which John Talkso had left behind after departing on the previous afternoon.

"Now shut your eyes, Miss Balliol! Promise not to peep."

"Cross my heart," she returned gaily.

I slowly crossed the floor to her, then stepped away a pace or two.

"Open!"

Her wondering gaze fell upon the concrete floor. From the door of the living room to the side of her chair extended a line of fresh, muddy pterodactyl tracks! She almost jumped, then her blue eyes went to me.

"Exhibit A!" I said, holding up the bucket of muddy water, and in the other hand the plaster-of-Paris cast which had made the tracks. "John Talkso was here yesterday. So was the sheriff. Talkso left these things behind—and he's not coming back."

Her face sobered.

"What do you mean, Mr. Desmond?"

"Well," I explained, "this Talkso was an educated chap. He knew what a pterodactyl was, you see—and he knew that other men knew! Then he left some other things. Typical of them was a set of twelve pieces of round, crimson glass; these, placed in the eyes of those skulls, made a fine crimson effect when seen from the lake. You get the idea?"

Her eyes widened.

"Talkso? That man? But what about my brother—"

"I'm coming to that. Between the sheriff and Talkso, we got the whole thing straightened out yesterday afternoon."

After telling her something of what had happened, I explained.

"Your brother, Miss Balliol, had peculiar notions of what to do with Indian relics. In building this house, he uncovered the so-called graves of the former chiefs of the Indian tribe which inhabited this valley—and which still inhabits it in places. Your brother used the skulls for decoration, and once set in that concrete, the skulls could not be removed without destroying the foundation wall of the house. You see?"

She nodded, watching me with eager absorption.

"Well," I pursued, "this John Talkso found out about it. He came after your brother in a rage and there was a fight on the spot, in which Talkso got worsted. Then he set to work to drive your brother off.

"He invented some very clever stage stuff, such as the pterodactyl tracks and the red glass in the skull-sockets; he also had some other tricks in his basket, and all of them clever. He had managed to make every one believe that this house was haunted. He had once or twice attempted your brother's life—"

"But *why?*" broke in the girl, astounded. "Whatever made the man act so? Was he mad?"

"Not a bit of it! He was sane. He was also well educated. But—mark this—he was *not* a white man; he was a half-breed Indian, and he was the last of the Indian chiefs in this particular valley. He had all the Indian's sense of outrage at seeing the skulls of his forefathers ornamenting this house. So, naturally, he tried to drive out the desecrators—your brother and me.

"He did not go in for murder in cold blood. Yesterday he merely entered the room behind you and gave you a shove, for example. In general, he contented himself with such things. But when I met him at McGray's Tavern and beat him up, he lost his head. He hiked over another road from McGray's, a shorter road east of the river, and got here ahead of me. But the sheriff and another man were hunting, and they saw Talkso deliberately ambush my car. It was assault with intent to kill, right enough, and it meant the coop for Mr. Talkso."

"But that wall you were building!" exclaimed Martha Balliol.

"That's the sheriff's idea; our sheriff is a bright man," I returned, laughing. "The skulls, you note, are now buried completely, yet the foundation of the house is not damaged. Thus the feelings of John Talkso have been smoothed over, particularly as he faced the penitentiary if they were *not* smoothed over! He and his family are rich ranchers across the lake, and beyond having him bounded to keep the peace, I'll not punish him further."

"Then you think—"

"Sure! Everything's all right!"

A little later that day, Martha Balliol was bidding me farewell. There was nothing to keep her here further, she said; at least, she knew of nothing. Nor did I, unhappily. She would go back East and take up the broken threads again.

"But," I proffered, "will you not let me take you as far as Lakeport?"

"It will be very kind, Mr. Desmond. Of course!"

"It's a promise?" I anxiously inquired.
"Word of honor?"

"Eh?" The blue eyes inspected me with surprise. "Why, of course it is!"

"Good." I lighted my pipe and puffed contentedly. "To tell you the truth, the car is useless—I failed to fix my tires efficiently. There's no gas to run the launch on; I forgot to fill up when we left Lakeport, I was so excited over your ar-

rival! Naturally, we do not want to walk; so, Miss Balliol, we must go by canoe."

"By canoe?" she echoed. "Why—Lakeport is miles and miles away! And I can't paddle a stroke. We'd *never* get there!"

"Well?" I said inquiringly.

She met my eyes. Slowly a rosy glow crept into her cheeks; then she turned—and passed toward the canoe.

(The end.)



BACK HOME

BY ROBERT BAKER

YES, Jim's right t' home,
Back from Over There;
Only brought an empty sleeve,
Calls it his "soovineer."
It's kinder changed the boy,
This fightin' game;
'Pears like he's more of a man
Than when the draftin' came.

Never thought he'd 'mount to much,
He was so all-fired wild;
Me and ma allowed we'd raised
A shiftless, thankless child.
He's allus helpin' now,
Don't kick at any chore;
Won't let mother lift her hand,
You'd think 'twas 'g'in' the law.

He's mighty sobered, too,
And kinder thoughtful looks;
Talks about the "Rights of Man"
And wants to l'arn from books.
Got a medal? Bet your life!
Don't brag about it, though;
Brought his wounded captain in,
Through hell he had t' go.

*I don't know what this war has done
For other boys in line,
But this I know, thank God, it's so:
It's made a man of mine!*

Cursed

by George Allan England.

Author of "The Shyster-at-Law," "The Brass Check," "Hypnotized," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

CAPTAIN ALPHEUS BRIGGS, of the clipper-ship *Silver Fleece*, of New Bedford, a huge, black-bearded bucko of the worst type, even for the strenuous days of the old windjammers, having stolen a Malay girl, Kuala Pahang, at Batu Kawan, refused pointblank to give her up, even though he knew the natives might rise and slaughter every white man on the ship.

Even when the girl's mother, Degan Jouga, a *nenek kabayan* (witch woman), came on board and cursed him, he refused and drove her off the ship, and when his mate protested, the skipper, in drunken rage, beat him. The mate, Scurlock, accompanied by a cabin-boy he had rescued from the bucko skipper's rage, went ashore; and the skipper, who had been somewhat held in check by the diplomacy of the ship's surgeon, Dr. Filhiol, finally fell into a drunken sleep. While he slept, the second mate, Wansley, took the ship out of Batu Kawan, but not being familiar with the uncharted coast, ran ashore on a sand-spit in Motomolo Strait.

There the pursuing natives, in nearly a score of boats, overtook them the next day. A parley ensued, in which the Malays demanded the girl, on penalty of instant death to Scurlock and the boy, whom they had in the boat with them. Despite the near-mutiny of his white crew, Briggs refused, and the two were decapitated. Briggs then turned his small cannon on the boat.

The entire fleet then attacked, but Briggs had the stolen girl brought on deck, and threatened to throw her to the sharks swarming about the vessel if they didn't haul off. They continued to approach, however, and Briggs made good his threat. The battle which followed was a desperate one, but in the end all the native craft were sunk, the *Silver Fleece* kedged off, and, with a deck full of dead and wounded, she managed to escape, ultimately reaching Boston with her rich cargo.

It was the 18th of February, 1868, when all this took place.

And now comes a lapse of fifty years—to the 24th of June, 1918. Captain Briggs had, in the mean time fallen in love, married, and been wholly reformed by his gentle wife, whom, however, he had lost at the birth of his first child. This son also had been killed tragically in early manhood, and the daughter-in-law he had loved as his own was also taken. But one object of his affection remained—his grandson, Hal, a young man now, and a replica—physically—of what the captain had been fifty years before. It was for this grandson that he was waiting as he sat on the veranda of his beautiful and peaceful home, Snug Haven, on the Massachusetts coast. Age had not bowed the giant. His hair and beard were now snow white, and time had etched deep lines in his rugged face, but he was still a vigorous and powerful man.

In the kitchen—or galley, as they called it—Ezra Trefethen, an ex-ship's cook, now his only companion and general factotum, was singing a sea chanty, when an old buggy drove up to the door, and an old man hailed the captain. It was Dr. Filhiol, now old and broken physically, but as clear sighted as ever mentally. For long the two men talked of their lives—since neither had seen the other since the days of the *Silver Fleece*. Then, as the captain sighted the schooner that was to bring Hal from Boston, he made his old friend comfortable, and hastened down to the dock to meet the ship when it tied up.

And then—up from the cabin came what seemed to be the ghost of himself at his worst—drunk, raging in brutal, unreasoning rage.

CHAPTER XIX.

HAL SHOWS HIS TEETH.

FERGUS McLAUGHLIN, down though he was, had not yet taken the count. True enough, Hal's first blow had felled him to his own deck, half-stunned; but the wiry Scotchman, toughened by

years of bucko work in many seas, had never yet learned to spell the word "defeat." For him, the battle was just beginning. He managed to get to hands and knees. Hal lurched forward, to close with him, to finish him with never a chance of getting up; but now old Captain Briggs had Hal by the arm again.

This story began in the *All-Story Weekly* for January 11.

"Hal, Hal!" he entreated. "For God's sake—"

Once more Hal threw the old man off. The second's delay rescued McLaughlin from annihilation. Dazed, bleeding at mouth and nose, he staggered to his feet and with good science plunged into a clinch with the onrushing Hal.

This unexpected move upset Hal's tactics of sudden, smashing violence. The Scot's long, wiry arms wrapped round him, constricting him, hampering his fist-work. Hal could do no more than drive in harmless, random blows at the other's back. They swayed here, there, tripped over a hawser, almost went down. From the crew and from the spectators on the wharf ragged shouts arose, some of fear and anger, some of purely malicious delight and animal excitement, for here, indeed, was battle-royal of the finest. The Airedale, barking madly, added to the general tumult; and the sound of feet, running down the wharf, told of other contingents hastily arriving to witness the delectable scene.

"By gum!" approved the helmsman, forgetting to chew his quid. He had more than once felt the full weight of McLaughlin's fist. "By gum, now, but Mac's in f'r a good takin'-down. If that lad don't fist him proper, I miss my 'tarnal guess. Sic 'im, boy!"

Blaspheming, Hal with a supreme effort tore McLaughlin loose, flung him back, lowered his head and charged. But now the Scot had recovered a little of his wit and skill. On deck he spat blood and a broken snag of tooth. His eye gleamed murderously. The very excess of Hal's rage, insensate, animal, betrayed the boy. His guard opened. In drove a stinging left-hander to his ear. McLaughlin handed him the other fist, packed full of dynamite. The boy reeled back, gulping.

"Come on, ye college bratlin'!" challenged the fighting Scot, and smeared the blood from his mouth with one swift pass of the hand. "This here ain't your ship—not yet!"

"My ship's any ship I happen to be on!" snarled Hal, circling for advantage. Mac's lesson had already taught him to be cautious. Old Captain Briggs's imploring cries

fell from him, unheeded. "If this was my ship, I'd wring your neck, so help me God! But as it is, I'll only mash you to a jelly!"

"Pretty bairn!" gibed McLaughlin, hunched into battle-pose, with bony fists up and ready. "Grandad's pretty pet! Come here to uncle, till I spank ye! Arrrh! Ye *would*, eh?" as Hal bored in at him.

He met the attacking rush with judgment and cool skill. True, Hal's right went to one eye, closing it; but Hal felt the bite of knuckles catapulted from his neck in a glancing blow that, had it landed square, would almost have snapped the vertebra.

Hal delayed for no more jockeying. Bull-like, he charged. By sheer weight and fury of blows he drove Mac forward of the schooner, beside the deck-house. Amid the turmoil of cries, shouts, cheers, the battle raged. The jostling crowd, swift-gathered, shoved and pushed on deck and on the wharf, to see this epic war. Half a dozen bets were placed, even money.

McLaughlin, panting, half-blind, his teeth set in a grin of rage only less savage than Hal's, put every ounce he had left into each blow and into attempts to parry, to guard. But Hal's greater weight and longer reach outclassed him.

A minute, two minutes they battled, furiously, straining, sweating, lashing. Then something swift and terrible connected with Mac's jaw-point in a jolting jar that loosened the universe and set the solar system spinning in mad vortices. Mac's head snapped back. His arms flung up. He dropped, pole-axed, into the scuppers.

For the first time in five-and-twenty years of fighting, clean and dirty, Fergus McLaughlin had taken a knockout.

A mighty shout of mingled joy, exultation, fear and rage loosened echoes from the old fish-sheds along the wharf. Three or four of the crew came jostling into the circle, minded to avenge their captain. Sneering, his chest heaving, but ready with both fists, Hal faced them.

"Come on, all o' you!" he flung, drunk with rage, his face distorted, mad, bestial. A slaver of bloody froth trickled from the corner of his mouth. "Come on!"

They hesitated. Gorillalike, he advanced.

Back through the crowd the overbold ones drew. No heart remained in them to tackle this infuriated fighting-machine.

Wild, mocking laughter rose. Unmerciful gibes were chivvied at the quitters. Hal set both fists on his hips, flung up his head and panted:

"Apologize, will I? I, a passenger on this lousy tub, I'll apologize to a bunch of down-east roughnecks, eh? If there's anybody else wants any apology, come on! It's my little job to clean 'em out. I'm here!"

None caught up the gage of battle. Bursting with fury that had to vent itself on some object, Hal swung toward McLaughlin. The Scot had landed on a coil of hawser in the scuppers, that had somewhat broken the impact of his fall. Hal reached down, gripped him with gorilla strength, hauled him up and flung him backward over the rail. Twice, thrice he struck him with a fist reddened by McLaughlin's blood. He wrenched at the unconscious man's arm, snarling like an animal, his face distorted, eyes glazed and staring. A crunching sound told of at least one broken bone.

Shouts of horror, of protestation fell unheeded from his ears.

"My Gawd, he's a killin' on him!" quavered a voice. "Men, all o' ye—we can't stan' by an' see him do murder!"

Old Briggs, nerved to sudden action, ran forward.

"Hal! For God's sake, Hal!"

"You stand back, grandad! He's my meat!"

"Hal—"

Before any one could intervene, Hal raised McLaughlin high above his head, with a mingling sweep of wonderful power. Roaring, he dashed the Scotman to the bare planks with a horrible, dull crash. Then he hauled back one foot and kicked the senseless man full in the mangled, blood-smeared face.

A kind of communal gulp and gasp of terror rose up then. Men shrank and quivered, stricken with a kind of almost superstitious fear. All had seen fights aplenty; most of them had taken a hand in brawls and scuffles of more or less violence—usually more—but here was a new kind of malice, a strange variety of passion. And

silence fell, more tense, more heart-searching, than any tumult.

Hal faced the outraged throng, and laughed with deep lungs.

"There's your champion, what's left of him!" cried he. "*He* won't bullyrag anybody for one while, believe me. I've tamed him for you. Take him—I'm through with him!"

Of a sudden the rage seemed to die in Hal, as if spent in that last, orgiastic convulsion of passion. He turned away, flung men right and left like children, forced a path for himself through them and leaped down the companion. Swiftly he emerged with a suitcase. To his trembling, half-fainting grandfather he strode, unmindful of the low and ominous murmur of curses and threats directed against him.

"Come on, grandpop!" he said in another and more normal tone. His voice did not tremble, as will the voice of almost every man after a storm of rage. His color was fresh and high, his eyes clear; his whole ego seemed to have been vivified and freshened, like a sky after tempest. "Come along, now. I've had enough of this rotten old tub. I've given it what it needed, a good clean-up. Come on!"

He seized Captain Briggs by the elbow—for the old man could hardly stand, and now was leaning weakly against the hatchway housing—and half guided, half dragged him over the rail to the wharf.

"Shame on you, Hal Briggs!" exclaimed a leather-faced old lobsterman. "This here's a bad day's work you've done. When he was down, you booted him. We wun't fergit it, none of us wun't."

"No, and *he* won't forget it, either, the bragging bucko!" sneered Hal. "Uncle Silas, you keep out of this!"

"Ef that's what they l'arn ye down to college," sounded another voice from somewhere on the wharf, "you'd a durn sight better stay to hum. We fight some, on the North Shore, but we fight fair, anyhow!"

Hal faced around, with blazing eyes.

"Who said that?" he gritted. "Where's the son of a pup that said it?"

No answer came. Cowed, everybody held silence. No sound was heard save the shuffling feet of the men aboard the *Sylvia*

Fletcher, as some of the crew lifted McLaughlin's limp form and carried it toward the companion, just as Crevay had been carried on the Silver Fleece, half a century before.

"Come on, gramp!" exclaimed Hal, again. "For two cents I'd clean up the whole white-livered bunch. Let's go home, now, before there's trouble."

"I—I'm afraid I can't walk, Hal," quavered the old man. "This has knocked me galley-west. My rudder's unshipped and my canvas in rags. I can't navigate at all." He was trembling as with a chill. Against his grandson he leaned, shaken, ashen-faced, helpless. "I can't make Snug Haven, now."

"That's all right, grampy," Hal assured him. "We can dig up a jitney if you can get as far as the street. Come on, let's move!"

With unsteady steps, clinging to Hal's arm and followed by the dog, old Captain Briggs made his way along Hadlock's Wharf, the way he had come. Only a few minutes of time had elapsed since he had strode so proudly down that wharf, but what a vast difference had been wrought in the captain's soul! All the glad elation of his heart, which had shone forth from his eyes and had irradiated his whole being, had now faded and vanished more swiftly than a tropic sunset turns to dark. The old man seemed to have shrunken, collapsed, fallen in. His vigor, his firm strength—where were they now? Fifteen little minutes seemed to have weighted and bowed down his shoulders with at least fifteen years.

"Oh, Hal, Hal!" he groaned, as they slowly made their way toward the street, with a little straggle of curiosity-seekers trailing after them. "Oh, Hal, my boy, how could you ha' done that?"

"How could I? After what he said, how *couldn't* I?"

"What a disgrace! What a burning, terrible disgrace! You, Hal, a Briggs—just back from college—"

"There, there, grandpop, it'll be all right. Everybody'll be glad, when they cool off, that I handed it to that bully proper."

"This will make a terrible scandal. The

Observer will print it, and maybe it'll get into the Boston papers, and—"

"Nonsense! You don't think they'd waste ink and paper on a little mix-up aboard a coasting-schooner, do you?"

"This is more than a little mix-up, Hal. You've stove that man's hull up, serious. There's more storm brewing."

"What d'you mean, more storm?"

"Oh, he'll take this to court. He'll sue for damages, and get them, too."

"He'd better not!" snapped Hal, grimly. "Just let him try it. I've got more for him, where what I handed him came from, if he tries it!"

"Hal, you're—breaking my old heart."

"D'you think, grandpa, I was going to stand there and swallow his insults? Do you think I, a Briggs, was going to let that slab-sided P. I. hand me a bunch of that rough stuff? Would *you* have stood for it?"

"I? What do you mean? How could I fight, at my age?"

"I mean, when you were young. When you were at sea. Didn't *you* ever mix it, then? Didn't you have guts enough to put up your fists when you had to? If you didn't, you're no grandfather of mine!"

"Hal," answered the old man, still holding to his grandson as they neared the street, "what course I sailed in my youth is nothing for you to steer by now. Those were rough days, and these are supposed to be civilized. That was terrible, terrible, what you did to McLaughlin. The way you flung him across the rail, there, and then dashed him to the deck, and—kicked him, when he was down—kicked him in the face—"

"It's all right, I tell you!" Hal asserted, vigorously. He laughed, with glad remembrance. "When I fight a gentleman, I fight like a gentleman. When I fight a ruffian, I use the same tactics. That's all such cattle understand. He'd have done the same to me, if he'd got a chance, which he didn't then and never will. My motto is to hit first, every time. That's the one best bet. The second is, hit hard. Mean business. If you're in a scrap, you're in it to win, aren't you? Hand out everything you've got—give 'em the whole bag of tricks, all at

one wallop. That's what *I* go by, and it's a damn good rule. You, there! Hey, there, jitney!"

The discussion broke off, short, as they reached the end of the wharf and Hal sighted a little car, cruising slowly and with rattling joints over the rough-paved cobbles.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CAPTAIN COMMANDS.

THE jitney turned, approached, and stopped.

"Oh, hello, Sam! That you?" asked Hal, recognizing the driver. "How are you?"

"Hornspoon! Ef it ain't Hal!" exclaimed the jitney-man. "Back agin, eh? What the devil *you* been up to? Shirt all tore, an' one eye looks like you'd been—"

"Oh, nothing," Hal answered, while the taggers-on stopped at a respectful distance, gazing silently. "I've just been arguing a little with McLaughlin, aboard the *Sylvia Fletcher*. It's nothing at all." He opened the car door, helped his grandfather in and shoved the suit-case on to the floor of the machine. Then, gripping the Airedale by the scruff of its neck so that it yelped with pain, he pitched it in.

"It was nothing, nothing at all," he repeated. "How much more than that do you want to take us down to Snug Haven?"

"Well—that'll be a dollar 'n' a half, seein' it's you."

"You'll get one nice, round little buck, Sam."

"Git out! You, an' the cap'n, an' the dog, an' a grip! Why—"

Hal climbed into the car, sat down and slammed the door. He leaned forward, his face close to Sam's. The seethe of rage seemed to have departed. Now Hal was all joviality, good spirits, friendliness. Swiftly the change had come upon him.

"Sam!" he admonished. "You know perfectly well seventy-five cents would be robbery, but I'll give you a dollar—or gramp will. Come, put her into high, and let's be moving!"

The driver sniffed Hal's breath, raised his

eyebrows, and nodded acceptance. Who could resist Hal's smile?

"All right, seein' as it's you," he answered. He added, in a whisper: "Ain't got nothin' on y'r hip, have ye?"

"Nothing but a bruise," said Hal. "Clk-clk!"

The jitney growled forward, and struck its bone-shaking gait along the curving street of Endicutt. No one spoke. The old captain, spent in forces and possessed by strange hauntings, by bitter and terrible thoughts, had sunk far down in the seat. His beard made a white cascade over the smart blue of his brass-buttoned coat. His eyes, half-closed, seemed to be visioning the other, far-off, wicked days that he had labored so long and so hard to forget. His aged, deep-lined face was gray with suffering, beneath its tan. His lips, from which issued no word, had set themselves in a grim, tight line.

As for Hal, he filled and lighted his pipe, then leaned back and with a kind of bored tolerance eyed the quaint old houses, the shops, the gardens and trim hedges.

"Some burg," he murmured. "Some live little burg to put in a whole summer, here and at South Endicutt! Well, anyhow, I started something. They've got something to talk about, for a while. They ought to hand me a medal, for putting a little ginger into this prehistoric graveyard."

Then he relapsed into contemplative smoking.

In silence they rattled along. Presently the town thinned out, giving place to the open road along the shore, now bathed in a thousand lovely hues as sunset died. The slowly fading beauty of the seascape soothed and quieted what little fever still remained in Hal's blood. With an appreciative eye he observed the harbor. The town itself might seem a dreary place, but in his soul the instinctive love and comprehension of the sea awoke to the fresh charms of that master-panorama which in all the history of its infinite existence has never twice shown just the same blending of hues, of motion, of reflux ebb and fall.

Along the dimming islands, the incoming swells were breaking into great bouquets of foam. The murmurous, watery cry of the

surf lulled Hal; its hollow and booming cadences against the rocky girdles of the coast seemed whispering strange, alluring, mysterious things to him. In the offing a few faint specks of sail, melting in the purple haze, beckoned: "Come away, come away!"

"Lord!" muttered Hal, shifting uneasily. "How *can* I stick it out all summer, here with grampy, when that, *that* is calling me?"

To Captain Briggs quite other thoughts were coming than those of sky and sea. Not now could the lure of his well-loved ocean appeal to him, for all the wonders of the amber and dull orange west. Where but an hour ago beauty had spread its miracles across the world, for him, now all had turned to drab and dun. Here, and beyond, a few faint twinkles of light were beginning to show in fishers' cottages; and these, too, saddened the old captain, for they minded him of Snug Haven's waiting lights—Snug Haven, where he had hoped so wonderfully much of the home-coming, but where now only mournful disillusion and foreboding thoughts of evil remained.

The ceaseless threnody of the sea against the shore, now and then audible above the purr of the engine and the whirring spin of the tires, seemed to the old man a requiem over dead hopes. The salt tides seemed to mock and jibe at him, with malice; and out of the pale haze that drifted upward, seaward, from the slow-heaving waters, ghosts seemed to be beckoning, wraiths and specters of the long-dead past.

All at once Hal spoke, his slangy college vernacular rudely jarring on the old captain's melancholy.

"That was some jolt I handed Mac, wasn't it?" he laughed. "He won't be so careful who he picks on. That'll do him a needed, a good walloping."

"Eh? What?" murmured the old man, roused from his sad musings.

"Such people have to get it handed to them once in a while," the grandson continued. "There's only one kind of argument they understand—and that's this kind!"

He raised his right fist, and by the fading light, inspected it, turning it this way and

that, admiring its massive power, its adamant bone and sinew.

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, Hal, don't do that!" exclaimed the captain, startled. With strange eyes he peered at the young man.

He laughed uproariously.

"Some fist, what?" he boasted. "Some pacifier! Makes you nervous, eh?"

As he turned toward the old man, his breath smote the captain's senses.

"Lord, Hal! You haven't been drinking, have you?" quavered Briggs, with fear-stricken accents.

"Drinking? Well—no. Maybe I've had one or two, but that's all."

"One or two what, Hal?"

"Slugs of rum."

"Rum! Good God!"

"What's the matter, now? What's the harm in a drop of good stimulant? You see, Mac had some extra fine rum in his cabin. As a passenger, I thought there was a little coming to me. It's chilly out at sea. Damned chilly, grandpop. You know that, yourself. So I asked him for a drink, and he couldn't see it, the tightwad! I took it, anyhow. That's what started all the rough-house."

"Great heavens, Hal! D' you mean to tell me you're drinking now?"

"There, there, gramp, don't get all stewed up over a trifle. All the fellows in my set, at college, take a drop now and then. You don't want me to be a molly-coddle, do you, and drink nothing stronger than warm milk? You don't want me to feel I can't take a nip, once in a while, and not hold it like a gentleman? That's all foolishness, grampy. Be sensible!"

The old man began to shiver, though not with cold, for the off-shore breeze blew warm and flower-scented. Hal made a grimace of displeasure and vexation. His grandfather answered nothing, and once more silence fell between the two. It lasted till the first scattering houses of South Endicutt came into view in the fading light, and until the car, slowing a little, rattled into the rock-studded street that sinuously wound along the shore.

The driver, throwing a switch, sent the beams of his headlights piercing the soft

June dusk. The cones of radiance painted the roadside grass a vivid green, and made the white-washed fences leap to view. The hedges, gardens, gable-ends of the old houses, all spoke of home and rest, of comfort, peace, and the beatitude of snug security. Somewhere the sound of children's shouts and laughter, as they played hide-and-seek, echoed appealingly. The tinkle of a cow-bell added its musical note; and faint in the western sky, the evening star looked down upon the darkling sea.

Then came the turn in the road. A little red gleam winked in view—the port light of the Haven.

"There's the old place, just the same, isn't it?" commented Hal, in a softer tone. For a moment he seemed moved to gentler thoughts. But only for a moment. His eye, catching a far, white figure away down by the smithy, brightened with other anticipations than those of getting home again.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "That's Laura, isn't it? Look, gramp—isn't that Laura Maynard?"

Peering ahead, Captain Briggs recognized the girl. He understood her innocent little subterfuge of being out for a casual stroll just at this time when Hal was coming home. His heart, already lacerated, contracted with fresh pain.

"No, no, Hal," he exclaimed. "That can't be Laura. That must be Susan Caldwell—you know, Ed Caldwell's wife. Come now, don't be thinking about Laura, to-night. You've had a hard day of it. You're tired, and ought to rest."

"Tired? Me tired? Say, that's a good one! When was I ever tired?"

"Well, *I'm* tired, anyhow," the captain insisted, "and I want to cast anchor at the Haven. We've got company, too, and I want you to come right in. It wouldn't look polite, if you went gallivanting—"

"Company? What company?" demanded Hal, as the car slackened still more, drawing up toward the gate.

"A very special friend of mine," answered the captain. "A man I haven't seen in fifty years. An old doctor that once sailed with me. He's waiting to see you, now."

"Another old pill, eh?" growled the boy,

sullenly, his eyes still fixed on the girl at the bend of the road. "There'll be time enough for Methuselah, later. Just now, it's me for the skirt!"

The car halted at the gate. Captain Briggs opened the door. Ruddy, the Airedale, leaped out and stood expectant, grinning and panting as dogs do when well pleased. The captain stiffly descended, forcing himself to greater activity than his weariness dictated. He felt singularly spent and old. Hal threw out the suit-case, and lightly leaped to earth.

"Dig up a bone for Sam, here," directed Hal. "Now, I'll be on my way to overhaul the little dame."

"Hal! That's *not* Laura, I tell you!"

"You can't kid me, grampy! That's the schoolma'm, all right. I'd know her a mile off. She's some chicken, take it from me."

"Hal, I protest against such language about that fine young woman!"

"Oh, too rough, eh?" sneered the boy. "Now in your day, I suppose you used more refined English, didn't you? Maybe you called them qualified wenches, or—"

"Hal! That will do!"

"So will Laura, for me. She's mine, that girl is. She's plump as a young porpoise, and I'm going to go after her!"

The captain stood aghast, at sound of words that echoed from the very antipodes of the world and of his own life. Then, with a sudden rush of anger, his face reddening formidably, he exclaimed:

"Not another word! You've been drinking, and you're dirty and torn. You've got rum aboard you, sir—you're no fit man, to-night, to haul up 'longside that craft!"

"I tell you, I'm going down there to say good evening to Laura, anyhow," Hal insisted, sullenly. "Don't be so buttinsky! I'm going!"

"You are *not*, sir!" retorted Briggs, while Sam, in the car, grinned and nodded with enjoyment of this verbal war that would make choice pickings for gossip all along the village. "You're *not* going to hail Laura Maynard to-night! I'm ashamed of you. Do you want to lose her friendship and respect?"

"Piffle! Women like a little rough stuff, now and then. This *Little Rollo* business is

played out. Go along in, if you want to; but I'm going to see Laura."

"Hal," said the old man, a new tone in his voice. "This is carrying too much canvas. You'll lose some of it in a minute, if you don't reef. I'm captain here, and you're going to take my orders, if it comes to that. I'm paying your way through college, sir. Every bite you eat and every stitch you wear comes from me. The very strength you boast of and misuse so brutally is derived from money I worked a lifetime for, at sea, and suffered and sinned and bled and almost died for!" The old man's tone rang out again as in the old, tempestuous days when he was master of many hard and violent men. "Now, sir, you're aboard my craft and I'm your sailing-master. You're going to obey me, or overside you go, this minute—and once you go, you'll never set foot on my planks again! Pick up your dunnage, sir, and into the Haven with you!"

"Good night!" ejaculated Hal, staring. Never once before in all his life had the old man, the soul of kindly indulgence, spoken to him thus. Astonished though Hal was, and stung to anger, he recognized a power he dared not disobey. Muttering, he picked up the suit-case. Ruddy, glad to be at home once more, set up a joyful barking and leaped against him. With an oath, Hal swung the suit-case; the Airedale, yelping again with pain, cringed, fawned and slunk away.

"Into the Haven with you!" commanded Briggs, outraged and indignant to his very heart. "Go!"

Hal obeyed, slouching through the gate with huge shoulders hulking and drooping in their plentitude of evil power, just as the captain's had done, so very long ago. Alpheus Briggs peered down the street a moment at the dim white figure of the disappointed girl; then, eyes agleam and back very straight, he followed Hal up the white-sanded walk toward Snug Haven—the Haven which in such beatitude of spirit he had left but an hour ago—the Haven to which, filled with so many fears and evil bodings, he now was coming back again.

"Oh, God," he murmured as he went, "if this thing must come upon me. Thy

will be done! But if it can be turned aside, spare me! Spare me, for this is all my life and all my hope! Spare me!"

CHAPTER XXI.

SPECTERS OF THE PAST.

HAL'S boots, clumping heavily up the steps of the porch, aroused the captain from his brief reverie of prayer—a prayer wrung from him by excess of anguish. Captain Briggs, despite all his many virtues, was not a pious man. Neither did he often pray. His faith in a personal God was tenuous, perhaps, being more than anything else a kind of love and reverence for land and sky and sea, for all of Nature's universal and eternal miracles. Yet in this moment of distress, the age-old formula, the cry for help to some unknown and overbrooding Power framed itself upon his lips.

That cry was only momentary. Almost at once, the new, swift stab of pain he felt at realizing that Dr. Filhiol must see the grandson in this disheveled, half-drunken condition, brought the old man sharply back to earth again. How bitter a humiliation this—to have extolled the boy and praised him in so many ways, and then to have this brutal disillusionment, this sickening anticlimax! The captain stifled a groan. Fate seemed indeed to be dealing him a blow unreasonably hard.

A chair scraped on the porch. By the dim light through the windows of the cabin Briggs saw the bent and shriveled form of Dr. Filhiol arising. The good doctor, rendered a bit nervous by the formidable arsenal of weapons over the fireplace and by the cabinet of curios, which all too clearly recalled the past, had once more issued out upon the piazza, to await the captain's return. Warmed by the egg-nogg within, and outwardly by a shawl that Ezra had given him—a shawl wrapped about his lean, crooked body, so that to speak truth he much resembled a wizen old woman—now he stood there waiting, leaning on his cane. A smile of anticipation curved his shaven, bloodless lips. His eyes blinked eagerly behind his thick-lensed glasses.

"Home again, eh?" he piped. "Good!

So then this is Hal? This is the little grandson back from college? Little! Ha-ha! Why, captain, he'd make two like us!"

"This is Hal," answered the captain briefly, and also climbed the steps strangely weary. "Yes, this is my grandson."

The doctor, a little surprised at Briggs's curt reply, put out his hand. Hal took it as his grandfather spoke the doctor's name.

"Glad to know you, doctor!" said he in a sullen voice, and let the hand drop. "Excuse me, please! I'll go in and wash up."

He turned toward the door. With perturbation Filhiol peered after him. Then he glanced at the captain. An awkward silence fell. It was broken by a cry of joy from the front door.

"Oh, Master Hal!" ejaculated Ezra. "Ef it ain't Master Hal!"

The faithful old servitor's long, leathery face beamed with jubilation as he seized the suit-case with one hand and with the other clapped Hal on the shoulder. "Jump-in' jellyfish, but you're lookin' fine an' stout! Back from y'r books, ain't ye? Ah, books is grand things, Master Hal, 'specially check-books pocketbooks, an' bank-books. Did the cap'n tell ye? He did, didn't he?"

"Hello, Ez!" answered Hal, still very glum. "Tell me what?"

"'Bout the plum-cake an' lamb?" asked Ezra anxiously as Hal slid past him into the house.

"No."

"Didn't, eh? Said he would, though." The ancient mariner's tone expressed keen disappointment. "But it's all right, anyhow. I remembered what you like, Master Hal. I been workin' dog-gone hard to git everythin' jest Ar fer you!"

His voice sank to a mumble and grew inaudible as he followed Hal into Snug Haven. The captain and the doctor, left alone, gazed at each other a long, eloquent moment in the vague light. Neither spoke. Filhiol turned, hobbled back to his chair and sat down, puzzled and oppressed.

Briggs drew up another chair and sank into it wearily. The sound of Hal's feet stumbling up the front stairs echoed with torment through his soul. Was that the stumbling of haste, or had the boy drunk more than he had seemed to? The captain

took off his cap and let it fall to the porch-floor. Not now did he take pains to hang it meticulously on top of the rocking-chair. He wiped his forehead with his silk handkerchief, its gay colors now incongruous, and groaned.

The doctor, with courteous delicacy of feeling, kept silence. He understood that any word of his would prove inopportune. But with pity and deep concern he studied the face of Captain Briggs, its lines accentuated by the light that shone out through the window of the cabin.

Presently the captain sighed deep and began:

"I'm glad you're here on my quarter-deck with me to-night, doctor. You're the one man I'd have chosen to be aboard with me. Things are all going wrong, sir, very wrong. Barometer's way down, compass is bedeviled, and seams are opening fore and aft. It's bad, doctor—very, very bad!"

"I see there's something wrong, of course," said Filhiol with sympathy. "I couldn't help seeing *that*."

"Everything's wrong, sir. That grandson of mine—you—noticed just what was the matter with him?"

"H-m! It's rather dark here, you know," hedged Filhiol, unwilling to hurt the feelings of his old-time companion.

"Not so dark but what you understood," said Briggs grimly. "It's no use blinking facts. When there's a storm brewing no good navigator thinks he can dodge it by locking himself in his cabin. And there *is* a storm brewing this time, a hurricane, sir, or I've missed all signals."

"Just what do you mean, captain?"

"Violence, drink, women—wickedness and sin!"

"Eh, what?"

"You smelled his breath, didn't you? You took an observation of his face?"

"Well, yes. He's been drinking a little, of course; but maybe not a very great deal. These boys in college—"

"He's been drinking enough, sir, so that he very nigh killed the skipper of the *Sylvia Fletcher*, and there'll be the devil to pay about it. It was just luck there wasn't murder done before my very eyes. He's been drinking enough so as to wake up a

black devil in his heart! Enough so he's like a roaring bull after the first pretty girl he sights in the offing."

"There, there, captain!" The doctor tried to soothe him, his thin and piping voice making a strange contrast with the captain's booming bass. "You're probably exaggerating. A little exuberance may be pardoned in youth." He tried to speak reassuringly, but his expression belied his words. "Remember, captain, when you were—"

"That's just what's driving me on the rocks with grief and despair!" the old man burst out, gripping the arms of the rocker. His face, by the light through the window, had set itself into a mask of agony. "God above! It's just the realization of my own youth, flung back at me now, that's like to kill me! That boy, doctor, that boy, so help me—why, he's thrown clean back fifty years all at one clip!"

"No, no, not that!"

"He has, I tell you! In deed and word and thought he's jumped back half a century. *He* don't belong in this age of airplanes and wireless and ail that. *He* belongs back with the clipper-ships and with the—"

"That's all nonsense, captain, and you know it!"

"It's far from nonsense, doctor. There's a bad strain somewhere in my blood. I've been afraid a long time it was going to crop out in Hal, but I haven't said anything. There's always been a tradition in my family of rough and evil doings now and then. I don't know anything certain about it, though, except that my grandfather, Amalfi Briggs, died of bursting a blood-vessel in his brain when he was in a fit of rage. That was all that saved him from being a murderer—he died before he could kill the other man!"

Silence came. Silence, save for the piping whistle of some urchin far up the road that branched to northward round Croft Hill—some homeward-bound urchin tunelessly keeping up his spirits as he passed the cemetery. The ever-rising, falling suspiration of the sea breathed its long caress across the land, on which a vague, pale sheen of starlight was descending.

Suddenly, from above stairs, sounded a dull, slamming sound as of a bureau-drawer violently banged shut. Another slam followed: and now came a grumbling that could be no other than muffled profanity.

"All that saved my grandfather from being hung as a murderer," said Briggs dourly, "was the fact that he dropped dead himself before he could cut down the other man with the ship-carpenter's adze he had in his hand. That was a close shave our family-tree had. If the old carpenter had lived another five seconds we'd have had one branch on it, anyhow, labeled 'Murder!'"

"Yes," thought the doctor, "and you'd have added another, if anything out East had ever been known about you." But, stifling that uncharitable thought under the ashes of long-dead years, he answered only:

"Indeed? Your grandfather, so it seems, must have been rather a hard specimen."

"Only when he was in anger. At other times you never saw a more jovial soul! But rage made a beast of him!"

"How was your father?"

"Not that way in the least. He was as good, as upright, and consistently Christian a man as ever breathed. My son—Hal's father—was a good man, too, normal and even-tempered. Not a sign of that sort of brutality ever showed in him."

"I think you're worrying unnecessarily," judged the doctor. "Your grandson may be wild, untamed, and rough at times, but he's tainted with no hereditary stain."

"I don't know about that, doctor. I wish I could believe it," said the captain earnestly. "For a year or two past he's been showing more temper now and then than a young man should. He's not been answering the helm very well. There's been a little minor trouble about it. Two or three of the village people here have already complained to me. But I've never been really afraid till to-night. Now, doctor, now I *am* afraid—terribly, deadly afraid!"

The old man's voice shook under the weight and stress of his emotion. Filhiol tried to smile.

"You're needlessly disturbing yourself," said he. "Let the dead past bury its dead! Don't open the old graves to let the ghosts

of other days walk out again into the clear sunset of your life."

"God knows I don't want to!" the old man exclaimed in a low, trembling voice. "But, doctor, suppose those graves open themselves? Suppose they won't stay shut, no, not though all the good deeds from here to heaven were piled atop of them, to keep them down? Suppose those ghosts rise up in spite of everything that I can do and stare me in the eyes and won't be banished—what then?"

"Stuff and nonsense!" gibed Filhiol, though his voice was far from steady. "You're not yourself, captain. You and Hal have been quarreling and you're both unnerved. There's nothing the matter with that boy except high spirits and overflowing animal passions."

"No, no! I understand only too well what Hal's in for—what I'm in for. God is being very hard to me! I sinned, and sinned grievous, in the long ago! We both understand that. But I've done my very best to pay the reckoning. Seems like I haven't succeeded in paying. Seems like God don't forget! He's paying me now with interest!"

"Captain, you exaggerate!" the doctor tried to assure him, but Briggs only shook his head.

"It skips that way sometimes, don't it?" asked he. "Heredity skips that way?"

"Well—sometimes. It's been known to happen. But, of course, that doesn't prove anything."

"No, it don't prove anything, but what Hal did to-night *does!*"

"You're borrowing a lot of unnecessary trouble, captain. The boy may be irascible, combative, and rough, I tell you. He may even drink a little. A great many young men do. But—"

"Would a thing like that come on sudden that way?" demanded Briggs, paying no heed to the doctor's platitudes, obviously forced and insincere. "Would it? That kind of a mad hydrophobia of rage that won't listen to any reason but wants to break and tear and kill? I mean, if that kind of thing was in the blood, could it lay hid a long time and then all of a sudden burst out like that?"

"Well—yes. It might. But why do you assume—"

"I seem to remember it was the same with me the first time I ever had one of those mad fits," said the captain. "It came on quick. It wasn't like ordinary getting mad. It was a red torrent, insane, delirious, and awful—something that caught me up and carried me along on its wave—something I couldn't any more have fought against than a dory could keep from going ashore in the surf of an easterly hurricane. When I saw Hal with his teeth grinning and his eyes glassy and his fists red with McLaughlin's blood, oh, it struck clean through my heart!"

"It wasn't any fear of either of them getting killed that harpooned me. It wasn't fear of complications and damages to pay. No, no, though such will be bad enough. What struck me all of a heap, what wrung me out and drained me dry, was to see myself, my very own self that used to be. If I, Captain Alpheus Briggs, had been swept back to 1868 and set down on the deck of the Silver Fleece, Hal would have been my exact double. I've seen myself just as I was then, doctor, and it's shaken me in every timber. There I stood, I, myself, in Hal's person, after five decades of weary time. I could see the outlines of the same black beard on the same kind of jaw—same thick neck and bloody fists; and, oh, doctor, the eyes of Hal! His eyes!"

"His eyes?"

"Yes. In them I saw my old, wicked, hell-elected self—saw it glaring out, to break and ravish and murder!"

"Captain Briggs!"

"It's true. I'm telling you. There's no exaggeration in it, and no lie! I've seen a ghost this evening. A ghost—"

He peered round fearfully in the dusk. His voice lowered to a whisper.

"A ghost!" he repeated.

Filhiol could not speak. Something cold, prehensile, terrible, seemed fingering at his heart! Ruddy, the Airedale, raised his head, seemed to be listening, to be seeing something they could not detect. In the dog's throat a low growl muttered.

"What's *that!*?" said the captain, every muscle taut.

"Nothing, nothing," the doctor answered. "The dog probably hears some one down there by the hedge. This is all nonsense, captain. You're working yourself into a highly nervous state and imagining all kinds of things. Now—"

"I tell you, I saw the ghost of my other self on the decks of the *Sylvia Fletcher*," insisted Briggs. "There's worse kinds of ghosts than those that hang round graveyards in white robes. I've always wanted to see that kind and never have succeeded. Night after night I've been up there to the little cemetery on Croft Hill, and leaned over the wall or gone inside and sat on the bench in our lot, just as friendly like and receptive as could be, waiting and ready to see whatever ghost might come to me, but none ever came. I'm not afraid of the ghosts of the dead! It's ghosts of the living that strike a dread to me—ghosts of the past that ought to die and can't—ghosts of my own sins that God won't let lie in the grave of forgiveness—"

"*S-h-h-h!*" exclaimed the doctor. He leaned forward and laid a hand on the captain's, which was clutching the arm of the rocker with a grip of steel. "I beg of you, my friend, I entreat you, don't give way to such folly! Perhaps Hal did drink a little, and perhaps he did do what any high-spirited youth would do if he could—whip a man who had insulted and tormented him. But that's as far as it goes. All this talk about ghosts and about some hereditary, devilish force cropping out again, is pure rubbish!"

"I wish to God above it *was!*" the old man groaned. "But I know it's not. I know! It's there, doctor; it's there, I tell you! It's still alive and in the world, more terrible and more malignant than ever, a living, breathing thing, evil and venomous, backed up with twice the intelligence and learning I ever had, with a fine, keen brain to direct it and with muscles of steel to do its bidding! Oh, God, I know, I *know!*"

"Captain Briggs, sir," the doctor began. "This is most extraordinary language from a man of your common sense. I really do not understand—"

"Hush!" interrupted the captain, raising his right hand. On the stairway feet

echoed, descending. "Hush! He's coming down!"

Silent, tense they waited. The heavy footfalls reached the bottom of the stair and paused there a moment. Briggs and the doctor heard Hal grumbling something inarticulate to himself. Then he walked into the cabin.

CHAPTER XXII.

DR. FILHIOL STANDS BY.

THROUGH the window that gave upon the porch both men could see him, though they themselves, in shadow, were hardly visible to him. The cabin-lamp over the captain's table shed soft rays upon the boy as he stood there unconscious of being observed.

He remained motionless a moment, gazing about him as one gazes at a familiar place after long absence, taking account of the room and of any little changes that had been wrought there in the past months. At sight of him the old captain, despite all his bodings of evil, could not but thrill with pride and admiration of this clean-limbed, powerful-shouldered grandson, scion of the old stock, last survivor of his race, and hope of all its future existence.

Hal took a step or two forward to the table. The lithe ease and grace and power of his stride impressed the doctor's critical eye.

"He's all right enough, captain," said Filhiol in a low tone. "There's nothing the matter with him. He's as normal as can be. He's just as I've already told you—a case of overflowing animal spirits, strength, and energy. Lord! What wouldn't I give to be like that? What wouldn't you—again?"

"I wouldn't stand in those boots of his for all the money in Lloyd's!" returned the captain in a hoarse whisper. His left hand was holding hard to the arm of the chair; his right was stroking his white beard—sure sign of perturbation. "Not for all the money in the world, sir. For look you, doctor, I have lived my life and got wisdom. My fires have burned low, leaving the ashes of peace—or so I hope. But that lad there, ah! there's fires and volcanoes enough

ahead for him, I warrant you. Maybe those same fires will kindle up my ashes, too, and sear my heart and soul! Maybe there *is* no peace for me. I thought, after the life-journey I've sailed, I was entitled to heave anchor and lay in harbor a spell till I get my papers for the unknown port we don't any of us come back from, but maybe I'm mistaken. Maybe that's not to be, doctor, after all."

"What rubbish for a sane man to talk!" retorted Filhiol, still speaking very low. "Look at him now, will you? Isn't he quiet, peaceful, and normal enough for anybody? See there, now, he's going to take a book and sit down and read it like any well-behaved young man."

"Any well-behaved young man would come out here on the quarter-deck and talk to his skipper that he hasn't seen for six months and to the guest aboard the craft!" declared the captain. "Ah, well, I mustn't hope for everything. If he'll only furl sail now and keep off the rocks for a while, that's about all I can expect."

Hal had, indeed, taken a book from the captain's table and had sat down with it in the big chair before the fireplace. He did not, however, open the book. Instead, he leaned back and gazed intently up at the arsenal displayed against the cobblestones. He frowned, nodded, and then broke into a peculiar smile. His right fist clenched and rose, as if in imagination he were gripping one of those weapons, with Fergus McLaughlin in all probability as his immediate target.

A little silence fell once more, through which faintly penetrated the far-off, nasal minor of old Ezra, now (as he made the final preparations for supper) engaged upon an endless chantey recounting the life and adventures of one "Boney"—*alias* Napoleon Bonaparte. For a minute peace seemed to have descended upon Snug Haven, but only for a minute. Once more it was Hal who destroyed it.

For all at once, with an oath of impatience, he flung the book, crumpled, to the floor. He stood up, thrust both hands deep into his trouser-pockets, and fell to pacing the floor in a temper obviously poisonous.

Of a sudden he stopped, wheeled toward

the captain's little private locker built into a corner of the cabin near the wall-safe and strode to it. The locker door was secured with a brass padlock of unusual strength. Hal took the padlock between thumb and fingers and twisted it off as easily as if it had been made of putty. He flung open the locker door, peered at the shelves a moment, and then took down a bottle.

He pulled the cork, seized a tumbler and sipped it levelful of whisky, which he gulped without a wink. Then he smeared his mouth with the back of his hand and stood there evil-eyed and growling.

"*Puh!* That's rotten stuff!" he ejaculated. "Grandpop certainly does keep a punk line of stuff here!" Back upon the shelf he slammed the bottle and the glass. "Wonder where that smooth Jamaica's gone he used to have?"

"God above! did you see that, doctor?" breathed the old captain, gripping at the doctor's hand. "He downed that like so much water. Isn't that the exact way I used to swill liquor? By Judas priest, I'll soon put a stop to *that!*"

He would have risen, bent on instantly precipitating the issue with Hal, but Filhiol restrained him.

"Wait!" he cautioned as the two old men leaned forward in their chairs, peering in, unseen, through the window. "Even that sort of drinking doesn't prove the innate depravity and original sin you seem so determined to lay at the boy's door. He's tired and unnerved after his fight with McLaughlin. When I used to go through a severe siege, in the active days of my work—after a trying operation, or what not—sometimes I've taken some pretty stiff drinks myself. Let's see what he'll do next. If we're going to judge him accurately, we've got to watch a while."

Old Briggs sank back into his chair, and with eyes of misery followed the boy, idol of all his love, hope of all his dreams. Hal's next move was not long delayed.

"Ezra!" they heard him call in a harsh, imperative voice. "You, Ezra! Come *here!*"

The chantey of the life and adventures of N. Bonaparte came to a sudden end in the galley. A moment and Ezra appeared

in the doorway leading from the cabin to the dining-saloon.

"Well, Master Hal, what is it?" smiled the cook, beaming with affection and with pleasurable anticipation of the treat he was just now laying on the table for his cherished Hal. Ezra looked the part of sea-cook to perfection. Apron, cap, and all were quite correct, and in one hand he held a "copper," just such as aboard the Silver Fleece had heated water for the scalding of the Batu Kawan folk. "What d'you want, Master Hal?"

"Look here, Ezra," said the boy arrogantly, "I've been trying to find the rum that grandpop always keeps in there." He jerked a thumb at the locker. "Couldn't locate it, so I've been giving this whisky a trial, and—"

"When whisky an' young men lay 'long-side one another, the whisky don't want a trial. It wants lynchin'!" The old cook's tone was of stern reproof.

"That'll do for you! I'm not asking *your* opinion!" sneered Hal.

"Yes, but I'm givin' it, Master Hal," persisted Ezra, advancing into the cabin. "When the devil goes fishin' fer boys, he sticks a petticoat an' a bottle o' rum on the hook."

"Get me the Jamaica, you! Where's the old Jamaica?" demanded Hal with growing anger. "I've got no time for your line of bull!"

"Lots that ain't got no time for nothin' in this world will have time to burn in the next! You'll get no rum from me, Master Hal. An' what's more, if I'd ha' thought you was goin' to slip your cable an' run ashore in any such dognation fool way on a wave o' booze, first thing you come home, I'd of hid the whisky where *you* wouldn't of run it down!"

"You'd have hidden it!" echoed Hal, his face darkening, the veins on neck and forehead beginning to swell. "You've got the infernal nerve to stand there—you, a servant—and tell me you'd hide anything away from me in my own house?"

"This here craft is registered under your grandpa's name an' is sailin' under his house-flag," the old cook reminded him. His face was still bland and leathery as

ever, but in his eyes lurked a queer little gleam. "It ain't the same thing at all—not yet."

"Damn your infernal lip!" shouted Hal, advancing toward him. Captain Briggs, quivering in every fiber, half-rose from his chair and was restrained from pegging away into the house only by the doctor's hand. "You've got the damned impudence to stand there and—and dictate to *me*?"

"Master Hal," retorted Ezra with wonderful, with admirable self-restraint, "you are goin' too far, young man. You are sailin' a bit too wide o' your course now. There's breakers ahead, sir. Look out!"

"I believe you've been at the square-face of Jamaica yourself, you thieving son of Satan!" snarled Hal. "You and your sniveeling platitudes make me sick. I'll not stand here parleying with a servant. Get me that Jamaica now or I'll break your damned, obstinate neck!"

"Now, Master Hal, I warn you—"

"To hell with you!"

"With me, Master Hal? With old Ezra?"

"With everything that stands in my way!"

Despite Hal's furious rage the steadfast old sailorman still resolutely faced him. Captain Briggs, now again hearing almost the identical words he himself had poured out in the cabin of the Silver Fleece, at Batu Kawan, sank back into his chair with a strange, throaty gasp.

"Doctor!" he gulped. "Hear that? Do you hear that?"

"Wait! *S-h-h-h!*" the doctor cautioned, leaning forward. "This is very strange. It *is*, by Jove, sir! Some extraordinary psychological parallel, some amazing coincidence, or—"

"Next thing you know he'll knock Ezra down!" whispered the captain, staring. He seemed paralyzed, incapable of movement, as though tranced by the scene now being acted in the cabin of Snug Haven as on a stage. "That's what I did to the cabin-boy, or tried to, when my run was wrong. Remember? It's all coming round again, doctor. It's a nightmare in a circle—a fifty-year circle! Remember Kuala Pahang? She—she died! I wonder what woman's got to die this time?"

"That's all pure poppycock!" the doctor ejaculated, but his words sounded none too sure. He was trembling in a violent nerve-crisis. With a great effort, leaning heavily on his stick, he arose. Captain Briggs, too, shook off the spell that seemed to grip him and stood up.

"Hal!" he tried to call: but his voice failed him. He could produce no more than a choking gasp. Turning, he lurched toward the front door.

From within sounded a cry. Came a trampling noise. Something clattered to the floor.

"Hal! My God, Hal!" the captain shouted hoarsely, his voice returning under stress of terrible emotion.

As he reached the door Ezra came staggering out into the hall, a hand pressed to his face.

"Ezra! What is it?" choked the captain. "What's he done? For Heaven's sake, Ezra, what's Hal done to you?"

For a moment the old man could make no answer. Limply he sagged against the newel-post, a pitiful, sorry picture of grief and pain. The captain reached him, put an arm about his shoulders, and with burning indignation cried:

"What did he do? Hit you?"

Ezra shook his head in stout negation. Even through all the shock and suffering of the blow that Hal had dealt him, his loyalty remained sublimely constant.

"Hit me? Why, no, sir," he tried to smile, though his lips were white and tremulous. "He wouldn't strike old Ezra, Master Hal wouldn't. There's no mutiny or war aboard this little craft of ours. Two gentlemen may disagree, an' all that, but as fer Master Hal strikin' me, no, *sir!*"

"But I heard him say—"

"Oh, that's nothin', cap'n," the old cook insisted, still, however, keeping his cheek-bone covered with his hand. "Boys will be boys, an' some of 'em git a leetle mite sassy, now an' then. They're a bit loose with their jaw-tackle, maybe. But there, there, don't you git all har'ed up, captain. Men an' pins is jest alike, that way—no good ef they lose their heads. Ca'm down, cap'n. Master Hal didn't mean nothin' by what he said. Not a thing in this world, sir!"

"What's that on your face, Ezra? Blood?"

"Blood, sir? Why, no, sir. How would blood git on my dog-gone face, anyhow? That's—h-m—"

"Don't you lie to me, Ezra! I'm not blind. He struck you, didn't he? He cut you with something. What was it?"

"Honest to God, cap'n, he never!" the old salt persisted, with brazen determination. "I admit we had a bit of an argyment, an' I slipped an' kind of fell ag'in' the—the binnacle, cap'n. Now that's the livin' truth, so help me! I swear that on the ship's Bible!"

"Don't you stand there and perjure your immortal soul just to shield that boy!" Briggs sternly reproved him, loving the old man all the more for the brave lie. "Don't you do it, sir. But I know you will, anyhow. What authority have I got aboard my own ship these days, when I can't even get the truth? Ezra, you wouldn't admit it, you wouldn't own up to it, if Hal took that kris in there and cut your head off!"

"How could I then, sir?"

"That 'll do, Ezra! Where is he now?"

"I don't know, sir."

"I'll damn soon find out!" the captain exclaimed, stung to the first profanity of years. He turned from Ezra and tramped into the cabin, fists clenched, face terrible with anger.

"Come here, sir!" he cried in a tone that never before had been heard in Snug Haven.

No answer. Hal was not there. Neither was the bottle of whisky. That, too, had disappeared, evidently snatched from the locker shelf when Hal had departed. A chair had been tipped over, and on the floor lay the captain's most cherished possession, his wonderful chronometer, face-down and with shattered glass. In the struggle, whatever it had been, that precious thing had been struck from the mast that rose beside the captain's table.

This destruction, joined to the sight of Ezra's innocent blood, seemed to freeze the captain's narrow. He stood there quite motionless a moment, staring. Then, wide-eyed, he peered round.

"Mutiny and bloodshed!" he whispered.

"Mutiny and blood, aboard my craft! God deliver us from what's to be!"

At sight of the open door leading into the dining-saloon, his bushy white brows contracted. Thither Hal must have retreated. The captain, terrible in wrath, strode through the open door.

"Hal Briggs, sir!" he called crisply. "Come here!"

A creaking of the back stairs constituted the only answer. Into the galley the captain hurried, and up those stairs. As he reached the top he heard the door of Hal's room shut, and the key turn.

To the door he stamped, a figure of avenging indignation.

"You, sir!" he cried, knocking violently at the panels.

Only silence answered him. He knocked again. A voice issued:

"It's no use, gramp. I'm not coming out, and you're not coming in. It's been nothing but hell, one way or another, ever since I struck this damn place. It began with McLaughlin picking on me, and everybody else seems to be keeping it up. If it doesn't stop I'm going to get mad and do some damage round here, and that goes! I don't want any of Ezra's lamb and plum-cake. What does he think I am, anyhow, a kid? Regular nursery layout. Not for mine, thanks! All I want now is to be let alone. That's all I'm going to say. Go 'way, and don't bother me!"

"Hal! Open that door, sir!"

Never a word came back. Quite unfruitfully the captain knocked and argued, entreated, threatened; he got no reply.

At last, realizing that his grandson occupied the tactical advantage, and that he was only lowering his dignity and making himself absurd by such vain efforts, the captain turned and departed. His eyes glowered strangely as he made his way downstairs, into the front hall.

Ezra had disappeared. But the old doctor was standing in the hallway, under the gleam of a ship's lantern that hung there.

"Captain," said he with timid hesitation, as he clutched his supporting cane and peered through his glasses. "Captain, I feel that my presence in this house at this particular time may add to your sense of

embarrassment. Therefore, I think I had best return to Salem this evening. If you will kindly ask Ezra to harness up my horse in case he's able I'll be obliged."

"I'll do nothing of the kind, doctor!" Briggs interrupted stoutly. "You're my friend and my guest, and you're not going to be driven out by any such exhibition of brutal bad manners as we've had here to-night. I ask you, sir, to stay."

"You really mean that, captain? You know, I can manage the drive to Endicutt quite well, and there, of course, I can get the 10.17 southbound train."

"You'll take no train and no drive to-night, sir!" The captain tugged excitedly at his beard; his eyes threw fire. "I haven't seen you for fifty years, sir; and you do no more than lay 'longside, and then want to hoist canvas again and beat away? Never, sir! Here you stay, to-night, aboard me. There's a cabin and as nice a berth as any seafaring man could ask, all real for you. Stay to-morrow—stay a week, sir, if you will. Cruise with me, a week, on the ocean of memories. Go and leave me now, would you? Not much, sir!"

"If you really want me to stay, captain—"

Briggs took the doctor by the hand and looked steadily into his anxious face.

"Listen," said he, in a deep, quiet tone. "I'm in trouble, doctor. Deep, black, bitter trouble. You can see that; you understand. Nobody in this world but you can help me steer a straight course now, if there's any way *to* steer one, which God grant! Stand by me now, doctor. You did once before on the old Silver Fleece. I've got your stitches in me yet. Now, after fifty years, I need you again, though it's worse this time than any knife-cut ever was. Stand by me, doctor, for a little while. That's all I ask. *Stand by!*"

CHAPTER XXIII.

SUNSHINE.

THE miracle of a new day's sunshine—
 June sunshine, golden over warm,
 green earth, foam-collared shore and
 shining sea—brought in its train another

miracle almost as great as that which had transformed the somber night to radiant morning. This miracle was the complete reversal of the situation at Snug Harbor, and the return of peace and happiness. But all this cannot be told in two breaths. We must not run too far ahead of where our story leads us.

So, to go on in orderly and decent fashion we must know that Ezra's carefully prepared supper, the subject of such long and affectionate thought, turned out to be a sad, a melancholy failure. Other, it could not be. The somber dejection of the three old men at table, and then the miserable evening of the captain and the doctor on the piazza, talking of old days with infinite regret, of the present with grief and humiliation, of the future with black bodings, made a sorry time of it all.

Night brought but little sleep to Captain Briggs. The doctor, worn out by a day of unaccustomed exertions, slept well enough; and Ezra, quite without nerves, seconded him. But the good fortune of oblivion was not for the old captain. Through what seemed a black eternity he lay in the bunk in his cabin, pondering, brooding, agonizing, listening to the murmurous restlessness of the sea, the slow tolling of hours from the tall clock in the hallway. The cessation of the ticking of his chronometer seemed to leave a strange vacancy in his soul. Deeply he mourned it.

After an infinite time, half-sleep won upon him, troubled by ugly dreams and visionings of Batu Kawan and the sluggish, fever-stricken Timbago River, the straits, the battle, the slave-driving Ivory Coast. Alpheus Briggs seemed to behold again the stifling huts and alleyways of the Malay town, the carabaos and chattering gharri-men, the pedlers and whining musicians, the smoky torch-flares and dark, slow-moving river. He seemed to smell, once more, the odors of spice and curry, the smoke of torches and wood fires, the dank and reeking mud of the marshy, fever-bitten shore.

And then the vision changed. He was at sea again: he was witnessing the death of Scurlock and the boy, the death of the girl, Kuala Pahang, in the blood-tinged, shark-teeming waters. Came the battle with the

Malays, in all its horror, exaggerated by the grotesque exaggerations of a dream; and then the torments of the hell-ship, cargoing slaves from the Ivory Coast to Cuba. The old captain seemed stifled by the reek and welter of that freight; he seemed to hear their groans and cries—and all at once he heard again, as in a voice from infinite distances, the curse of Shiva, flung at him by Dangan Jouga, witch-woman of the Malay tribesmen:

"The evil spirit will pursue you, even beyond the wind, even beyond the Silken Sea! Vishnu will repay you! Dead men shall come from their graves, like wolves, to follow you. Birds of the ocean foam will poison you. Life will become to you a thing more terrible than the venom of the katchubong flower, and evil seed will grow within your heart.

"Evil seed will grow and flourish there, dragging you down to death, down to the longing for death, and yet you cannot die! And the blind face in the sky will watch you, *sahib*—watch you, and laugh, because you cannot die! That is the curse of Vishnu on your soul!"

In the captain's dream, the groaning and crying of the wounded and perishing men aboard the Silver Fleece—men struck down in the battle of Motomolo Strait, all for the captain's bull-headed clinging to the girl—seemed to blend with that of the dying slaves. And gradually all this echoing agony transmuted itself into a kind of sinister and terrible mirth, a horrifying, ghastly laughter, far and strange, ceaseless, monotonous, maddening.

Somewhere in a boundless sky of black, the captain seemed to behold a vast spiral, whirling, ever whirling, in and in; and at its center, vague, formless yet filled with demoniac menace, he dimly saw a blind face—more than a blind face, but it had never had eyes—an eyeless face, indeed, that still for all its blindness seemed to be watching him. And as it watched, it laughed, blood-freezingly.

Captain Briggs roused to his senses. He found himself sitting up in bed, by the open window, through which drifted the solemn roar and hissing back-wash of a rising surf. A pallid moon-crescent, tangled in spun gossamer-fabric of drifting cloud, cast tenuous, fairy shadows across the garden. Staring, the captain rubbed his eyes.

"Judas priest!" he muttered. "What—where— Ah! Dreaming, eh? Only dreaming? Thank God for that!"

Then, with a pang of transfixing pain, back to him surged memories of what had happened last night. For a moment he sat there, thinking. Then he slid out of bed, struck a match and looked at his watch. The hour was just a bit after two.

Noiselessly Briggs crept from his room, climbed the stairs, slipped down the passageway, and came to Hal's door. Awake though the old man now was, the menace of the curse of Kuala Pahang still weighed terribly upon him. Something of the vague superstitions of the sea, superstitions that a man, be he never so materialistic, can quite escape if he follows the great waters long enough, seemed to have infused themselves into the captain's blood. Shuddering, he remembered the curse that now for many years had lain forgotten in the dusty archives of his youth; remembered even more than he had dreamed; remembered another curse laid on him by the *nenek kabayan*, the witch-woman—that strange, yellow, ghostlike creature which had come upon him silently over his rum and gambling in the cabin of the hell-ship:

"Something you love—love more than your own life—will surely die. You will die then, but still you will not die. You will pray for death, but death will mock and will not come!"

The old captain shivered as he stood before the door of Hal's room. Suppose the ancient curse really had power, what then? Suppose it should strike Hal, and drag him down—suppose Hal should die! What then?

For a moment he heard nothing within the room, and his old heart nearly stopped, altogether. But almost at once he perceived a sound, rhythmic, gentle—Hal's breathing, quiet and natural as that of a child.

"Oh, thank God!" the captain murmured, his heart and soul suddenly expanding with gratitude, with blest relief after fear. He remained there a little while, keeping silent vigil at the door of his well-loved boy, the very door that Hal so brutally had locked in his face and refused to

open. Then, quite satisfied that all was well, he retraced his steps, got back into bed, and so presently fell into a very deep and peaceful slumber.

A knocking at his door awoke him, together with the voice of Ezra:

"Cap'n Briggs, sir! It's six bells o' the mornin' watch. Time to turn out!"

The captain blinked and rubbed his eyes. "Come in, Ezra," bade he, mustering his wits. "H-m!" he grunted at sight of Ezra's cheek-bone, now black-and-blue, with an ugly cut across it. "The doctor up yet?"

"Yes, sir. He's been cruisin' out round the lawn an' garden an hour or some such matter. He's a real interestin' old saw-bones, ain't he? But he's too kind o' mournful like about his nerves to set right on *my* stomach. Kind of a pessimist like, only happy when he's miserable. Men's different, that way, sir. Some heaves a sigh, where others would heave a brick."

"That 'll do, Ezra. What's there to record on the log, so far?" asked Briggs, anxiously. "Anything at all?"

"Well, yes, sir, quite some. First thing I get on deck this A.M. I'm boarded by old Joe Pringle, the pedler from Kittery. Joe, he wanted to sell us anythin' he could—a jew's-harp, history o' the world in nine volumes, Salvation Salve, a phonograft, a Ready Letter-writer, an Eyetalian queen-bee, a—"

"Hold hard! I don't care anything about Joe. What's the news this morning about—about— You know what I mean, Ezra!"

"News, sir? Well, I got seven eggs, fer one thing, an' the white Leghorn's bringin' off a nestful. Five's hatched already. Nature's funny, ain't it? We git chicken from eggs, an' eggs from chickens, an'—"

"*Will* you stop your fool talk and get down to business?" demanded the captain with some heat. He sat up in bed and peered at Ezra with disapproval. To his lips he could not bring a direct question about the boy; and Ezra, sparring for time, was equally unwilling to introduce the subject, fearing lest some word of blame might be spoken against his idol. "Tell me some news, I say!" the captain ordered.

"News, cap'n? Well, Dr. Filhiol, there, fed his nag enough of our chicken-feed to

last us a week. That old plug et like it 'd never had a fillin' up. The doc, he calls the critter Ned. But I think Sea Lawyer would be 'bout right fer a name."

"Sea Lawyer? How's that?"

"Well, sir, it *can* draw a conveyance, if it has to, but it's dog-gone poor at it."

"I'll thank you to stop your foolishness, Ezra, and tell me what I want to know. Since you make me name it, I will. How's Hal this morning? Where is he, and what's he doing?"

"Master Hal? Why, he's all right, sir. As right as can be."

"He is, eh?" The captain's hands were clenched with nervousness. "You've seen him?"

Ezra nodded assent.

"Don't ye worry none about Master Hal," said he gravely. "Don't ye worry. Worry's wuss 'n a dozen leaks an' no pump. Ef ye *must* worry, worry somebody else. That's *my* say."

"What's the boy doing? Drinking again?"

"Not a drink, cap'n. Now as regards that, my idea about liquor is—"

"Judas priest!" interrupted Briggs. "You'll drive me crazy with your philosophizings! If the world was coming to an end you'd argue with Gabriel. You say Hal's not touched it this morning?"

"Nary drop, sir."

"Oh, that's good news!"

"Good news is like a hard-b'iled egg, cap'n. You don't have to break it easy. Hal's fine an' fit this mornin', sir. Fresh an' handsome as a new schooner jest off 'n the ways. I thought maybe he might hunt a little tot o' rum, a little grog this mornin', but no: no, sir, he's sober as a deacon, an' seven thousand times a finer man than any deacon ever I see. The way he come an' apologized was as han'some as he is himself."

"Apologized? Who to?"

"Me an' the doctor. First thing he sees us, out to the barn, he come an' begged our pardons, in some o' the dog-gonedest purtiest language I ever clapped an ear to. He's a slick one, Master Hal is. Everythin's all right an' fergot an' forgave, between Master Hal an' the doctor an' I. After he apolo-

gized he went fer a swim, down to Geyser Rock."

"Did, eh? He's wonderful in the water, isn't he? Not another man in *this* town dares take that dive. I—I'm mighty glad he had the heart and decency to apologize to you, Ezra. I don't say just that alone can make everything all right again. There's breakers enough ahead yet, but Hal's steering the right course now. He's proved himself a man anyhow. Last night I'd almost lost faith in him and in all humanity."

"It ain't so important fer a man to have faith in humanity as fer humanity to have faith in him," affirmed the old cook. "Now, cap'n, you git up, please. Breakfast's 'most ready, an' you'll want to see Master Hal afore it. The board of arbitration will want to have a session with him. When I was a young un, the only board my old man arbitrated with was a spruce paddle." Ezra's lank, solemn face assumed an expression of more than human gravity. "Older I got, bigger the board got, till at last I up an' run away. Listen to me, cap'n, no matter what kind of arbitration you use, don't never drive that boy out, same's I was drove. I know Master Hal's sound an' good at heart. But he's had his own head too long now fer you to try rough tactics."

"Rough! When was I ever rough with Hal?"

"Mebbe if you had of been a few times when he was small—reasonable rough, y' understand—it 'd of been better. But it's too late now fer that. He's as full o' life an' vigor as the Sea Lawyer *ain't*. Let him keep his sperrit, cap'n. Let him keep all canvas aloft: but hold a hard helm on him. Hold it hard!"

The sound of singing somewhere down across the road toward the shore, drew the old captain's attention out the window. Striding home from his morning plunge and swim, Hal was returning to Snug Harbor, "coming up with a song from the sea."

The captain got up, put on his bathrobe and girded it about him, then went to the window and sat down there in a chair. He leaned his crossed arms on the sill, and peered out, anxiously enough, at Hal. Ezra, meanwhile, discreetly withdrew.

No sign seemed visible on Hal of last

night's mad rage and warfare. Sleep, and a clean shave, joined to the exhilaration of battling with the savage surf along the face of Geyser Rock, had swept away all traces of his brutality. Molded into his wet bathing-suit that revealed every line of that splendidly virile body, he drew near.

All at once he caught sight of Captain Briggs, leaning from the window. He stopped his song there by the lantern-flanked gateway, and waved a hand of greeting.

"Top o' the morning to you, grandfather!" cried he in a strong, vibrant tone, that echoed from his high-arched chest with sonorous power. There he stood, a living sculpture of young manhood, overflowed with life, strength, spirits. His body gleamed with glistening brine; his face, lighted by a smile of boyish frankness, shone in the morning sun. His thick, black hair that he had impatiently combed straight back with his fingers, dripped sea-water on his bronzed, muscular shoulders. Thus, there he stood at the gate, looking up with a kind of waiting anxiety at the old captain in the cabin window.

"God, what a man!" the captain thought. "That chest, those arms! Hard as nails, and ridged with sinews. He's only twenty-one or so, but he's better than ever I was, at my best!"

And once again, in spite of all his sorrow and forebodings, he felt his old heart thrill, beat high, expand with pride and hope—hope that, through all narrow straits, beyond all towering barriers, still reached out to lay eager hold upon the future and its dreams.

"I'll be ready for you in a few minutes," was the prosaic enough remark that came to utterance from the captain's lips. "I want to see you, sir, before breakfast."

Hal grinned boyishly, and nodded comprehension. From the hedge he broke a little twig, and held it up.

"Here's the switch, gramp," said he whimsically. "You'd better use it now, while I've got bare legs."

The old man had to smile. He leaned a little further from the window, and with eyes of profound affection gazed at Hal. Sunlight on his head, and Hal's, struck out

wonderful contrasts of snow and jet. The luminous, celestial glow of a June morning, on the New England coast—a morning supreme in warmth and color, in the perfumes of sea and shore, of tree and vine and flower, a morning gemmed with billions of dewdrops flashing on leaf and lawn, a morning overbrooded by azure deeps of sky unclouded—folded the world in beauty.

A sense of completion, of fulfilment of the work of loveliness compassed everything. Autumn looks back, wistfully, regretfully, at all that was. Winter shivers between memories and hopes. Spring hopes, indeed, more strongly still—but June fulfils, completes, and, resting, says: "Behold!"

Such was that morning; and the captain, looking at his boy, so deeply loved, felt something of its magic expanding, soothing, calming the troubled heart within him. On the lawn of Snug Haven, two or three robins were busy in the traditional work of proving how very indiscreet a worm is to be an early worm. Another robin, teetering high on the plummy, green-feather crest of a shadowing elm, was emptying its heart of melody.

For a long minute, old man and young man looked steadily at each other. Then Hal came along, up the white-sanded walk, between the two precisely arranged rows of polished conch-shells. Swinging onward with the ease of perfect and coordinated strength, he passed the flagpole and the brass cannon, and stopped at the old man's window.

"Grandfather," said he in a low tone, "will you listen to me, please?"

"What have you got to say, sir?" demanded Briggs, and stiffened his resolution. Too easily, too quickly had it melted as he had looked at this well-loved grandson, in whom all hopes were centered. "Well, sir, what have you got to say?"

"Listen, grandfather," answered Hal, in a straightforward and very manly way, that harmonized with his clear, blue-eyed look, and with the whole air of ingenuous and boyish contrition that enveloped him. He crossed his bare arms over his powerful chest, looked down a moment at the sand, dug at it a little with a toe, and then once more raised his head. "Listen, please. I've got just one thing to beg of you. And that

is, please don't lecture me, and don't be harsh. I stand here absolutely penitent, grandfather, begging to be forgiven. I've already apologized to Dr. Filhiol and Ezra, you know—"

"So I understand," put in Briggs, still striving hard to make his voice sound uncompromising. "Well?"

"Well, grandfather—as for apologizing to you, that's kind of a hard proposition. It isn't that I don't want to, but you know, the relations between us have been so close that it's pretty hard to make up a regular, formal apology. You and I aren't on a basis where I really *could* apologize, as I could to anybody else—or almost anybody else. But I can say this, that I certainly did act the part of a brute and a ruffian on the Sylvia Fletcher, and I was certainly a rotter here last night. There's only one other thing—"

"And what is that, sir?" demanded Briggs, stifling the impulse he had, to stretch out his hand to Hal and bid him say no more. The captain still maintained his judicial aloofness, despite all cravings of the heart. "What is that?"

"I—you may not believe it, gramp, but it's true, anyhow. I really don't remember hardly anything about what happened aboard the schooner or here. I suppose I must be one of those fellows that can't stand even a couple of drinks. It all seems vague and hazy to me now, like a kind of nightmare, or something. It's all indistinct and shifting, as if it weren't me at all, but somebody else. I feel just as if I'd been standing and watching another man do the things that I really know I myself *did* do. I tell myself I did them, and I know I did, but some way I can't seem to make it come real. The real feeling is that somebody else took my body and used it, and made it do things that I myself didn't want it to do. But I was powerless to stop it. Grampy, I'm telling you this to get out of being blamed. I'm telling it because it's true, true, *true!*"

He paused, looking at his grandfather with eyes of intense and tragic seriousness. Old Briggs shivered slightly, and drew the bathrobe more tightly round his shoulders.

"Go on, Hal," said he.

"Well, grandfather, there isn't much more to say," answered the boy. "I know there'll be consequences, and I'm willing to face them. I'm ready to stand all the gaff that's coming if you'll only let me live this thing down and make good with you and 'come back.' I'll cut out the booze altogether. It was foolish of me to get into it at all, but you know how it is at college?"

"Yes, I can imagine, Hal."

"They all kidded me, for not drinking a little, and so—well, I'm not trying to lay the blame on them, you understand. It's my own fault, right enough. Anyhow, I'm done. You'll forget it and forgive it, won't you, grandpa?"

"If *ill* I, my boy?" the old man answered, in a tremulous voice. He blinked to keep back the tears. "That's a question you don't have to ask. You know the answer, already!"

"You really mean that, gramp?" exclaimed Hal, with boyish gladness and enthusiasm. "If I face the music, whatever it is, and keep away from any encores, will you let me by, this time?"

The captain could answer only by stretching out his hand and gripping Hal's. The boy took his old, wrinkled hand in a grip heartfelt and powerful. Thus for a moment the two men, old and young, one on life's descending slope, the other climbing its first heights, felt the strong pressure of palms that cemented contrition and forgiveness. The captain was the first to speak.

"Everything's all right now, Hal," said he, "so far's I'm concerned. That's the most important part of it. Whatever's wrong, outside Snug Haven, can be and will be made right. I know you've had your lesson, boy."

"I should say so! And what a lesson! I don't need a second."

"No, no. You'll remember this one, right enough. Well, now, least said soonest mended. It was pretty shoal water there, one while. Pretty dognation shoal. But we're floating again, and we've got the coast better charted, now. Not going to run on to any more sandbars, are we? Ah, there's Ezra blowing his bosun's whistle now, for breakfast: and me, captain of this

craft, not dressed yet. No, nor you either. Mr. Mate. Go aloft with you now, sir. Let's see which of us gets to mess-table first!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

DARKENING SHADOWS.

BREAKFAST—served in the sunny dining-saloon on a regulation ship's table, with swivel-chairs screwed to the floor and with a rack above for tumblers and plates—made up by its good spirits and its overflowing happiness for all the grief and heartache of the night before. Hal, expansive with the well-being of the reaction from his swim, and glad in the lustration of his grandfather's forgiveness, radiated life and high spirits. The captain's forebodings of evil had been put quite away, had vanished in his newly-revivified hopes. Dr. Filhiol became downright cheerful, and so far forgot his nerves as to drink a cup of weak coffee. As for Ezra, he seemed in his best form. Taking his cue from the boy's holiday attire of flannels, that truly made a civilized Apollo of him, the old cook slipped in a variety of sly innuendos.

"Judgin' by them 'ar white pants, Master Hal, an' by that 'ar necktie an' them shoes," said he, as Hal—breakfast done—lighted his pipe and blew smoke up into the sunlit air, "an' also rememberin' the fact that it's Saturday an' no school keepin', I cal'late Laura Maynard's got jest the same chances of not takin' a walk with a young man, this mornin', that Ruddy, here, has got of learnin' them heathen Chineese books o' yourn. Well, hail that craft an' speak her fair, ef ye so desire. It says in the sacred Bible to love y'r neighbor as y'rself; so you got Scripture backin' fer Laura."

"Plus the evidence of my own senses, Ezra," laughed the boy, easily. "Heigho!" He stretched his powerful arms and drew with satisfaction at his pipe. His freshly-shaven, well-tanned face with those now placid blue eyes of his, and with that thick-grown black hair crowning the well-modeled head, seemed to have no possible relationship with the mask of viciousness, of animal

hate and rage that it had been the night before.

Even the blow that Hal had received had left but little mark on that vigorous, healthy flesh. As he sat there, smoking and observing Ezra with an amused twinkle in his look, he appeared no other than an extraordinarily well-grown, powerfully developed young man. Could it be, after all (the captain asked his heart), could it be that in this boy, this lithe, well-groomed, quiet-appearing boy, such seed of evil lurked as had, last night, burst forth into that wild, exotic jungle of mad passion?

It all seemed downright impossible. The captain, putting aside memories of other disquieting fits of rage, entered a denial.

"Must have been the rum that did it," he tried to convince himself. "Works that way with some people. Sets them crazy, plumb downright crazy. They lose all anchors, canvas, sticks and everything—go on the rocks, smash! when they've only shipped a drink or two. That's what was at the bottom 'of it—rum. And there'll be no more rum for Hal. He's passed his word that he's through. That means he *is* through, because whatever else he may or may not be, he's a Briggs. So then, that's settled!"

"Heigho!" exclaimed Hal again, "now that you've put me in mind of Laura, I think I will take a walk down-street. I might just possibly happen to meet her. I'm glad you reminded me, Ezra."

"I guess you ain't in need o' much remindin', Master Hal," replied the old cook solemnly. "But there's one thing I *will* remind you of, an' that is to sail a steady course an' not carry too much canvas. You're too young a cap'n to be lookin' for a mate, on the sea o' life. Don't give that gal no great encouragement, Master Hal. Go slow. You can't never tell what a woman or a jury 'll do, an' most women jump at a chanst quicker 'n what they do at a mouse. You ain't out o' college yet. Go easy!"

"For an old bachelor, an old pair of scissors with only one blade, you seem to understand the cut of the feminine gender pretty well," smiled the boy.

"Understand females?" replied Ezra,

drawing out a corn-cob and a pouch of shag. "Not me! Some men think they do, but then, some men is dum fools. All I say is, look out fer 'em; then you can't git far out o' the channel. They're dangerous, women is. No charted coast, no lights, nothin' but love-lights, an' that most always turns out to be will-o'-the-wisp, that piles ye up on the rocks. When a man gits stuck on a gal, seems like he's like a fly stuck on fly-paper—sure to git his leg pulled. Not meanin' your case, now. Master Hal, but jest as a kind o' general proposition, y' understand."

Hal, laughed again, got up, passed a few commonplaces with his grandfather and the doctor, and then departed with that kind of casual celerity which any wise old head can easily interpret when a girl is near, on a June morning. Ezra, striking into a sea-ditty with a monotonous chorus of "Blow the man down," began gathering up the breakfast-dishes. The captain and his guest made their way to the quarter-deck—the piazza, you understand—and settled themselves in rockers, with the Airedale close by.

Briggs had hardly more than filled and lighted his pipe, when his attention was caught by the appearance, down the road, of a slow-jogging, white-canvas covered wagon, bearing on its side the letters: "R. F. D."

"Hello," said the captain, a shade of anxiety crossing his face—recurrent anxiety, for a time dispelled by the good-cheer of the breakfast table. "Hello, there's Del Clark, and the mail. Excuse me, doctor, till I see what this day means to bring forth."

He tried to speak with unconcern, but into his voice crept a foreboding that matched his look. As he strode down the sanded walk, Filhiol peered after him, and shook a dubious head.

"It's a shame, a sin and shame, the way he's worried now," the doctor murmured. "That boy's got the devil in him. He'll kill the captain, yet. A swim, a shave and a suit of white flannels don't change a man's heart. What's bred in the bone, what's bred—"

Captain Briggs reached the gate of lan-

terns, and came to a stand there, waiting for the mail he feared to see. His nervousness betrayed itself by the thick cloud of tobacco-smoke that rose from his lips, upon the morning air. Leisurely the mail-wagon drew along, zigzagging from side to side of the street as the postman slid papers and letters into little metal boxes and hoisted the red flags, always taking good care that no card escaped him, unread.

"Mornin', cap'n," said Del Clark, coming to anchor by the gate. "Here's your weather report, an' here's your 'Shippin' News.' An' here's a letter from Boston, from the college where Hal goes to. You don't s'pose he's in any kind o' rookus down there, huh? An' here's a letter from Squire Bean, down to the Center. Don't cal'late there's any law-doin's, do you?"

"What do you mean?" demanded the captain, trying to keep a brave front, though the heart within him sank like a dipsy-lead. "What could there be?"

"Oh, you know, 'bout how Hal rim-racked McLaughlin. I heered tell, down-along, suthin' about his goin' to sue fer swingein' damages. Seems like Hal durn nigh killed the critter. No gret put-out ef he *had*, I vowny; but Mac, he's madder'n snakes in hayin'-time, an'—"

"Who told you?" demanded the captain, still holding the letters in his hand, as if paralyzed and unable to open either.

"Oh, they're all talkin'. An' I see Mac, myself, goin' into the squire's house on a crutch an' with one arm in a sling, early this mornin'. This here letter must of been wrote right away after that. The ink ain't hardly dry onto it, yit. Course I hope it ain't nuthin'," asseverated Del, with that veiled malice which the best of us inevitably feel in any neighbor's distress, "but looks to me like 'tis. Well—"

He eyed the captain expectantly, hoping the old man might open the letter and confide its contents, or at least by some involuntary exclamation betray the news which Del could bear like the fiery cross of the Scotch highlands, to all and sundry over the whole countryside. But no; the captain merely nodded, thrust the letters into the capacious breast-pocket of his square-rigged, brass-trimmed coat of blue,

and with a non-committal "Thank you, Del," turned and made his way back up the walk to the piazza.

His shoulders drooped not, neither did his step betray any faltering, any weakness to the peering eyes of the R. F. D. man, self-appointed publicity-agent for that whole stretch of coast. Not in presence of Del Clark would Captain Briggs betray emotion. Whereat the disgruntled postman muttered something surly, clucked to his horse, and in profound disappointment pursued his business—the leisurely distribution and collection of Uncle Sam's mail and everybody's private affairs.

The same robin—or perhaps, after all, it was a different one—was singing in the elm, as Alpheus Briggs returned to the house. Down the shaded street, every leaf of which was jeweled with sun-flashing dew, every grass-plot strewn with the living, moving gold of sunlight through wind-stirred foliage, the musical, metallic rhythm of the anvil was breaking through the contrabass of the vexed surf. But now this melody fell on deaf ears, for Captain Briggs. Heavily he came up the steps, and with an air of weariness sank down in the big rocker. Something bothered him. Sadly he shook his head.

"It's come, I'm afraid," said he dejectedly. "It's come, after all. I was hoping it wouldn't. Hoping McLaughlin would let it go just as a fight that finished where it began. But that was hoping too much. He's no man to swallow a beating. No bully *is*. Either he's got to lick, or he won't attempt to play. See here now, will you?"

The captain pulled out his letter from Squire Bean, and extended it to Filhiol. The doctor read the return-card printed in the corner of the envelope.

"Local attorney?" asked he, with a look of anxiety.

"And only one," answered the captain. "This letter means only one thing. Barometer's falling again. We'll have to take in more canvas, sir."

He tore the envelope, clumsily enough, for his fingers were not only thick and old, but now were trembling a little. The letter when spread out, revealed a crabbed hand-

writing which the captain's anxious eyes deciphered thus:

Endicutt, Massachusetts,

June 10, 1918.

CAPTAIN ALPHEUS BRIGGS,

South Endicutt.

DEAR SIR: Captain Fergus McLaughlin, of the Sylvia Fletcher, has placed in my hands for settlement the matter of the assault and battery committed upon him, to a degree almost amounting to manslaughter, by your grandson, Hal Briggs. Captain McLaughlin is in bad shape, under a doctor's care, is minus a front tooth, has his right arm broke, and cannot walk without a crutch. You are legally liable for these injuries, and would be immediately summoned into court except Capt. McLaughlin has regard for your age and position in the community. There is, however, no doubt, legal damages coming to the Capt. If you call, we can discuss amt. of same, otherwise let the law take its course.

Res'tly,

JOHAB BEAN, J. P.

Ex-Candidate for Judge of Dis't Court.

P. S.—It is Dr. Stevens who is attending the Capt., and he will corroborate my statements as to the injuries done, and *et cetera*, if you wish to see him before visiting my office.

This letter, for all its absurdities of style, produced no smile on the lips of Captain Briggs. Instead, his boding dejection deepened, as he reread it carefully, then, tugging at his beard, passed the letter over to Dr. Filhiol.

"It's all as I was afraid it would be, you see," said the captain. "McLaughlin's not going to take the medicine he's really been earning for long years of buckoing the poor devils that have signed articles with him. No, doctor. First time he meets a *man*, one that can stand up to him and pay him back with interest, he steers a course for the law. That's your bully and your coward, at heart, for you. Thank God, for all my doings, I never fought my fights before a judge or jury! It was the best man win, fist to fist, or knife to knife if it came to that—but the law, sir, never!"

"Well, that doesn't matter now," said Filhiol, squinting at the letter. "I'm afraid you're in for whacking damages, captain."

"Don't think so really, do you?"

"It looks that way, to me. Hal's lucky,

as you know, yourself, that he wasn't a signed-on member of the crew. There'd have been mutiny for you to get him out of, and iron bars. Lucky again he didn't hit just a trifle harder, or in some other and more vital spot. If he had, it might easily have been murder, and in this State they send men to the chair for that. Yes, captain, you're lucky it's turned out no worse. If you have only a hundred or two dollars to pay for doctor's bills and damages, you'll be coming out of it most fortunately."

"A hundred or two dollars!" ejaculated the captain. "Judas priest! You don't think there'll be any such bill as that for repairs and demurrage on McLaughlin's hulk, do you?"

"I think that would be a very moderate sum, in view of the damage inflicted by your grandson's fists," answered Filhiol. "However, that's something we can hardly speculate on, now. All I can say now is this, that I'm willing to stand back of you, captain, all the way. I'll go into court and examine McLaughlin, myself, as an expert witness. It's more than possible McLaughlin and Squire Bean, here, are exaggerating matters, to shake you down. So far as that goes, they can't succeed, because, as I say—"

"You'll stand back of me, doctor?" exclaimed the captain, his face lighting up. "You'll go into court, and steer me straight?"

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

"By all means, sir!"

Briggs nearly crushed the doctor's feeble hand with the all-too-powerful grip he gave it.

"Well and manly spoken, sir!" said he. "It's like you, doctor. In the old days, you were that way. You haven't changed. Well, all I can do is to thank you, and accept your offer. That puts a better slant to our sails, right away. I feel now that I may get through this storm without jettisoning any more dollars than I really have to. Good, sir—very, very good!"

His expression was quite different as he tore open the other letter, the letter from the college whence Hal had just come. Perhaps, after all, this was only some routine communication. But as he read the neat, typewritten lines, a look of incredulity, astonishment, bewildered lack of comprehension developed; and this in turn gave way to a most pitiful dismay and grief.

The captain's hands were shaking, now, so that he could hardly hold the letter. His face had gone quite bloodless. All the voice he could muster was a kind of whispering gasp, dry-throated, hoarse, as he stretched out the sheet of paper to the wondering Filhiol:

"Read—read that, doctor! The curse—the curse! It's falling on me, surely falling on me, now.

"Oh, God is being very hard on me, in my old age! Read *that!*"

U U U U

THE BON VIVANT

BY JOSEPH P. HANRAHAN

HIS merry little twinkling eyes
 Some hidden truths disclose:
 You'll read a lecture in his paunch,
 A sermon in his nose,
 A volume in his gouty foot.
 To cut it short, papa
 Would make a dandy unabridged
 Encyclopedia!

Daughter of Ayler



by Jennie Harris Oliver

IT was the talk all along Bear Creek how the out-of-season electric storm that burned houses, killed a horse and felled the best timber, left there an unparalleled siege of scarlet fever. The storm might have brought about the scourge. Queer things happen. At any rate, after it was over, fever lay red and torturing upon the small population of the cotton-belt.

Van Camp's son, husky as a pirate, cheered by catnip tea and his grandmother's stories of wild dogs and headless horses, pulled through magnificently; but Emmett Ayler's little daughter, just beginning to walk and talk, was not quite the same afterward.

It takes a mother to meet trouble more than half-way. Liz Ayler—she that had been Liz Elly—ran over to tell Roxey Van Camp about it. Not that Liz loved Roxey! There was a time when Emmett left Liz—making her wedding clothes—and went to worship a girl with slim throat and wind-meshed hair.

In the stillness of the night, with her husband breathing heavily beside her, she told herself relentlessly that, in spite of some things, Roxey Malone was between them—ghost of the unattainable. It was the primitive mother in Liz, together with a wholesome appreciation of Roxey's good sense and generosity, that winged her feet down the orchard slope across a green splash of alfalfa up through the plum-grove to the bungalow on the hillside.

"I want you to come home with me," Liz

panted, standing white-faced in the doorway of the Van Camp living-room. She said this to the young mistress. Significantly she turned her black eyes on Mrs. Malone busy with her embroidery, caught in one glance the handsome youngster building a castle of blocks on the hearth and the blue and white uniformed mulatto maid making lettuce salad at the sideboard.

"Alone!" Liz added tensely.

Roxey jumped up from the piano. She was startled, frightened. As she ran after Liz between dipping boughs and through knee-high clover, it was her belief that little Hepsibah—the Ayler baby was named for Emmett's mother—was in a fit; but there were no signs of trouble about the big, pointed house on the hill.

"Sit down," Liz invited, and Roxey sank breathless into the leather chair pointed out. "I'll get you some cold water," Liz added. She hurried out and there was heard the creak of the windmill.

It was a gloomy place where Van Camp's young wife was left to wait and wonder. A carpet of unclipped Brussels matched for heaviness the greenish paper on the walls and the window-shades. The furniture was of mahogany, haircloth and leather. Aylers, a score of them, long, thin and ashy of feature, scowled down from their frames with a sort of unreasonable pride. Roxey shuddered. She thought of the new house fronting the white Meridian Road and wondered how Liz could wait to move into it.

The baby's crib—one joyous tone in the big living-room, swayed by the north window and through airy canopy of gauze, little Hepsibah could be seen gracefully relaxed in sleep. Roxey had turned to this pleasing picture when Liz came in.

"It is about *her*." She nodded toward the child. Pouring some water from a sparkling pitcher into a sparkling glass, she waited for Roxey to drink before setting the tray on the reading-table. Her dark face was tragedy itself as she stood silently looking down at the baby. Finally she crossed the room to a small compartment on the right and signaled the other to follow her. Roxey remembered the nook as the bedroom where Emmett had lain after he had all but died to save her son. Now it showed itself to be a child's nursery. A rose-sprigged carpet was on the floor. Shelves, cabinets and hangers were heaped and loaded with costly things—offerings, Mrs. Van Camp found, from the Ayler.

Liz touched a tiny coat of turquoise velvet, lined with scented satin and trimmed with swansdown. "From Grandfather Ayler," she murmured. Turning, she lifted an ivory elephant from a mantel—"Aunt Sarah gave this." Her foot had touched a huge doll with real hair, and she called Roxey's attention to it. "Grandmother Ayler brought that and the whole row sitting against the wall. She says she never had a doll, and Hepsibah shall be rich with them."

For some time Liz held her company thus. She showed necklaces, rings, satin shoes and lace hoods, manicure and dressing sets, silk pillows, wonderful little quilts and socks of cobweb. Her expression was restrained until she came to an "a-b-c book" of linen, much crumpled and tattered with baby clutchings and chewings, then she sobbed. She took the book with her as they left the room, and while they sat facing each other, she caressed it on her knee with soft strokes of her long, firm fingers.

"They've never had any use for me—Emmett's people," she said bluntly. "Of course I've held up, but it's been in my heart all the time, eating there like a cancer. Emmett—we've been closer since he was cut to pieces in that pit back of your gin,

and I gave the blood out of my arm to save him—still, I know that he knows I'm an Elly!"

Liz opened the soiled linen-book, closed it, and the vivid lines of her face trembled. "His people didn't intend to have anything to do with me, but after they came back from Tennessee and saw Hepsibah, it was different. They worship the baby. Anything with the blood of Ayler, I've found, is—*different*."

"They've no business to make you feel that way!" Roxey cried indignantly. "If they're as narrow as that, I wouldn't care. But the baby—is something wrong with her?"

"I want you to see for yourself. I've been trying to fill the time till she wakes up. I'd rather not disturb her. You don't mind waiting?"

"No," said Roxey.

A silence fell. Finally there was a sigh from the crib; a funny little gurgle and flop. Hepsibah came up feet first, righted herself and called to her mother:

"Mu-uh!"

"Yes, darling," Mrs. Ayler answered sweetly. Then she did something incomprehensible to Roxey. She leaned and shoved a chair between herself and the crib. "Come," she prompted softly, "right here, honey!"

Hepsibah put aside the netting. Reaching one white-moccasined foot over the edge of the low crib, she felt for the floor and found it. Carefully she planted the other foot firmly and balanced herself like a flower in the wind. Cocking her dusk little curls sidewise, she questioned, quaintly, "Mu-uh?"

"Here I am." Liz spoke from behind the chair.

With wabbly, wide-apart steps the baby advanced, stopped, and again made the adorable sidewise little dip of her head:

"Mu-uh!"

"Here, right here!"

Whitely Roxey watched the child take a fresh start and stagger into the chair. She saw Hepsibah pat the chair, feel her way around it, and finally come to anchor in triumph at her mother's knee. She stared at the mother and child, then away.

"Blind!" breathed Liz.

Roxey could only nod when she heard the expression.

"Emmett doesn't suspect—I wasn't sure of it myself until just as I went after you. You know she hasn't really walked before, and there was no way to tell. What I want is to take her away to a hospital and see what can be done. Roxey Van Camp, it is you I am asking for help. I want two hundred dollars. I don't know when it will be paid. I don't want Emmett and his people to know. I don't want any one but you to know! Maybe she can be cured. If not—" Liz paused and did not say what she had in mind.

Roxey Van Camp had known trouble—danger, starvation; her beloved mother had been blind. Even as Liz uttered the request her mind was made up. "I am glad you asked me," she said simply.

"Yes—you're that kind." She lowered her voice. "There's Emmett. It must be dinner-time."

Ayler wasn't really embarrassed before Roxey, but it always seemed that he was. Liz spared any awkwardness as he came into the room. "Take the baby, Emmett," she said, "and let me get Mrs. Van Camp a cup of yeast foam."

Roxey knew that Liz had spent four years digging her way out of the Elly dialect, but it was the native wit of her that counted in an emergency. With the pungent foam dipping from the white jar in the cupboard, she turned at the door for a nod of understanding. Liz, whose face showed blanched above the snowy flare of her collar, was practically refitting the cover on the yeast crock. Beyond her stood Emmett, his little daughter pressed tightly in his arms. There spoke the Elly courage and the Ayler pride.

Mrs. Van Camp took the downward path briskly. The sun picked gold from the floating meshes of her light-brown hair, her little strapped sandals shone. She still wore the girlish "middy" that John called a "jumper." Love, contentment and Rosie Sunpie's cooking had rounded her beautifully. She looked exactly like the sort of young person who could draw on the family bank for two hundred dollars and no ques-

tions would be asked concerning its disposition. Briefly, that is what happened.

II.

Liz had cherry pie, fried chicken, pineapple salad, new potatoes and little beet-greens the day before she told her husband she was going to the city for a month—maybe more. Emmett was down to his third cup of coffee and his second helping of pie. It was the Ayler of it that he didn't act surprised.

"What's that for?" he asked quietly, after the silence had become oppressive.

"I need a change, and so does Hepsibah," Liz said.

"Yuh going tuh take Hepsy?"

"Why, of course, silly," Liz laughed.

Emmett finished his pie and his coffee. "I guess you're joking, Liz."

Liz gave the baby a spoonful of bread and milk, then wiped the little bib with a napkin. "Do I joke, Emmett?" she finally rebuked him.

The Ayler spoke out. "I don't want you should go."

"I must."

"Why must yuh? What's the matter here, all of a sudden? Take Hepsy tuh the city and she git sick. City water hain't fot for a baby."

"I'll boil every bit of it, Emmett, and use lime-water besides."

Ayler set down his cup. He had lost his dash of color. "Mebbe I could go along," he suggested, yielding somewhat.

"The house, Emmett—you agreed to shingle it yourself. More than that, you contracted, didn't you?"

Ayler had forgotten the new house. "Yes, that settles it," he told her triumphantly. "You'll have to cook for me. Man shingling all day in the boiling sun, he's got tuh eat."

"Your mother will see to that. She is coming to-morrow. With a girl to help her, the work won't be anything—she'll have only to boss."

"Don't make any difference, Liz. You can't go."

"I must."

"You'd look well in the city—alone!"

"I've got people there—the Morgans."

"I hain't going tuh have my wife living off the Morgans."

"I have some money of my own, Emmett—enough."

"Yuh're going—whin I tell yuh not to?"

"Yes."

Ayler got up with such violence that the table rocked. "Yuh can't go," he shouted. "Yuh hear me!"

"So do the neighbors." The girl's hot temper arose. "Do be still, Emmett—you frighten Hepsy."

The baby leaned in her high-chair, her dark curls tilted backward and sidewise. Liz knew that the wonderful purple pools that were-her eyes, strained between their dusk fringes upon herself and Emmett—strained, and could see nothing. The tiny pucker on the rosebud mouth stiffened the mother's courage. She stood up and faced her husband, her eyes leveled upon his.

"Did I ever tell you you couldn't do anything?" she said reasonably.

Then Emmett reverted to type. He leaned as if to strike her. He clutched her arm. "No—but I tell you," he snarled, "that you can't take Hepsy tuh the city. That settles it."

Liz shrugged away. "You can't keep me from it," she told him coolly. "If I'd suspicioned you'd act this way, Emmett, I wouldn't have mentioned the matter."

"And sneak off without letting me know?"

"Not sneak—just go."

The man dropped his hands in a way he had. "All right, go. See if I care. But don't come back. You hear!"

"Emmett!"

"I mean it."

Ayler started around the table toward the baby. He wanted to kiss the piteous look from her little face, to feel her mite of a nose in his neck, her hands in his hair. Liz looked at him questioningly. He kissed Hepsibah once and turned to the door.

"That's all," he stated insultingly. "I hain't coming back till yore gone."

Liz conquered her desire to say something terrible. She ran and clung to her husband. "You'll be sorry, Emmett," she sobbed. "You'll be sorry!"

Brutally he broke from her. "Jest sorry I tied to an Elly!" he sneered, and was gone.

Liz watched her husband's furious stride down the slope. "Next week they'll all be here," she mused bitterly, "and how they will hate me!"

Fortune favors the brave. Mrs. Ayler was ready and gone within an hour after the clash. She caught a ride with a strange family motoring along the section line. A sanitorium is a safe place for hiding. Taken to the very door of the institution, Liz and little Hepsibah entered swiftly and were blotted from the annals of Bear Creek.

Behind them, the house of Ayler arose with clenched fist—and cursed.

III.

EMMETT AYLER had been wrapped around by the warm presence of his wife. He had been worshiped, obeyed, slaved for, deferred to. He was even above the baby she had borne, in her affections. To find that she had any thought apart from himself, a will of her own—he suspected, evilly, a secret of her own, was cruel as death.

There is no limit to the crazy things a man of Ayler's type will do. Emmett's first act, after he had searched through the empty spaces of the gloomy house on the hill, was to lift the cut-glass berry-dish that had been a wedding present from the Ellys and dash it to the floor. Standing amid the fragments of diamond-bright glass, he shook his fist.

"Curse her, curse her!" he breathed venomously. "May God damn her and the devil get her!"

Ayler shingled his house according to contract, but he did not eat a bite for three windy, blistering, dust-ridden days. He wanted Liz—was lost and beside himself without her, but he would not admit it, even in his inmost heart. It was the baby he hungered for; his little daughter, whose presence he craved. When it came out that Liz was away, with a sort of selfish pride he stated that she had taken the baby to see Uncle Hi over in "Tennessee."

Mother Ayler reproved him for the lie.

Mother Ayler dyed her hair and dipped snuff, but she used flat silence instead of words to deny it. "Tell the truth and shame the devil!" she advised her son. "She's run off, and that's all they be to it. It 'll have to come out some time. 'Nother thing, I want yuh tuh go tuh town and git that young one—me and grampaw'll go crazy ef yuh don't. Don't fool around—take her—jest take her! Won't no jedge in Oklahoma give an Elly nuthin!"

"Grampaw" found immense comfort in berating the Ellys. "Them Ellys," he rasped, slamming down the trunk-lid on toy-piano, doll-house, teddy-bears, music-box and a dozen and one other extravagances they had brought little Hepsibah, "them Ellys is crooked as a dawg's hind leg." Grampaw had a way of emphasizing remarks by a twitch of his big-jointed right thumb.

"Them Ellys," he twitched, "is a low-down, ornery, thievin', murderin', bootlaigin', cussin' outfit. They'd better not tangle up with me, not ary one of 'em!"

Emmett did not mention the number of trips he had already made to the city. He had not gone after Liz—nothing like that! Since she had lied about going to the Morgans, it didn't matter where she was. He had told her not to come back to Bear Creek, and he meant it. As for Hepsibah—maybe he could "jest take her," and then again, maybe he couldn't. As days crawled by he remembered more and more the fighting look in his wife's big black eyes. There was something strange about it, strange and baffling.

One month completed itself and lapped over into the next one. Emmett went to town; grampaw went to town. Sometimes, after a family powwow, grammaw, Uncle Hi from Tennessee, Aunt Sarah from Kansas—and all the aunts; Cousin Esmeralda from Colorado, and all the cousins, went to whatever place it was decided upon might have swallowed up little Hepsibah. It took money, all this prancing about, but there was no lack of money among the Aylers. The upshot of it was—they didn't find the baby, and they couldn't find her.

Then, two months after her disappearance, the unexpected happened—little Hep-

sibah came back to the big house on the hill. Through heavy wind and rain a touring-car, ungainly with chains and mud, labored up the slope. The family—a representation of them—were seated in the gloomy living-room, themselves gloomy beyond words. There might have been a ram on the north door, Emmett wasn't sure. A lash of spray struck him in the face as he opened the door, and below him, on the step, a strange woman, clumsy in motor things, stood holding the child in her arms.

After Ayler had shut the door on the woman and the storm, he stood stupidly staring. grammaw and grampaw were removing Hepsibah's swathings—he could hear their rapid and senseless chatter. So Liz had sent the baby. Liz wasn't coming back. Well—he had told her not to come. He didn't want her back. Suddenly he listened.

"I can't git her sleeve off, 'cause she won't turn it loose," his mother was saying. "It's a letter. Here, Emmett, see if she'll let you have it."

Ayler leaned and looked into the bewildered little face. "Give daddy the letter," he said gently, and Hepsibah yielded it up. The thick sheet crackled as he drew it from the long envelope. While his father and mother sniffed audibly, he studied the unmeaning document. At last his thick skull comprehended—this was a health certificate and belonged to the baby.

It was very plain after the first. Hepsibah had been blind from scarlet fever. She had gone through a delicate operation and come out with good eyes. That was why she had been slow about giving up the letter—she was not sure who was who. Pinned to the sheet was a narrow strip inscribed in his wife's bold hand:

Pay to the order of Roxey Van Camp—two hundred dollars.

"What 'd she write?" asked Mother Ayler, when her curiosity had gotten the better of her.

"Yes, what 'd the huzzy have to say for herself?" sneered the old man.

Ayler did not answer. He unpinned the slip and, stepping to the table, set his name to the check. Leaving the certificate lying

there, he went into the bedroom and got the revolver he kept loaded for marauding rats. Then fumbling his hat from its nail, he walked through the dining-room, out into the rain-sodden path.

IV.

Love is a law to itself—without reason and without recompense. If Liz Ayler could have been certain of her husband's undivided affection, she would have been in heaven. That was the way Liz loved. To stand well with his people was half the battle. In a way, motherhood had bound her to them—she had given the family of Ayler a healthy, winsome child to perpetuate the name. That was as they understood it. A blind Ayler—that would be different. It would be "jest like an Elly to have a blind one!" The fever—that could have nothing to do with it!

Further, the family were dead set against hospitals. They looked upon an "operation" with the horror of the ignorant. Liz fought for her own the best she knew when she took her little daughter and borrowed money to go the lone trail. If it all proved a failure, she meant to hide herself and the baby from the reproach of the Aylers. If a success—she would come home in triumph. That was as she had planned it before Emmett turned absolute cur and insulted her.

Still, Liz had not let her baby return uncomforted. It had been the chauffeur's wife who handed little Hepsibah in to the Aylers, but Liz herself held the precious burden to her own warm breast every jolt of the stormy way. When, at her bidding, the car stopped just beyond sight of the house, the important document had been placed in the child's hand.

"Give this to daddy," Liz had said, kissing the tiny fingers that clutched what was intrusted to them. "Be sure—no one must have it but daddy."

"Daddy!" repeated Hepsibah sweetly.

"And be good. Don't cry—if you can help it."

"Not cry!" promised Hepsibah bravely.

"Kiss mother." They kissed.

Twenty minutes later Liz knocked at the

Van Camp door. The fragrant breath of a green-wood fire received her as she stepped in and confronted the young mistress.

"Hepsibah can see," she announced briefly. "I have sent her up there to them. I am not going. Maybe you want to know why!"

Roxey looked at the dripping figure, white-faced and unspeakably tragic. "I don't," she answered firmly. "At least, not now. Let me help you to a chair. Oh, you poor girl!"

"I'll lie down—in a minute," Liz said hoarsely. "I don't know what it is to sleep. About the money—it's gone, every cent. I sent a check for Emmett to sign. I think he'll do it. Any way, you'll be paid."

Liz took her eyes from Roxey's, and for a moment gathered comfort from the rest of the family, one by one. "I want to hide here a few days. I haven't eaten much lately, and I'm weak. I don't want *any one* to know where I am."

Roxey slipped an arm around the fugitive's wet shoulders. "Lean on me," she said.

In a bedroom beside the fireplace, she striped off her guest's too thin jacket and her soaked shoes. As she stooped over the exhausted woman, Ayler was heard to enter the living-room. "Don't let him suspect," whispered Liz. "Go!" She pushed Roxey from her. "Don't let him know," she repeated, almost savagely.

Van Camp had opened to Ayler. He had set him a chair, too, but Ayler preferred to stand. He was gray—Ayler-gray, like ashes, and water dripped upon the floor from the hat that hung in his hand.

"I guess you know why I'm here." He spoke to Roxey as she came into the room. "It's about the money Liz borrowed of you."

Roxey took the check he extended to her. "Thank you, Emmett," she said.

"What else I got to say," he went on, "is as much for one as another. It looks queer, butting into a man's house on a day like this, but I had tuh. I got to say in front of some one that may sometime see Liz, what I think of myself. I'm a hound—worse, I'm a murderer. I've killed the liking Liz had fer me!"

Freeing his mind thus far, Emmett looked about him. He saw Mrs. Malone swaying gently in her sewing-chair. He saw the boy. The boy who tried not to hate Ayler, stood quite close, looking up and trying not to scowl. Ayler looked longest at Van Camp.

Moistening dry lips, he took up the thread of self-accusation. "I guess a man that's got a streak of yellow is never shet of it unless the Lord Almighty bleaches him. I'm yellow—you know that. Even animals understand, and hate me. Even your boy sees through me. Liz was the only one—"

Ayler paused, swallowing hard. The hand that held the hat at his side, gripped hard. "Us Ayler has always set ourselves up as better then the Ellys," he resumed, with an effort. "We never let Liz fergit that fer a minute. That's the big-headedness of us. Old man Elly did kill a man in a fair hand to hand squabble, but I—I caught a sheep-dawg in a wolf-trap and beat it to death with a club. Elly has bootlaiged whisky and us Ayler has guzzled it on the sly. He cusses and we break dishes. We hain't got no more learning then a mule, and don't want none. Two of the Elly boys is over tuh the university."

Emmett stopped. It was hard to speak out what must be said. "Whin Liz got that money of you," he turned to Roxey. "and went away, the yellow devil in me struck her. It said, 'if you go, don't ever come back.'

"Well,"—he lifted his hands and dropped them palm out—"she hain't come back. She sent the baby, and she—stayed. I don't blame her. They's nothing to come back to. Mebbe if she could 'a' changed all my blood tuh hers that time, things 'd been different. Anyways, I hain't going back on the hill. If she can't have little Hepsibah, I won't, either. I've said some things—not half I could. It's mighty good of yuh tuh listen. Now I'm going."

"No use to rush off in the rain," Van Camp said. "Stay and have supper with us."

Ayler opened the door. "No use," he muttered. "Things is as they be."

Stepping out, he slammed the door after him. By the porch a sudden scream of wind snatched off the frost-bitten cotton-

wood leaves and sent them in a yellow streamer in the desperate man's wake, as if the stain in his soul pursued him.

The boy, whom his father called "Swashbuckler," ran to the window and looked after the fleeing figure. "He's going like the very devil," the Swashbuckler cried, choosing his phrase with relish. "And he hasn't any more hat on than a rabbit!"

"Son!" cried Roxey.

Beside the fireplace, the bedroom door opened. Liz had dragged on her shoes and partly buttoned them, but her hat and jacket were forgotten. Within the loosened bands of her midnight hair a glorious color flamed. She crossed the room erectly. At the door she swung about and faced Roxey.

"Oh," cried Liz, lifting her palm to her blazing eyes, "isn't a woman a fool!"

V.

AYLER left the plum-grove to westward and plunged down the lane toward the open road. At Flat Rock he paused, looking dazedly at the wall of gray, wind-driven rain. He had taken the gun from his pocket, holding it in clutching fingers, his arms folded. He believed Liz was lost to him, and he meant to take the coward's way out of his bereavement.

His wife was close upon him before he suspected her presence. "Emmett!" she said quietly.

Ayler wheeled and stared. He slipped the weapon out of her sight, still staring, dazedly. He did not wonder how she came to be there, bareheaded, thin sleeves clinging to her beautiful arms—only if she were there at all.

"Liz!" he muttered. "Liz! Liz! Is it you?"

"Of course it is. Wake up, boy—it's all right. I heard you—back there!"

Ayler took her in his arms, fearfully at first, then straining her to him. For the first time he bruised her with a kiss.

"Liz," he sobbed hoarsely, "I hain't fitten—fer you!"

The cottonwood leaves came to prison under the shelving edge of Flat Rock; but on the orchard slope the two whom tragedy had made one, climbed swiftly—together,

After His Own Heart

by Ben Ames Williams

Author of "Once Aboard the Whaler," "The Devil's Violin," "Three in a Thousand," etc.

CHAPTER XII.

THE STRASSBURG GOOSE—(CONCLUDED).

DR. SLEEN watched Tom's enormous repast with obvious satisfaction; and when it was done, he produced a deadly looking little silver-and-steel instrument from his case and bade Tom roll up his sleeve.

"What's the matter?" Tom asked. He was too full of good victuals to be over-energetic.

"Blood test," the doctor explained.

"Roll up your sleeve."

Vince passed a box of cigars, and Tom took one and lighted it, and grinned amiably at the doctor. "You know, doc," he said, "you please me. There's a pertinacity about you."

"Exactly," Dr. Sleen agreed. "I am flattered. Just for that, young man, I will leave you as many of your organs as we can possibly manage to get along without."

"Don't mention it," Tom urged.

"And now—your sleeve."

Tom rose lazily, stripped off his coat, loosed his cuff, and turned it back. He held out his arm for the doctor's inspection. Dr. Sleen eyed it admiringly.

"Very fine development, young man."

Tom nodded. "This course of treatment you've given me—"

The doctor waved his hand. "I can't claim all the credit."

He jabbed Tom's arm with a needle.

"Ouch!" Tom ejaculated. The doctor soothed him. "There, there, it's all over now." And he squeezed a red drop from the puncture and deftly sucked up this red drop with a tiny syringe. Tom eyed this instrument. "That's a neat contrivance."

"Yes, isn't it?" the surgeon assented. "My own invention. More satisfactory, I think, than a smear on a slide." He was packing the syringe carefully in his case; and when this was done, he turned to the watchful Vince.

"I expect you to see to it that this young man eats what is set before him hereafter," he directed.

"Yes, sir," said Vince.

"Don't leave him."

"I shall be watchful, sir."

The doctor bowed to Tom, turned to the door, and departed; and when the door was closed behind him, Vince gave Tom a long and baleful stare. Tom, lounging in a deep chair, grinned up at him.

"Well, Vince?" he asked.

"You're a troublemaker, sir."

"I'm in trouble myself, Vince. You ought to be willing to share it."

Vince shook his head. "I'm a troublemaker myself, sir, when I'm crossed," he warned. "Sometimes my harsh nature overcomes my tender heart, sir."

Tom shook his head sorrowfully. "That will never do, Vince. Let me read you a bit of my poetry. It will soothe you."

"I fear not, sir."

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for January 4.

"Let me try it, anyway?"

"I've stood a great deal in silence, sir—"

"Silence, Vince?"

"Comparative silence, sir. But I could not stand that. I could not be responsible for the consequences, if you were to utter those jingles of yours, sir."

Tom sighed. "I'm afraid you're stifling your better nature, Vince."

"I'm afraid you are, sir."

"Well—we won't quarrel over a pronoun."

They did not. After a time Vince announced that the hour had come for the afternoon stroll; and they went out together into the gardens, Archibald, as ever, two paces to the rear.

And, as always on these excursions, Tom kept a vigilant outlook for any word or sign from Sally, any trace of her continued presence in the house. He even ventured to ask Vince whether she had been removed from the island; but Vince said firmly:

"I can say nothing about the matter, sir."

Tom could not shake his resolution; but a moment later he found the answer to his own inquiry.

It had rained the night before; a vigorous downpour that beat the sand and soft earth smooth and clean as a fresh sheet of paper. At a point where their path crossed another, Tom discovered, in the gravel here and there, a series of depressions. Something leaped within him at the sight. He dropped a match and stooped ostentatiously to pick it up.

Thus stooping, he was able to examine the depressions more closely; and he saw that they were the marks of two pairs of feet, feet that had passed that way since the rain. They were the marks of the feet of a man and a woman; they were, beyond a doubt, the footprints of Sally and of some guard who had accompanied her on such a stroll as that which he himself was taking.

She was, then, still here. Tom picked up the match and passed on, without confiding to Vince his discovery; and he began to consider ways and means by which he might take advantage of the good luck which had revealed Sally's presence.

She had passed this way once; she would come this way again. If he had a note, he might drop it where she would discover it. But what could he say? She did not know the nature of the peril which threatened him; but it would do no good for her to know. It would only add to her distress. He cudged his brain, found no wheat among the chaff there. But at least he could drop some one of his belongings, something that would tell her he was still near her.

On the way back to the house he dropped his pocket-knife. His initials were engraved on it. It fell softly in the grass beside the path.

Goliath touched his shoulder, presented the knife. "You drop this, ya-as," he told Tom; and Tom was constrained to accept the restitution and pass on—baffled.

But it was something to know the girl was near.

He turned his thoughts to a reconsideration of the possibility of delaying the operation. Starvation had failed him. There was no chance of trying that again. He might overeat and get indigestion; but his digestion was—he groaned at the recollection—cast-iron. Besides, indigestion would hardly save him. It was his heart, not his stomach, that Dr. Sleen was after.

His heart! He wondered what he could do to his heart! He would have been willing to acquire any cardiac disorder if by so doing he might avert the thing that was coming. He considered, remembered having heard somewhere that alcohol was bad for the heart.

"Vince!" he called. "I feel like a drink of whisky!"

Vince was busy with the gate-legged table. It was the dinner-hour. "Do you, sir?" he inquired.

"Yes. Serve me a couple of highballs before dinner; and some—oh, no that's not right. I want cocktails first, and highballs during dinner. See to it, Vince."

Vince shook his head apologetically. "My orders are—no strong drink, sir. Very bad for the heart. Now—a little wine, perhaps?"

Tom persisted. "Oh, come, Vince. This business is getting on my nerves. I'm all

strung up; I need letting down. A good, old bat—"

"Very sorry, sir!"

"Go ahead, that's a good fellow. You must know how I feel, Vince. Didn't you ever crave a good shot of—"

"I'm a teetotaler, sir."

Tom threw up his hands. "I surrender!" And he groaned inwardly. His alcoholic hope was gone. Nicotin? There was a chance. He took it that evening, after dinner; he smoked two cigars, two cigarettes, told Vince to bring more cigars.

And once more Vince blocked him. "You have reached your daily limit, sir."

"My limit? I never heard of that before."

"I never mentioned it, sir, because there was no need. You have never approached it; but you have smoked an unusual amount to-day."

Tom glared at him. "You mean to say I'm not allowed to smoke all I want to? Why, they let even a condemned man do that!"

Vince shuddered. "Don't speak of such things, sir. I should suppose you had more delicacy—when that fate hangs over me—"

"I beg your pardon, Vince. I forgot. But it's true, just the same."

"So I believe, sir. But—they have no further use for a condemned man's—er—vitals, sir."

"And they have for mine. And think smoking will make them a trifle shop-worn."

"Exactly, sir."

Tom felt cold. He could not sit still. He stood up, paced across the room, back again. "By glory, Vince, that doctor is a cold-blooded specimen."

"A doctor needs to be, sir." Vince, too, arose. "But I must not allow you to excite yourself, sir. You had best go to bed, sir."

Tom threw up his hands. "Oh—all right!"

When Vince, with a tenderness almost maternal, had tucked him in for the night and left him, Tom tossed back and forth, thinking desperately. Heart disease! Heart disease! He had to have it, had to have it quick. But the thing was—how?"

Tobacco heart? Barred. Drunkard's heart? Beyond his reach. What other kinds of bad hearts were there?

He sat up in bed with the idea. Athletic heart? He had heard of that. Athletes got it. He was an athlete. He ought to have it; but Dr. Sleen had told him his heart was all right. Nevertheless, athletes got athletic hearts. How? Overexertion. Tom jumped out of bed and set his teeth. By glory, if that was all—

He began to overexert himself. It was no easy task, for Tom was a husky citizen. He started with callisthenics, going through the familiar exercises at top speed, over and over, till he was panting and gasping and dripping at every pore. He stood erect and bent to touch the floor fifty times. He stood erect and squatted down and leaped up again a hundred times. He did the shoulder-roll; he dropped on his face and did chest and back exercises till he could do no more. He turned on his back and did the seesaw, feet up, then head up, until he was dizzy. He jumped up and turned hand-springs till his head was loose on his shoulders—

When he had exhausted his repertoire, he started all over again at the beginning. And when he could continue the strenuous pace no longer, he strode back and forth across the room at top speed.

Once he felt his pulse. It was maddeningly calm. He plunged into his over-exertions with fresh vigor.

He took a chair and used it as a dumb-bell. He took two chairs and brandished them simultaneously. He tackled the bed, and lifted and lowered the foot of the heavy piece until his back ached. He tried to lift the desk on his back, at last succeeded, and marched with it up and down the room, like a baggageman with a trunk, until it hit the chandelier and fell to the floor, jerking him over and on top of it.

Hitherto he had managed to keep quiet. But the fall of the desk alarmed the house; and in an instant Vince came in the door, and snapped on the light and stared at Tom.

"Why, sir," he demanded, "what are you doing?"

"Eh! Wha's that?" Tom mumbled. He

rubbed his eyes, peered at the valet. "Oh! Oh! Oh! 'Sat you, Vince?"

"Why, yes, of course, sir. What is it, sir?"

Tom grinned foolishly. "Oh—guess I had a nightmare, Vince. Thought I had Doc Sleen."

"Get back to bed, sir," Vince urged, and he took Tom by the elbow. "You're hot, sir. Why, you're dripping. You'll get pneumonia."

Tom whirled. "Pneumonia!" he cried. His eyes lighted joyously. "Pneumonia! Great stuff! Do you think there's a chance, Vince?"

Vince looked at him in amazement. "You'll have to have a tub, sir. Fresh pajamas. You would be sick—"

"Oh, I say, I'm all right."

"No. You must have a bath. A warm bath."

"I won't."

Vince look at Tom warningly. "Do you wish me to summon Archibald, sir?"

Tom surrendered. "No, no. I'll bathe, Vince. Lead me to it."

When he was abed again, bathed, and clad to Vince's taste, he grinned and waited. Vince had given him an idea.

He waited till the house should be quiet again, hoping that Vince might fall asleep. And in the waiting, he fell asleep himself.

The first glint of daylight woke him; and he remembered his resolution. Pneumonia! Not a minute to be lost. He leaped out of bed, careful to make no sound that would bring Vince. He began those exercises once more. He continued them until he was red-hot.

The steel shutters on Tom's windows were not kept closed now; the island itself was a sufficient prison. He flung up the window and looked out over the sea, and let the cold morning breeze bathe his panting lungs. Pneumonia! That would save him.

"I hope I get it good while I'm getting it," he told himself. "I've heard it sometimes weakens the heart. Maybe, time I'm through with it, my heart will be no good to Sleen any more. Here's hoping—"

And he shivered bravely in the breeze.

He waited all that morning for a fever to develop; but none appeared. He was a

discouragingly healthy specimen. In the afternoon he gave up hope of pneumonia, and dropped back to overexertion again. Vince was with him, and he stared in surprise when Tom began his callisthenics.

"What's the matter, sir?" he demanded.

"Are you—are you—"

"I'm stale, Vince. Just getting in condition," Tom informed him, bending forward strenuously. "Great stuff. You ought to—"

The door had opened and Dr. Sleen stood there: Tom grinned at him defiantly and redoubled his efforts. The doctor called, "Stop!" Tom kept on. And the surgeon, with no more ceremony, charged, cornered him, clipped him helpless, and held him down on the bed. "You're mad, man," he chided. "You'll ruin your heart."

"I aim to," Tom told him. "Let's see you stop me."

The doctor frowned; then he smiled. "Fair enough," he agreed. "I see you're a determined chap." He turned and called over his shoulder: "Vince, get the chair."

Vince departed. The doctor held Tom flat on his back. Tom writhed, and then surrendered. Vince returned, rolling an enormous invalid-chair of curious construction. "Call Archibald," directed Dr. Sleen; and when Goliath appeared, the doctor surrendered Tom to him. "Put him in the chair," he told the giant; and Goliath lifted Tom and deposited him in the cushioned seat.

The doctor lifted a strap and deftly buckled it about Tom's right wrist; then another at his right elbow; a third about Tom's shoulders, under the arms. The left arm was similarly pinioned. The legs were gathered in. And the doctor stepped back and surveyed his handiwork.

"I expected we might need that," he remarked. "Had it made on purpose?"

"Thanks," said Tom dryly.

"Vince will feed you hereafter. You'll sleep in that thing. It can be made into a reclining chair. You'll stay in that—till I need you."

Tom tried to grin. "Just as you say, doc."

"Exactly," Dr. Sleen agreed. "Just as I say."

Tom's further captivity was lacking in incident. Archibald and Vince fed him, forced him to eat when he was reluctant. The chair held him in its calm embrace save for brief moments when, with Archibald on one side and Dr. Sleen on the other, he was released and allowed to walk about the garden. The chair, on such occasions, was wheeled to the elevator and taken to the lower floor, and Tom was wheeled bodily out into the open air.

He settled into a steady and concentrated effort to devise some escape. He thought of opening a vein, bleeding himself into a condition too weak for the operation; and he tried this. That is to say, he tried to get near enough the window to break a pane of glass and get a piece and cut himself with it; but he never succeeded even in breaking the glass.

On the second day, when his chair was wheeled out on the veranda, he took a desperate chance and toppled it down the front steps. His hope was that he might be maimed, bruised, injured in some way that would unfit him for the doctor's uses. But the chair perversely rolled down the steps without touching so much as the hair of his head, to the stones, righted itself, and coasted down the graveled path to the lawn without so much as a jolt.

Even then he did not surrender. His body was bound, but his spirit was untamed. And his grin was as broad as ever. But fate and the passing hours were inexorable.

Came an evening when Vince and Archibald showed symptoms of subdued excitement; when John T. Gulworthy visited him for the first time since his captivity had begun; and when at last Dr. Sleen came to examine him with new solicitude.

"What's the excitement, doc?" Tom asked him cheerfully. "Everybody's in a whee to-night."

Doctor Sleen nodded. "Mr. Corpus has arrived," he explained seriously, the triumphant light of the scientist in his eye.

Tom shifted uneasily in his bonds; and Dr. Sleen bent and pressed his ear against Tom's breast to listen to Tom's wheels go round. Tom tried to lean far enough forward to bite the back of the doctor's neck.

He longed to be able to breathe fire like a dragon and burn the doctor to a cinder. But Dr. Sleen stepped back, after a moment, unscathed.

"You're in fine shape, sir," he applauded.

"Thanks," said Tom. "And now that Corpus is on hand, I suppose the party will begin. I'd like to meet the old guy first."

The doctor smiled and shook his head. "I'm afraid that isn't possible. Any excitement—his heart is in a delicate condition, you understand—we have to keep him very quiet."

"I see," Tom assented. Then: "Do you think if I yelled, it would do the trick for him? I've got a strong voice."

"I don't want to have to gag you, young man. For the short time that remains, will you not be more docile?"

"The short time?" Tom interrupted. "J—just how short?"

"The operation," said Dr. Sleen, "will be performed to-morrow evening."

Tom gulped; then he took a deep breath.

"In that case, doc," he grinned cheerfully, "you'd best be on your way. I want some sleep."

"Good night," said Dr. Sleen.

"Good night!" barked Tom.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ETHER CONE.

THE day that followed was by all odds the most painfully distressing of Tom's life. He was gloomy; and there was no cheering him. Vince tried every wile he knew without success; and even Goliath Archibald Beauregard took a hand. He came in and told Tom a funny story, and laughed tremendously at his own jest; but Tom did not join in his mirth.

This was at six o'clock in the morning. Tom had not slept during the night; and, by the same token, neither had Vince. So far as Tom ever discovered, Vince never slept. He appeared, at a moment's notice, at any hour of day or night; and always he was fully clad, neat, calm, and quiet. Even in the midst of the mental perturbation of that last day, Tom found time to

wonder how Vince did it; and he asked the valet for an explanation. Vince smiled with pride.

"It is a part of my art, sir," he explained.

"Sure. I know that. But how do you work it? I might want to be a valet myself some day."

"It is perfectly simple, sir," Vince explained. "During the day, I am, of course, always on duty. At night, when I lie down for a bit of a snooze, sir, when I am likely to be called, I only remove my coat, sir. I have a special coat that I wear at such times, sir. The white collar and tie and shirt-front are attached to it; and when I am called, I need only to slip on this coat, button it up the front, and button two buttons that fasten the shirt inside the coat at the left side, sir." He demonstrated, to Tom's delighted interest.

"Like one of those things we used to call a 'dicky,'" Tom commented; but Vince shook his head.

"No, indeed, sir. The dicky is merely a collar and shirt-front, sir. Very unhandy. I was forced to discard them, early in my career."

"I should think your trousers would rumple."

"I have trained myself to sleep on my side, with my legs straight, sir. Thus the trousers fall into the 'natural crease, as I lie, and they look better when I rise than when I lay down in them, sir."

Tom lost interest. He was still buckled fast into the reclining chair; and the strain of lying for so long in one position was tormenting him. He dreaded the passing of the hours; but he welcomed the coming of daylight and breakfast, because it meant he could sit upright again. He had given up hope, this past week, of cajoling Vince. The thing was not possible. And Goliath was too phlegmatic to be moved by any appeal Tom could contrive. His only chance, he knew now, lay in a break for liberty at the last minute, when every one would be concerned with the other party to this projected transaction.

He wondered how Judah B. Corpus had spent the night. "I hope he didn't sleep a wink," he told himself.

The breakfast was delicious, as Vince's breakfasts always were; but Tom could not eat it. He wasn't hungry. He preferred to sit still and listen to the throbbing of the pulse in his neck. He had never fully appreciated his heart before; but now that there appeared to be no escaping its loss, he awoke to a real affection for the plodding thing. "Always on the job," he soliloquized. "Never watching the clock. Never quitting; never loafing. Old Judah B. will get a good one if he gets you."

He shuddered and felt sick. The skin on his breast crawled and shrank as though from the very touch of Dr. Sleen's knife. Tom shut his eyes; and the vision of that knife became clearer, so he opened them again and held them wide open. So long as he could see actual objects, imaginary terrors would not harass him. He dared not even wink, for fear that vision would appear again.

Toward the middle of the morning Dr. Sleen came to examine Tom. He spent half an hour in this occupation; and at length straightened up with a smile of satisfaction on his countenance.

"Excellent! Excellent, young man!" he applauded.

Tom managed to grin. "Think I'm prime, do you?" he inquired.

"Splendid, sir!"

"How's old Jude?"

"Mr. Corpus?"

"Yes. Is he doing his share as well as I'm doing mine?"

Dr. Sleen eyed Tom gravely. "He is a very great man, Mr. Duncan," he declared. "And he is a brave man. He is submitting to this perilous operation—I will not conceal from you the fact that it is perilous, sir—with the highest fortitude. He is calm, self-contained, sure of himself. He has conducted his business up till yesterday; he has put his affairs in order; he is resting quietly to-day, and looking confidently forward to this evening."

"That's all right," Tom protested. "But is this going to be a fair swap? Is he doing his best to deliver the goods to me in prime shape?"

"Well—of course, his organs are impaired, young man. But I feel I can prom-

ise you that with proper attention to your health, you will some day be almost as well as ever."

"You promise that, do you?"

"Barring accidents, yes."

"Oh! Barring accidents? What kind of accidents?"

Dr. Sleen held up his hand. "You must understand, sir, that when we undertake to divert the circulation into new channels, we take chances."

"Oh, you're taking a terrible chance, doc. I pity you, Dr. Sleen. I really do."

The surgeon was not a whit abashed. "Thank you, young man. I trust, however, that my hand may prove as steady and as sure as it has always been in the past. I trust so, for your sake, my friend."

Tom felt seasick; but he grinned. Dr. Sleen departed with a final, bland explanation. "I must go now and rest," he called. "I wish to be very calm and cool. I shall not see you again, Mr. Duncan, until this evening."

"Well, I don't wish you any hard luck, doc," Tom called after him. "But if you choke to death on your dinner, I'll see to 't you get the best funeral in New York State."

Dr. Sleen smiled his appreciation of this jest, waved a large, hairy hand, and was gone.

After lunch Vince suggested casino; but Tom snarled at him. Vince hovered over the captive attentively. "Perhaps I can read something to you, sir?"

"Sure," Tom assented indifferently. "Go ahead and read!"

"Er—and—er—what shall I read, sir?"

"Anything."

Vince turned to the shelves. It was evident that he was not a reading man. He called over his shoulder presently: "Here's a book about flowers, sir."

"All right," Tom agreed. "Read that."

"It's called 'The Black Tulip,' sir."

Tom did not hear. His thoughts had drifted off, leaving Vince far behind; and he did not give the little man any further attention until a chance phrase caught his ear. Vince had come to the scene which describes the murder of the brothers by the

Dutch mob; and he was reading it with ununction. The blow, the knives, the hot flesh hawked about the streets for pennies—

"Stop!" Tom shouted. And Vince raised a startled countenance. "That's not about flowers. That's no kind of a book to read to a man who—to a man that—to me—"

Vince was blankly apologetic. "I beg your pardon, sir. I judged by the title; and then, when I began to read, I was so engrossed that it never occurred to me—"

"If I was out of this blasted chair," Tom vowed, "something painful would occur to you in half a minute. What do you think I— Vince, I'm surprised at you! You've failed me! You've wronged me! You are heartless, Vince—heartless! And I thought you were a kindly man."

"I do beg your pardon, sir. I really do."

"I can never forgive you, Vince."

"Quite so, sir. But I do beg—"

Tom interrupted. "Vince!"

"Yes, sir."

"You've made me unnecessarily miserable, Vince."

"Yes, sir."

"It's only fair that you should do something to soothe me, Vince. To calm me!"

Vince hesitated. "That's—that's very true, sir."

"Vince—is the young lady still here?"

"Oh, my orders, sir—"

"Is she here, Vince? Answer me, or say nothing. You are a hard man, Vince."

"Oh, no, sir. My heart is tender, and—"

"Is she here, Vince?"

Vince struggled visibly between duty and desire; and at length he fell. "Why—yes, sir."

Tom fixed the valet with his eye. "Vince, I'm a dying man."

"Oh, no, sir."

"I am, Vince. I know it."

"I hope not, sir."

"Vince, would you refuse anything to a dying man?"

"Not—not willingly, sir."

"Then Vince, do this. Go to the young lady. Beg her to forgive me for dragging her into this. Tell her good-by for me. And tell her, Vince, that I shall always love her."

Vince was in a terrible dilemma. The perspiration stood out on his forehead. He trembled.

To do what Tom asked was to violate his orders, was to invite the vengeance of Gulworthy. And that vengeance led to the chair. But not to do what Tom asked was to violate every impulse of Vince's own heart; and as he had proved more than once, he was a tender-souled and sentimental man. He loved to bear such messages as this; such messages, particularly, as the last sentence of this message. Such words thrilled him.

He turned to Tom. "I will do it, sir. On condition that you do not betray me."

Tom grinned—and groaned. "Dead men tell no tales, Vince," he said dolefully.

"I will do it, sir," Vince promised. He summoned Goliath to stay near Tom, and himself went on his way.

Half an hour later, he returned. He looked mysterious and important; and he sent Archibald from the room and bent over Tom. Tom looked up at him hungrily. "Well?" he asked.

"I told her what you said, sir."

"What did she say?"

"Her message was brief, sir; but it was—"

"What was it, man? What was it?"

"She said, sir—" And Vince straightened, and repeated in a parrotlike tone: "I do! *Au revoir!* And I too!"

Tom stared. "I do! *Au revoir!* And I too!" he repeated. "What does that mean?"

"You forget your message to her, sir."

"My message—"

"There were three divisions of your message; there are three divisions of her reply, sir. May I explain?"

"Go ahead! Quick, man!"

"You said: 'Beg her to forgive me.' She says: 'I do!' You said: 'Good-by!' She says: '*Au revoir!*' You said—" Vince blushed happily. "Ah, sir, have you forgotten the last clause of your message?"

"No. Of course not. And her answer—"

Tom remembered her answer; and his eyes lighted eagerly. "Vince," he commanded, "shake me by the hand."

The valet shook Tom's manacled hand

warmly. And Tom cried: "Vince, you're an angel! Thanks immensely. Now—let me be quiet and think, Vince."

Vince fell obediently into an inconspicuous and shadowy presence, haunting the distant corners of the room. And Tom thought over and over Sally's message, and drew from it a promise that had escaped Vince's notice. Vince had an eye for sentiment; a romantic word obscured all else from his view. But not so Tom. Tom was in love, but he was also practical. He had said: "Good-by!" She replied: "*Au revoir!*" And Tom felt, instinctively, that she would not have used that hope-arousing phrase without reason.

So there was still a chance. He would—

He was still absorbed in these pleasant reflections when Vince served dinner; and he was so cheered by this chance of a last-minute reprieve that when Vince and Beau-regard released him from the chair and politely bade him don pajamas, he obeyed without dissent.

It was only when he had incased himself in the silken garments that he realized their significance; and then he took it cheerfully. "These are like the black suits they put on in the—" he exclaimed; but Vince shuddered and cried out:

"Ah, sir, I pray—"

"I beg your pardon, Vince," Tom apologized. "I forgot your sensitiveness on such topics. I—"

The door into the hall slowly opened; and through this opening a man appeared. This man was dressed in a long, white cloak; and white bandages enshrouded his head and the lower part of his face. He was unrecognizable; and he looked like a ghost. He walked into the room, and behind him came a long, narrow, padded plank, mounted on wheels like a cart. Another man, similarly clad, pushed this contrivance. They entered in the most profound silence; they were like nothing so much in the world as a pair of executioners. And Tom shuddered.

Vince touched his arm. "They are ready for you, sir," he reminded Tom.

For an instant Tom hesitated. "Should he fight— Take the last slim chance— Risk it—"

But Archibald closed in behind him; and Tom stiffened himself and grinned and shook Vince's hand. "G'-by, Vince," he said. "You're a good fellow. Take care of yourself."

"I hope I shall take care of you during your—er—convalescence, sir."

Tom shook his hand again. "That's sure some hope, Vince. I hope so, too."

He shook hands with Goliath. "You're all right, Archie," he told the giant. "You're there, forty ways."

"Ya-as," said Archibald, and crushed Tom's fingers to a pulp. Tom was glad to escape from him. He turned to the two men in the white robes.

"What do I do now?" he asked.

"Lie down on this," said one man, and indicated the padded, cartlike contrivance. Tom eyed it with repulsion; but he obeyed.

It was a few inches longer than he; a few inches wider. When Tom had stretched himself on his back upon it, the men deftly buckled a strap about his ankles, another about his waist. They caught his wrists into buckled loops; and they drew tight another strap across his chest. Tom grinned good humoredly, and wondered if his heart was going to break his ribs with its pounding.

When he was secured, Vince opened the door, and the two men—one at either end of the cart—wheeled Tom into the hall. They went along the hall, and then into the elevator.

"Going down!" Tom called. "By-by, Vince."

"Good-by, sir," Vince shouted, from the door of the room.

The elevator began its descent.

The elevator sank from the third floor to the first; but one incident marked that short journey. At the moment when they were passing the level of the second floor, Tom caught the sound of voices.

They were strenuous voices; and they were upraised in a violent altercation. And one voice was the voice of Sally.

These voices came from some closed room on the second floor. Tom caught a word or two.

"You sha'n't! You sha'n't do it!" This from Sally. "I'll have you arrested—"

And then, the voice of a big man in a towering rage; the voice, Tom decided, of Judah B. Corpus, the answer:

"Be silent! Say no more! I am determined! If you make trouble, you will regret—"

The elevator sank below the floor level; and the voices were cut off. Tom grinned cheerfully. At least, Sally was keeping up the fight, and to the last minute. He wondered how she had managed to see old Corpus—

The elevator stopped. The cart with Tom as burden was wheeled out into the hall; along the hall; and so at last into a room that dazzled Tom.

This room was white as snow. The rubber tires of the cart rolled on a white-tile floor; the walls were of white tile, and the ceiling. In the center of the ceiling, a cluster of a dozen huge incandescents shed a blinding light down upon those in the room. There were other lights on the walls, a solid row of them.

Directly below the ceiling cluster, Tom, by turning his head, could see two white enamel tables with glass tops. They were set side by side like twin beds; and Tom grinned and thought: "One for Jude and one for me." There were white buckets and basins beside these tables; and there was a set of glass shelves close at hand. On these shelves glittered an array of nickel-plated instruments that gave Tom the creeps. Slender knives; needles; scissors—

They had wheeled his cart against one wall of the room; and the two men who had brought him went out and returned presently in new white robes, stiff and fresh. Besides these two, there were three other men in the room. All wore the white shrouds; all were unrecognizable by reason of gauze bandages bound across their mouths and noses.

Two of these men wheeled a little glass table the size of a tea cart over to where Tom lay. On this table there lay a large, cone-shaped contrivance with an opening in the top of the cone filled with cotton and gauze; and beside this cone there was a can, the label turned the opposite way from Tom.

But he knew what that can contained. You couldn't fool Tom. And he tried to sit up. "I say," he protested, "I don't want any ether. I've got nerve. I want to see what's happening. Don't try that stuff on me. I won't stand for it."

One of the men said soothingly. "There—don't worry. This will just dull the pain a little. You'll be able to watch the whole thing. It's all right—quite all right!"

They waited. They seemed to await some signal. And presently it came, came in the shrilling of a bell so near where Tom lay that he almost jumped out of his bonds. The two men moved. "Now!" said one.

He set his finger on Tom's pulse. The other lifted the cone and pushed it firmly down over Tom's face. It covered eyes and nose and mouth.

Tom waited, holding himself still with an effort. For a moment, nothing happened.

Then he smelled something, something not unpleasant. At the same time, he felt a little stifled. He breathed deep, again, again. He could not seem to get any air. He said as much in a muffled tone.

"I can't breathe," he mumbled. "I can't breathe. Take it off a minute."

The cone was not removed. That made Tom mad. He writhed in his bonds. And then he realized that he was losing consciousness. He knew that was a mistake. They had told him so. He shouted: "Hey, I'm going under. I'm going under. Hey, take it off! Take it— Take—it—"

He couldn't shout any more; he couldn't get his breath. But just then the cone was lifted for a minute. Tom was perfectly conscious. He couldn't see any one; but he was conscious. He heard sounds.

Some one lifted his eyelid; and such a simple thing as that toppled Tom off the brink of the conscious world, and he fell a million miles into feathery oblivion.

CHAPTER XIV.

A JOURNEY IN THE DARK.

IT was twelve minutes past nine o'clock in the evening when Tom was put under ether.

Two hours and seven minutes later, or

at nineteen minutes past eleven, a man came out of the Corpus cottage on the island, and ran down through the garden paths to the boat-house.

This man was large. A momentary glimpse of his figure as he emerged from the lighted hall showed thick hair on the backs of his hands, showed the unmistakable silhouette of Dr. Sleen.

Dr. Sleen ran down to the boat-house like a man who is pursued. He looked over his shoulder as he ran; and he ran swiftly.

In the boat-house, alongside the slip, lay a big power-boat. Dr. Sleen jumped into this boat. He pressed a button that lighted an electric bulb above her engines; and in this light he began to work on the engine, making numberless adjustments. He worked in haste. His usually deft hands were clumsy, bungling. He dropped things, and picked them up again with difficulty. But his impatience and anxiety found no vent in words. He worked in a feverish silence.

Three minutes after he emerged from the cottage, the mansion, two other men came out the front door; and then two more; and then three.

The second pair of men pushed between them a long, narrow, padded plank, mounted on two wheels, like a cart.

There was a man's limp body buckled in place upon this perambulating plank.

Four of the men lifted the cart bearing the body down to the garden path. Then the two who had pushed it out of the house, turned and went back inside. In the hall they paused for an instant, looking at each other furtively. Said one:

"I hope there's no slip!"

"God—me too," the other agreed.

Outside, the group of men were trundling the cart down the path toward the boat-house. They went slowly, carefully, easing the wheels gently over every roughness in the path. When the limp body lurched to one side or another in its bonds, the men toward whom it lurched shrank instinctively away.

They reached, at last, the slip beside the boat-house. They pushed the cart out on this slip, one man in front, another behind.

One of the wheels slipped off the edge; it overhung the water; the cart tilted that way.

The men caught it, dragged it back to safety. It was possible to hear them breathe deep with the relief of the rescue—one of the men wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

Dr. Sleen climbed up out of the power-boat. For all the terror and excitement under which the big man was laboring, he dominated this group of trembling men. He spoke to them in whispers, clapping them on the shoulder, heartening them.

"Gulworthy and Archibald and I will do it," he told them. "You don't need to worry at all. This is our job. It's up to us to take the risk. You gentlemen take the other boat—it's ready to run—and land wherever you like."

One man stammered: "Where are you going?"

"Just as well you shouldn't know. Can one of you run the other boat?"

One of them said he could. Dr. Sleen waved his hand. "All right. Go along, the rest of you. We'll manage, now."

They accepted the dismissal with obvious relief, and climbed into their craft, and chugged away. Dr. Sleen watched them go; then he turned to the two men who remained with him. One was John T. Gulworthy. The other was Archibald. In the reflected light from the little bulb above the power-boat's engines, Gulworthy's face showed white and wet with a cold damp of terror. Archibald's tiny countenance on his huge body was as calm as that of a cow. To complete the simile, he was chewing something that pleased him, and his expression was blissful.

"Brace up, Gulworthy," Dr. Sleen advised. "You ought to have taken a drink."

"I d-did," Gulworthy asserted.

"Oh, I mean a real drink."

"I had two t-t-tumblers of brandy."

Sleen stared; then he laughed. "It's a wonder you're not dead."

Gulworthy shuddered, gripped the doctor's arm. "God's sake, Sleen! That's an awful word. Don't you—"

The surgeon laughed. Gulworthy's terror had given him confidence. He looked

at Goliath. "You don't look scared, Archibald. Are you?"

"Ya-as!"

"Scared? What about? Why? We'll take care of you."

"Ya-as," Archibald admitted calmly. "Ya-as, I think maybe you will. That might be nice."

"Exactly," Sleen agreed. "We've got to protect you to protect ourselves."

"Ya-as," said Archibald again.

Gulworthy touched the doctor's arm. "C-can't we get s-s-s-s-started?" he begged. "I'm cold."

"Right," the surgeon assented. He bent over the body on the cart; then changed his mind. "Archibald, you unbuckle—him. I'll get the boat ready. You lift—him down in."

"Ya-as," said Archibald; and he bent above the cart and fumbled with all his thumbs for the buckles. Dr. Sleen and Gulworthy climbed down into the boat. Gulworthy prowled the length of the craft like a dog seeking a bed, and at length went inside the tiny cabin and huddled on a bench that ran along one side.

Archibald freed the body from its buckles and came, with the limp thing in his arms, and handed it down to Dr. Sleen. The surgeon bore it into the cabin and laid it on the bench across from where Gulworthy sat. The lawyer stared, eyes wide; and he asked pitifully:

"Are you going to leave it—"

"Right there," Dr. Sleen assented. "And—if we should happen to be questioned—or anything—he's asleep, drunk. Understand?"

Gulworthy backed to the door. "I—I'll stay out here," he decided. And he retreated to the stern and crouched there. All the little man's dapperness was gone.

Archibald was methodically casting off the boat's moorings; and at last he jumped aboard her, and took a boat-hook and pushed her free of the slip. Dr. Sleen started the engines; they churned ahead with slowly gathering speed.

The water began to boil under her bow. They swung in a circle and headed straight for the distant shore. Dr. Sleen was at the wheel. Gulworthy crouched in the shadows

aft. Archibald sat near Dr. Sleen and chewed like a meditative cow.

After an hour's run, the fast craft swung up to a mooring in sheltered waters, where others like her doted the darkness all around. They moored her, and then Dr. Sleen and Archibald, silently and with the utmost care, lifted the limp thing that lay in the cabin and lowered it into the tender that the motor-boat had dragged astern. Archibald took the oars. Gulworthy sat in the tender's bow; and Dr. Sleen, astern, sheltered the body from any chance glance in his own shadow.

Gulworthy called once, timorously: "Suppose your car's gone, doctor?"

"It's not," Dr. Sleen assured him. "I drove it here myself, locked it in my own private garage that I've had here for years—since—he bought the island. It will be there."

"I—hope s-so."

It was. They landed, and while Archibald and Gulworthy stayed in the boat with the body, Dr. Sleen ran up the street to his garage. Presently the car itself rolled down to the pier; and Gulworthy sighed with relief.

Archibald lifted the body up till Dr. Sleen could catch it and carry it to the car. Gulworthy climbed after it; and Archibald made fast the boat and followed, chewing silently. At the car, Gulworthy begged: "Let me drive, Dr. Sleen?"

The surgeon laughed. "I wouldn't let you drive a pair of snails across a billiard-table, in the present state of your nerves. Get in."

He half thrust Gulworthy into the tonneau. The top was up, and the curtains were closed, so that the interior of the car was black dark. Gulworthy stumbled over a limp foot; and when he sat down he found Dr. Sleen had propped the body up to share the seat with him. Archibald sat down on the other side of the thing. It lolled between them. The car started with a jerk and a roar; and the head dropped on Gulworthy's shoulder. He stifled a scream.

Half-way to the city, they blew out a tire; and Dr. Sleen had to replace it. Gulworthy and Archibald climbed out to watch

the process; and after a time Gulworthy commented shiveringly:

"A terrible end to this night, Dr. Sleen."

The doctor looked up and nodded thoughtfully. "I had expected this night would make me immortal, Gulworthy. Instead—"

He shook his head; and Archibald said soberly: "Ya-as, I think so."

Sleen looked at him. "You think what?"

"Oh, ya-as, just think about it."

The surgeon laughed. "It's all right, Archibald. Don't worry yourself about it."

The giant shook his head. "You might worry," he suggested mildly.

"I might," Sleen agreed. "But I don't propose to. Do you, Gulworthy?"

Gulworthy lifted protesting hands. "Don't talk, man. Hurry. It will be daylight—"

Sleen screwed the last nut in place and thumped the new tire. "All right. Get in. I'm ready."

Their ride began again.

By and by they entered the outermost purlieus of Brooklyn, and rode cheek by jowl with the early-fitting milkman through the empty streets. Across the bridge and swiftly up-town, the first faint hint of dawn tingeing the eastern skies. And so at last they ground to a halt.

They had halted before a boarding-house; the establishment of Mrs. Gall, where once Tom Duncan had dwelt. It was still dark and chill. Dr. Sleen stepped out of the car and tiptoed up the front steps and tried the door with a key.

It opened. He left it slightly ajar, and descended to the car again.

"You'll go first, Gulworthy," he directed.

"See that the coast is clear. I'll follow, with Archibald to help me."

The lawyer protested feebly. "There's no need of my going. I—"

"We're all in this," Dr. Sleen insisted grimly. "Come, move. The house will be awake in an hour. And for Heaven's sake go quietly."

Gulworthy nodded.

"You know the room?" Sleen asked.

"Yes. I helped—in the original search."

"All right. Go on!"

Gulworthy falteringly climbed the steps

to the front door; he pushed the door open and looked inside; he listened.

Then he turned, and beckoned for his companions to follow, and stepped inside the house.

The two big men lifted the limp body out of the car between them. They gripped it by the shoulders and bore it so, as though their burden were half-conscious, with dragging, drunken feet.

They crossed the sidewalk, climbed the steps, entered the hall.

Gulworthy was half-way up the first flight. They followed him.

They went upward endlessly, it seemed to Dr. Sleen. He was perspiring, trembling, desperately afraid. Every door they passed was an ambush from which he expected an accuser to appear. He caught his breath each time a door was safely passed.

They were fortunate on this upward progress; they woke no one; and thus they came at last to the door of Tom Duncan's room. Gulworthy opened the unlocked door and entered. The two followed, with the limp thing between them. They laid it gently down on the bed. Dr. Sleen bent over it, stood up at last, his countenance ghastly. His foot kicked against something, and he looked down and saw the corner of a trunk. And he gripped Gulworthy's arm.

"Some one's taken this room!" he whispered fiercely.

Gulworthy shook his head. "That's—his. I had it sent back as soon as we—had him."

Dr. Sleen's strength returned to him. "Oh—all right. Have you got the envelope—the letter—the—"

"Yes." Gulworthy drew something white from his pocket, turned to the dresser, propped this thing against the mirror.

The men backed toward the door, eyes fastened on the still thing on the bed. They passed out into the hall, and the door closed behind them. Dr. Sleen wiped his forehead.

They turned and went swiftly and furtively down the stairs. None barred their way. The car, engine purring, awaited them. The street was empty.

They leaped in, even Archibald scam-

bling with haste. The car plunged. They were gone.

CHAPTER XV.

THE AWAKENING.

A BILLOWY sea of black water; a sea of black water which was strangling and stifling him. And he had forgotten how to swim. His efforts were disjointed, hopeless, frantic. They drove him under the water again and again. He choked and coughed and sighed.

Suddenly, a bird began to sing. He could not see the bird; but he could hear the song. It was lively, gay, tinkling; it was like the sound of well attuned bells, ringing in concord.

At first this sound was pleasant; then it grew louder, it was incredibly persistent. It became a jangling tumult; it was deafening him. He tried to swim, to escape it—and he sank into the black waters of oblivion again.

But this oblivion was no longer absolute. Even while he slumbered in it, he heard things. They were indefinable; but they persisted. And then he drifted to the surface, and his face came out into the open again; he breathed; he heard the bell-like songs.

The black water solidified under him; he found it was solid earth. On this earth he ran, wildly, to escape the jangling bells. The land was strange; he had never seen it before. There were houses; but they were unfamiliar.

The pursuing bells drove him into one of them; he burst into a strange room, and then he turned around and around, and saw a girl standing at the door of the room.

The girl was Sally; so Tom knew it was time he awoke, and he opened his eyes.

He shut them again instantly; shut them and groaned. They hurt. They burned. They were like hot coals; and he could see nothing with them. The pain was sickening. He began to feel sick; seasick. He would not have opened his eyes again for the world.

So, lying with eyes closed, heaving with billows of discomfort, Tom drifted back

to consciousness. The first thing that identified itself to his senses was the cot on which he lay. His hand, hanging at one side of the cot, touched the iron bar of the frame. A tag was tied to the bar here; and he felt the string, and thus knew the cot was his own. He was lying, he understood, in his own bed, in his own room, at Mrs. Gall's.

Therefore, of course, he was dead. He was sure of this without being sure why he was sure; and the certainty was soothing, so that he slipped back into a half-sleep, half-stupor once more. This stupor persisted for some little time; and during this interval, the sun, climbing higher, peered in at the window and scorched his leaden eyelids.

Regretfully, at length, he approached consciousness once more. His stumbling thoughts began where they had left off. He was in his own bed, in his own room. Therefore, he was dead. Why? Why did this conclusion necessarily follow? He groped for an answer to this puzzle; and in the end, he found it.

They had told him that if he died, they would take him to his own room and leave him there, with a suicide note upon his dresser.

He turned his head weakly, and opened his eyes, and peered toward the dresser. He saw the white oblong of an envelope propped against the mirror. This confirmed his first conclusion. He was dead, and need trouble himself no more about the matter.

But with the slow flooding back of his senses, this conclusion no longer satisfied him. There was a flaw in it somewhere. He could not locate this flaw at first; though he considered the situation very painstakingly.

But in the end, he remembered. If he died, they were to leave him here, with a note on the dresser, and a knife in his breast.

He could feel no knife in his lungs as he breathed. The good air tasted very sweet and clean; and he felt sure that if there were a knife blade there, it would hurt him to breathe. To make assurance doubly sure, he lifted one hand, weakly, and passed

it across his breast. It struck nothing; found the hilt of no weapon—

He frowned with annoyance. A pretty mix-up. Either he was dead, or he was not dead. He had a right to know; but how was he to find out—

There was no one he could ask. He must solve the mystery to the best of his advantage.

How?

He decided to sleep a little while—he was very sleepy—and investigate this other, trifling matter at a later date. And so he slept.

While he slept this time, the influence of the drug left him. When he awoke, only a numb head and a dry mouth remained to distress him. He awoke lazily, and opened his eyes, and saw the familiar objects among which he had lived. And, abruptly, he was wide awake, perfectly conscious, remembering everything that had befallen him up to the moment when some one tweaked his eye-lid and he dropped into oblivion.

He sat up in bed, swung his feet to the floor, caught the reflection of himself in the mirror.

And suddenly an appalling thought struck him. His heart? It was gone. It must be gone. Else how came he here?

He struck his breast. He felt no pain there. He ripped open coat and vest and shirt and examined the smooth, white skin. He went over his left side minutely, refusing to be convinced. There was no scar, no mark of the knife, no wound.

Yet he could not have escaped them—not after that ether cone closed down on him. They must have had their will of him.

His back? Perhaps they had abstracted his heart through his back. He tried to feel for a scar there; but his contortions were unsatisfactory. He could not cover the ground. He must see.

He ripped off his garments, baring his torso; and he strode in front of the mirror and turned his back to it and twisted his head to look over his shoulder into the glass. He turned his body back and forth, inspecting it minutely.

It was sound; whole. His back and

chest were alike innocent of knife-scars. Ergo, his heart was still there.

Even then, he could not believe. He pressed a hand to his chest and could feel no pulsation; he tried his pulse, fumblingly; and his eyes lighted with triumph. His heart was still beating.

It was only then that Tom fully accepted the fact that he was alive. Alive! Free! Some miracle! He had no curiosity as to the details. It was enough that he was free.

He threw himself on the bed and lay there on his back, gloating over fate. He was free!

And then he sat up quickly. They might come for him again; they might have brought him back here for some purpose of their own. He was in danger so long as they knew where he was. He must escape, elude them, travel. He wished himself in Saskatchewan.

And he set about the task of getting there with all the vigor that was in him. Wriggled into his clothes! Discovered his trunk and made sure it was packed! Stuffed odds and ends into his bag!

It was when he gathered up comb and brushes to drop them in the bag that he saw the letter. He had forgotten it; but there it lay, leaning against the mirror, staring up at him. It was addressed to him; the address typewritten. He read this address aloud, dully:

"Thomas Duncan,
New York.

"Now that," he told himself sapiently, "that was delivered by hand. The post-office doesn't know me as well as all that. I know."

And after a moment: "And as far as that goes, I must have been delivered by hand, too." He grinned. "I'll bet Archibald had a share in that. Even the parcel-post would balk at me."

He turned the envelope over, saw that it was sealed, tore off the end, pressed the edges to force it open, and looked curiously inside.

It was a large envelope; and he saw now that it was well filled with money. Yellow bills. His heart began to pound. He

slid the contents of the envelope out upon the top of his dresser. The bills were bound together in a sheaf. He picked them up and counted them, twice.

There were forty-nine bills of the denomination of a thousand dollars; and there was a careful selection of smaller denominations which brought the total to another thousand. Tom made sure of his count.

"Fifty thousand," he said huskily. "Fifty thousand." And he grinned. "Well—that's fair, Tom!"

He realized then that a letter had been enclosed with the money. It lay, unnoticed, on his dresser. He picked it up and unfolded it and read:

DEAR MR. DUNCAN:

This should more than compensate you for any trouble or loss of time to which you may have been subjected. You will be wise to content yourself.

If you go about your business with a closed mouth, you will hear no more from us. If you undertake to pursue the matter, to investigate, to prosecute, you will suffer things far worse than those you have escaped.

I feel sure you are a wise young man.

(Signed) JOHN X. SMITH.

This letter, as well as the signature, was typewritten. And there was a postscript which read:

If you propose to be discreet, write "Yes" on the back of this sheet, and mail it to "John X. Smith, General Delivery, Grand Central Post-Office."

Tom held up his right hand and took oath to his image in the mirror that he was content.

"I'm satisfied," he swore. "Plum' satisfied. Never again!"

And he turned over the letter, wrote "Yes" on the back of it, slipped it in an envelope, addressed the envelope, and thrust it in his pocket to be mailed.

As he did this, some one knocked heavily on the door.

Tom was paralyzed for an instant. Then he acted. He swept up the heap of bills on the dresser, jammed them into his pocket, pulled the smallest chair within reach of his hand, put himself on guard, and called:

"Come in!"

In the doorway appeared the form of Archibald.

CHAPTER XVI.

SALLY PIM AGAIN.

WHEN Tom saw Archibald in the doorway, he was profoundly glad there was a chair within reach. He snatched it toward him, swung it into the air, and brandished it above Archibald's poll.

"Get out!" he commanded. "Get out! I'll smash you! Never again, Goliath! Avaunt!"

But Archibald only grinned stupidly and moved to one side; and this movement revealed, close behind him, Sally Pim.

Tom lowered the chair and gasped. Sally—a very serious and sober Sally—said quietly: "It's I, Tom. Don't hurt Archibald."

Tom grinned. "He brought you here. I feel like kissing him."

She smiled a little, faintly. "But—Tom—if you must kiss some one—"

"I must!" he vowed, and threw the chair across the room, and did. While Archibald watched benignly.

Sally's arm was around Tom's neck; she patted his shoulder softly. "I'm so glad you're safe, Tom," she whispered. "I was so worried—"

"I was a dog to get you into it."

"Oh!" She laughed, and stepped back a little. "I was never in any danger."

He shook his head. "You don't know that bunch."

"Oh yes I do, Tom. And besides—" She turned to the giant. "Archibald is a friend of mine. He brought me your letter; and he was looking out for me—and for you, too. He would have saved you at the last minute, in any case. But I hoped to do it in another way. Persuasion—"

"Persuasion is no good with that crowd."

She nodded soberly. "I found that out, Tom."

He turned and looked at Goliath, and grinned and stuck out his hand. "No hard feelings, Archibald?"

Archibald shook his head slowly.

"You don't mind this young lady's—"

"That might be nice," said Archibald.

"Oh—you give your consent, then, Archibald?"

"Ya-as!"

"Shake!"

They shook; and then Sally touched Goliath's arm. "Won't you wait downstairs, Archibald," she suggested. "Tom and I—"

Archibald grinned ponderously, lifted an elephantine hand, nodded his tiny head. "Ya-as—I know!" he declared; and so departed.

When the door was closed, Tom caught Sally's hands. He was full of his own story; and it burst from him. "I haven't had a chance to tell you. And you'd never begin to guess. Do you know why they had me out there?"

Sally started to speak; but Tom rushed on. "They spotted me the day you gave me the picture. Because I was husky. And your friend Gulworthy kidnaped me and offered me a million dollars for my heart. Modern surgery! All that—"

The girl touched his lips lightly with her hand to silence him, and thus provoked an irrelevant interruption of some minutes' duration. And when they returned to the subject, Tom demanded: "Can you believe that? It's the fact, Sally. Honest!"

"I believe it!" she told him. "I—I know it is all true!"

He stared at her. "You know it's true? How? How did you get away from the island, anyway? How did you find me here?"

She smiled at him softly. "Will you let me tell it—my own way?"

He chuckled. "If you don't mind my interrupting—"

She evidently did not mind. Nevertheless, between these interruptions, she told the story.

"It was Mr. Corpus who was to have—a bit of your artery, Tom," she said.

"I know."

"Oh—they told you that?"

"Yes."

"They must have been very sure of success."

"They claimed to be."

She nodded. "I did not know that at first," she said. "Not when I came to the island; not till I had talked with Archibald."

"You see, Tom—I—I know Mr. Corpus quite well. I thought he was fond of me. And when Archibald told me the thing they planned to do, I thought I could persuade him to give it up. And I waited."

"He would come to the island the day before. I wanted to see him then. But they would not let me. The next day, just before he was to go to—the operating-room—he sent for me."

"Sent for you?"

"Yes. To his room on the second floor."

"I heard you!" Tom cried. "While they were taking me down in the elevator, I heard you arguing with him. You little—"

"I did my best, Tom. But—I failed. He refused to give up the plan. When I persisted, he flew into a terrible rage. He—"

Some one buffeted the door, and Tom opened it and saw Goliath. "I think you might like a nice paper," said Archibald to Sally, and handed her the one he had brought. "So I buy it."

"Thank you, Archibald."

"Ya-as," said the giant, and backed out again.

Sally looked at the paper; and Tom saw her flush, and then turn pale, and she looked up at him.

"What is it?" he asked. "Anything wrong?"

She held out the paper to him. "Anger was—deadly for Mr. Corpus," she said

softly. "You—the rest of the story is there."

Tom took the paper and spread it out before him; and his heart leaped with surprise.

For, half across the page, a head-line read:

JUDAH B. CORPUS DEAD.

Magnate Stricken by Heart Disease on Eve of Operation.

Tom read this, and stared at the girl. "That's what saved me?" he whispered.

She nodded. "Yes!" And after a moment, she rose and came and stood beside him, and pointed to the paper again. "There is the—rest of the story," she said.

Tom followed her eye and saw what he had not seen before. In the middle of the page was a large photograph of the millionaire; and below and at one side, the picture of a girl. A girl who was indubitably Sally Pim.

Below this picture was printed the legend:

MISS SARAH PIM CORPUS,
Magnate's Adopted Daughter and Sole Heir!

When this had come home to him, Tom dropped the paper and turned slowly to the girl, and there was awe in his eyes. But there was none in hers. She cried softly: "We were never anything to each other—he and I? I'm just an ordinary girl, Tom. Don't be afraid of me."

And a little later, Tom was saying: "I swore I wouldn't sell my heart to a Corpus; but Sally—I might be willing to trade."

"It's a bargain," said Sally Pim.

(The end.)



WINE

BY LESLIE RAMÓN

THE glass that's raised in careless glee,
And grateful joy of freedom from some sullen care,
May good intentions pledge: but then, beware!
For when the bubble bursts, there's naught but dregs
To drain, and payment of the fee.

Channa's Tabu



by H. A. Lamb

WEST of the Solomon Islands, in the South Seas, is the island of Savo—a three days' run in a schooner after rounding Cape Astrolabe. Savo used to be a resort for the head-hunters of those regions, and traders and missionaries still fight shy of it. The near-by islands of Malaita and Guadalcanar belonged to Great Britain, but Savo belonged to King Channa.

King Channa was a small, dark islander, who wore a white flax wig, and carried a four-foot basket shield and spear. He was expert with the spear; also treacherous, which is probably why the pile of skulls outside his hut numbered a round score instead of Channa's skull decorating the hut of one of his henchmen. He was afraid of nothing except his own tabu, which was that he must not touch fish. All his life he had dreaded the sight of fish.

Skipper William McKechnie vouches for this, and McKechnie encountered Channa during the affair of the Sweet Alice and the Mongava pearl.

McKechnie was master and half owner of the trading schooner Auld Alfred. He was a Scotchman, past copra pedler, and pearl trader, who knew the by-ways of the South Seas like a book. Hence it was not surprising that a few days after he heard of the wreck of the Sweet Alice on Savo he headed his schooner for that place.

It was late in the afternoon that the Auld Alfred beat up to the north shore of Savo and slipped cable in a convenient cove within bowshot of the wrecked Sweet Alice.

Gordon, the sandy-haired mate of the schooner, joined McKechnie on the after deck after he had seen to the anchor, and together they scanned the wreck on the beach in silence.

The Sweet Alice lay on her port side, forty yards beyond the water's edge, where she had been driven by the force of the hurricane, which had splintered her starboard rail and snapped her foremast. Her deck-house was crushed in, and she bore unmistakable signs of pillage by the Savo islanders. The hurricane that had wrecked her had taken the lives, apparently, of Dixon, her master, and Hallie, her mate—the only two white men aboard. At least, such had been the report McKechnie heard.

"Gordon, man," observed the weather-beaten Scotchman at length, "if ye can ease a thought out o' your sandy head, consider yon wreck, and tell me what is strange about it."

The mate puffed tranquilly at a rank pipe, and closed one eye in pretended meditation.

"She lies high, Mr. McKechnie," he hazarded, "but the surf must have topped the beach to the edge of the bush during that tempest. Hallie lost his life trying to swim the surf with a life-line before she broke up."

Skipper McKechnie shook his head sadly.

"The good book says, Mr. Gordon, that there are them who have eyes and see not. Ye have put your muddling finger dead to the rights o' the matter; still ye see

nothing strange. As ye said, Hallie, who was a decent man, was lost in the surf. Dixon, who was a scoundrel—having shot more than one harmless heathen for his amusement, besides kidnaping the brother o' Channa—stayed on the vessel with the crew. The report says that he was drowned. One o' the crew escaped to Malaita with the tale."

"Well, and why not?" demanded Gordon.

"Why not? Do ye ask me that? No doubt ye think Dixon drowned himself in the water-cask o' the cabin out o' repentance for his sins when he saw the Lord was about to take him! Cast your eye over the wreck, yon."

McKechnie pointed a blackened forefinger at the hulk on the beach.

"Will ye notice, Mr. Gordon, that the tale goes Dixon was drowned when the vessel broke up. Ye will notice, no doubt, she is not broken up. If Dixon had stuck to his deck he would be alive this day."

"He might have been washed over the side by a comber, Mr. McKechnie," objected Gordon, who loved an argument. "Have you the testimony on oath of St. Peter that the man was not washed over the rail, which was splintered by the crash?"

McKechnie scanned the bulk of the wreck with shrewd eyes.

"Oh aye," he grunted; "I need no word from the saints. If Dixon was swept over the side did all the crew follow him? Out o' love for the man that fed them lousy tucker and strung them up by their thumbs? No, Mr. Gordon; if ye had brains instead o' ballast in your top-hammer, ye would know that if any o' her company had stuck to the Sweet Alice, they would have lived, for she is not broken up. And Dixon was no man to risk his life when others would serve instead."

The Scotchman swept his arm across the vista of the shore.

"What happened to him when he reached the beach? Where is he now, Gordon; where is he?"

"A look over the bloomin' tub might tell us what you want to know, Mr. McKechnie," suggested Gordon.

By way of answer the skipper pointed toward the bush. Gordon surveyed the shore through binoculars, and saw what the shrewd Scotchman had noticed—the glint of spear-points among the ferns and an occasional dark form that slipped from one palm to another. The men of Savo had sighted the schooner.

"We had best wait until the commissioner sends the Thor here, Mr. Gordon," said McKechnie. "The gunboat is headed this way, I heard at Malaita. The British navy is fast becoming curious about the death o' Dixon and the unlettered heathen o' Savo. Then we may do a wee bit investigating for ourselves the while."

"The curiosity of a decrepit Scotchman is a sad thing, to my way of thinking," muttered Gordon, addressing his pipe.

"Curiosity, is it, Mr. Gordon?" McKechnie eyed his mate hostilely. "Aye, it may be that. But what if I tell ye Dixon had on him the Mongava pearl?"

Gordon had heard of the pearl—a beauty of great size and purity that the native divers of Mongava had brought to the surface.

"The Malaita traders told me the tale," went on McKechnie. "Dixon bought it from the unlettered heathen o' Mongava for two pound, when he had them sweating drunk on the Sweet Alice. Man, it was robbery; but it cannot be proved, I'm thinking. The Mongava pearl is worth five hundred pound in Sydney and more in London. Aye, Dixon had the pearl. And we will find him or his body on the island o' Savo."

Darkness closed rapidly over the cove and the woods of Savo. A white line of gentle surf marked the shore. Between this line and the bush came forms invisible in the darkness—forms that carried shields and spears. They gathered in a group by the wrecked schooner, watching the riding lights of the Auld Alfred. But when dawn streaked up over the sea they were gone.

II.

LIEUTENANT-COMMANDER ST. GEORGE BARCLAY sat in a wicker-chair under the awning on the after deck of H. M. S. Thor,

and wished that he had a better cigar than the one he was smoking. Also he wished that he could penetrate the secrets hidden behind the bush of the beautiful island of Savo.

The commander of the gunboat was a square-shouldered man of perhaps thirty-two years, with a fresh, tanned face, and mild, blue eyes. As he puffed at his cigar a frown creased his brow. It was late in the afternoon, and the heat had seeped in under the awning and into every quarter of the old gunboat. The brilliant green of the foliage that lined the beach shadowed the clear blue of the sea. A few cables' lengths away the Auld Alfred was tranquilly at anchor. Opposite the war-ship the wreck lay on the shore, some distance above the water-line.

Barclay's eyes swept the scene, which had grown familiar. Idly puffing smoke-rings at the awning overhead, he ran over in his mind the scanty fruits of his visit to King Channa.

The Thor had been ordered to Savo—which the trading schooners avoided on account of the evil reputation of the place—to learn how Dixon and Hallie had met their death, and, if possible, to recover their bodies. Also to salvage whatever valuables were on the wrecked Sweet Alice, including the Mongava pearl, which Malaita traders asserted Dixon had with him. Barclay, under orders from the commissioner, was to settle the question. Like English navy men throughout Asian waters, Barclay was an unlisted court of appeal against crime, a judge of the unwritten law. It was his task to see fair play.

Yet Barclay saw little chance of recovering the pearl. King Channa, interviewed at his village by the Englishman with a party of marines, had confirmed the story of the survivor of the Sweet Alice, who had come to Savo from Malaita on the Thor.

The Sweet Alice, declared Channa through an interpreter, had struck the beach of Savo during the climax of a hurricane, and the one boatman had been the only man to win ashore. The terrific wind and the high surf had prevented the islanders from giving aid to the stricken ship. Some bodies of the native crew had been

washed ashore later. That was all. Nothing had been seen of the two white men of the schooner.

Channa and his spearmen had been in high good temper, plainly flattered by the visit from the war-ship. They admitted, when Barclay pointed out that the vessel had been looted, that they had taken the ship's furniture and fixings. But there had been no cargo, as the Sweet Alice was in ballast at the time, homeward bound for Sydney. No one had appeared to claim the vessel, so they had helped themselves.

Not content with this, Barclay had made a thorough inspection of the Sweet Alice, followed by a search of the island, which was small—being a scant ten miles around. No trace of the white men had been found. He was forced to admit to himself that there was little for him to do at Savo. He had not even found the ship's papers of the Sweet Alice.

Barclay knew of the evil reputation of Savo—of the head-hunting spearmen. He had seen the treasured pyramid of bleached skulls before Channa's hut. But the skulls were old, and the deeds of the Savo men belonged to a time before the coming of the British.

One curious thing he had seen. In talking with Channa he had idly flicked a dead fish, which lay on the ground between them, toward the king with his foot. Instantly Channa had sprung back, his eyes wide with terror. The action had alarmed the spearmen, and for an instant there were prospects of a free-for-all fight between the islanders and the marines. Barclay had quieted the disturbance, wondering at the fear of Channa for a dead fish.

The commander of the Thor looked up as he saw a boat approaching the war-ship from the schooner. The boat drew up beside the gunboat's ladder, and a few minutes later the stalwart form of Skipper William McKechnie strode aft.

The Scotchman greeted the naval officer calmly, and appropriated a chair beside Barclay. He sniffed at the smoke from the latter's cigar doubtfully, and drew a cigar from his pocket. Barclay eyed this and the weather-beaten face of the bald Scotchman curiously.

"This is no' so bad, Mr. Barclay." McKechnie extended the cigar. "And by the smell o' the one ye have, ye might relish a change. 'Tis a failing o' my mate, Mr. Gordon, to smoke the weeds. I saw ye go up to Channa's village this morning, when I was visiting the sad remains o' the Sweet Alice. How did ye like the bonny island o' Savo, with its canny king?"

Barclay exchanged cigars readily, and when the new one was alight ran his eye appraisingly over the skipper.

"May I ask," he inquired, "who you are and what your business is at Savo?"

"Ye may ask," responded McKechnie agreeably, stroking his whiskers with a stubby hand, "and welcome. My name is William McKechnie, master o' the Auld Alfred, yon. My business at Savo is nobody else's business."

The officer turned his blue eyes to the Scotchman, who met them frankly. He had heard of the master of the Auld Alfred, who bore a record for honest but crafty dealing.

"May I ask," resumed McKechnie calmly, "what ye have learned from Channa about the fate o' Dixon and Hallie? I'm thinking that's why ye are here, Mr. Barclay."

"Dixon and Hallie were drowned. There's nothing further for me to do at Savo. The Sweet Alice is a dead loss—can't be salvaged."

"Aye." McKechnie continued to stroke his whiskers. "No doubt ye would think that. Now, will ye tell me, Mr. Barclay, who the native was that went with ye up to Channa's village?"

"That was the survivor of the Sweet Alice crew."

"Aye. And did ye see the scar on Channa's cheek, Mr. Barclay?"

"Yes, I did." The commander of the Thor glanced at his visitor impatiently. "I say, is there anything more you would like to know, McKechnie?"

"There is." The Scotchman nodded gravely. "Do ye see nothing strange about the death o' Dixon?"

"I do not. I shall list him as drowned, with Hallie. Have you any suggestion to make, McKechnie?"

The Scotchman did not miss the mild sarcasm of this, but his expression did not alter.

"I might suggest, if ye ask it, that ye consider three things, Mr. Barclay—King Channa, who is afraid o' nothing except the tabu o' fish; also the scar on his cheek, and the man ye picked up at Malaita. Do ye know where he is, sir?"

Barclay sat up and ran his eye down the deck. When he had last seen the islander, the latter had been asleep in the shadow of a gig. The man was not there, however.

"The good book says," went on McKechnie, "that by their acts ye shall know them. The unlettered and benighted heathen is a canny man, Mr. Barclay, and will bear watching. The fellow ye are looking for saw me come aboard the Thor. If ye look ashore, ye will see him, yon."

McKechnie pointed to the beach. To his surprise the officer saw a dark form rise from the water and run ashore. The man ran, leaping in zigzag fashion, as if to dodge possible bullets. Barclay recognized him as the survivor of the Sweet Alice.

"I had a good look at the boy on deck before he slid over the side," McKechnie explained. "He wore a half-moon o' pearl shells, which is a sign o' caste on Savo. That boy is one o' the Savo men, and I doubt he ever saw the deck o' the Sweet Alice unless he helped to loot her. He saw me watching him, and he considered it was time to slip his anchor."

"I say!" Barclay frowned. "Then the beggar was spoofing me."

"Aye. No doubt he was. 'Twas a canny move o' Channa's to send one o' his men to Malaita with the tale that all on the schooner were drowned. Now, ye marked the scar on Channa, sir. Well, I'm thinking it was a bad day for Dixon when his vessel drove ashore here. That scar was Dixon's doing, the time he carried off the king's brother to Queensland. 'Tis bad luck to speak ill o' the dead. But Dixon was overquick to shoot when he was in the labor trade—getting islanders to work in Queensland. And Channa has a long memory. He remembers how Dixon cut a pearl from the mouth o' his brother when the poor man tried to hide it."

"Rot!" Barclay shrugged his shoulders skeptically. "Do you mean to say that Channa has taken to head-hunting again, and that he killed all the men on the Sweet Alice?"

"Did ye see, sir," McKechnie's burr thickened with excitement, "that a' the ship's papers was missin' from the schooner. The unlettered heathen canna read. Where did the log and papers go, if Dixon did not carry them ashore? Ye hae na dealt wi' the benighted islanders so lang as I—"

"But nothing can be proved," argued Barclay, puzzled. "I'll go ashore and find that beggar, however—"

"Ye will not find him, sir. Nor will ye find the bodies o' Dixon and the rest. Channa has taken care to put them in a canoe filled wi' stones, and sunk the lot at sea."

"Then what's to be done, McKechnie?"

The Scotchman stared thoughtfully at the woods of Savo, which were now void of sign of life.

"If ye will wait for a day, Mr. Barclay," he observed, "I will go ashore and interview Channa. The king is a verra interesting man, with his collection o' skulls—if he can be made to talk."

Barclay shrugged agreement. After all, as McKechnie said, he could do nothing, except to shell the village on suspicion, and he was not willing to do that.

III.

THE village of Savo was a short distance back in the bush out of sight from the beach. Leaving their boat-crew on the beach with the gig, McKechnie and Gordon struck into the bush-trails on the following day. The mate was armed with his revolver. McKechnie carried a small bundle, but no weapon.

They had no difficulty in locating the village, where the Savo men were gathered, all armed. Their appearance took the islanders by surprise. The King of Savo was sitting in front of his hut, and he sprang to his feet, grasping his spear, when he saw the two white men. Seeing that they were alone, however, he resumed his seat.

The Savo men clustered about them as they made their way to King Channa. McKechnie showed no signs of alarm. He knew that as long as the women and children of the village were near them, the men would not annoy them.

The ruler of Savo was a small man, but muscular. One cheek bore a deep scar, and a shoulder-blade protruded where a spear had wounded him in the back. He wore his tawny wig of flax, and a woven ditty-bag hung from the pearl-shell belt at his waist. His small, bleared eyes watched the newcomers closely.

McKechnie seated himself unconcernedly by the pile of skulls beside Channa. Gordon took his stand at his back, leaning against the bamboo hut. Both men were alert for trouble, but for the present they knew that the curiosity of the natives was more powerful than any desire to attack the white men. McKechnie busied himself in turning over various presents to Channa—tobacco, knives, and a pipe. The eyes of the Savo chieftain glistened when he saw his visitor draw a pair of handcuffs from the bundle. Channa knew the use of the implements, having had dealings with the Queensland recruiters in his youth.

"You like 'em this, good fella?" asked McKechnie, holding out the handcuffs to Channa. The latter assented cordially, and extended his hand for them.

"You work 'em like this, Channa," continued McKechnie calmly. Gordon backed slowly against the hut, and his hand went to his pocket. He little liked this expedition into the Savo headquarters, but McKechnie had insisted on coming, and Gordon would not let him take the risk alone.

The natives thronged closer. McKechnie drew the key of the irons from his pocket. Channa had not withdrawn his hand. The skipper clamped one of the bracelets over his own wrist. With a quick motion he snapped the other half of the irons over the islander's wrist.

Channa started angrily, but McKechnie paid no attention to his movement. The skipper reached into his bundle. A silence fell upon the gazing spearmen—a hostile silence. In it McKechnie's hand came forth from the bundle. It held a dead fish.

As his eye fell on the fish Channa's angry yell echoed through the village. McKechnie balanced the fish near the native. His eyes wide with terror, the native strained back. But the handcuffs held him to McKechnie. Gordon had drawn his revolver, and now faced the ring of islanders.

"Listen, Channa," McKechnie growled at the struggling native; "this fish is *tabu*. You touch 'em fish, you catch 'em seven devils and die like— Don't move, or I'll rub it on your arm. Tell your boys to keep back, or Marster Gordon will shoot 'em plenty quick."

The terror that gripped Channa brought beads of sweat to his forehead. He shouted to his followers, who drew farther away, watching the scene the while with rolling eyes. Channa had been brought up from childhood to dread the sight of fish, which he was convinced would send him to immediate destruction. He had never been so near the object of his *tabu*. And his fear knew no bounds.

"Now," resumed McKechnie, "ye and I are going to have a palaver, Channa. Don't reach for that spear, unless ye want to touch this fish. First ye can tell me what happened to Dixon? If ye lie, ye will feel the fish."

Channa protested that he knew nothing of the master of the Sweet Alice, but a near whiff of the hated fish loosened his tongue speedily.

"Marster Dixon him plenty bad fella," he cried. "Long time him come along Savo. Him take my small fella brother along Queensland. My small fella brother him die along Queensland. Marster Dixon him give me this"—Channa pointed to his scarred cheek. So far McKechnie knew that he spoke the truth.

"Then come schooner along Savo," Channa hurried on, his gaze fastened on the fish as on a deadly snake. "Marster Dixon come along village after hurricane. Him drunk like seven bells, my word! Him tell Channa his good fella mate got drowned along hurricane. Him shoot three times at my hut. My small fella sister she catch bullet and die—"

"And ye speared Dixon, eh?" queried McKechnie.

Channa assented frankly. Reaching over to the pile of skulls, he rolled off the ones on top. In the center of the mound the severed head of a white man showed, scarred and bruised. McKechnie recognized all that remained of Dixon. He shook his head sadly. Channa glanced from the head of his enemy to the man who held him prisoner. Something like pride replaced the fear in his eyes. Pride and anxiety lest he lose his treasured trophy.

"So ye killed Dixon," McKechnie mused. "What about the crew o' the schooner?"

Channa, his gaze still fastened on the blood-stained head, replied that they had fled in a boat to Guadalcanar when Dixon was killed.

"I believe ye are telling the truth, Channa," said the white man, "especially as ye offer proof. The killing is none o' my business. But I'll take the big pearl ye found on Dixon—the Mongava pearl."

Channa's glance turned to McKechnie and traveled back to the head.

"Marster Dixon, him swallow that big fella pearl," he said slowly.

"But ye cut it out o' him, Channa!"

The king hesitated briefly. Then he put his free hand into his ditty-bag. He pulled out a pearl, large and lustrous. McKechnie took it from him silently. And, in spite of Channa's wailing protests, he took the head.

On board the Thor that evening McKechnie told his tale to Barclay. As a climax he unwrapped the scarred head that he had brought from Savo. Barclay shuddered.

"I suppose we'll have to shell Channa's village for him, McKechnie," he decided. "Can't let these fellows take to head-hunting again. But I won't waste many shells on him. I'm half convinced Dixon got what was coming to him. By the way, did you see anything of the Mongava pearl?"

McKechnie held out the big pearl that had come from Channa's ditty-bag.

"Channa gave up this," he said. "It must be what ye want. I'll take Dixon's head, and give it a decent burial at sea, if ye wish."

Barclay was glad enough to let the skipper attend to this task. When Mc-

Kechnie and Gordon reached the cabin of the Auld Alfred, the former placed his grim burden on the table.

"Hard luck we had to give up the pearl, Mr. McKechnie," said Gordon, with a wry face. "It must have been worth— Man, are you mad?"

McKechnie was tugging at the jaw of the skull furiously. Gordon watched him in amazement. The teeth were clenched tightly in the rigor of death. But with an effort McKechnie pried the jaw open

slightly. With a wild cry he reached two fingers inside.

The next instant he held up a round object. The bewildered Gordon saw that it was a great pearl, blood stained, but of wonderful color.

"The Mongava pearl, Gordon!" cried McKechnie. "Aye, Channa was sorry to see us take the head, especially after he had given me the smaller pearl. He lost two treasures at once. It was a verra interesting place, that skull-heap o' Channa's."



THE AVERAGE MAN

BY WILL THOMAS WITHROW

HE lived about the same as most men live;
 About like other men he did his bit;
 He gave to life about what most men give;
 But never did he make a three-base hit.
 Home-runs were not his forte; he jogged along
 As most men jog, and merely held his place;
 So at the finish he was not *among*
Those present at the winning of the race.
 He was *an average man*—like you and me—
 His life, summed up, was neither good nor bad;
 And his concept of virtue was to be
Content with what he *was* and what he *had*.

And then he died—about as most men die—
Leaving no footprints on the sands of time;
 And soon his tombstone lied—they always lie;
 To speak the truth of dead men, 'twere a crime.
 "Here *lies*"—so that mendacious tombstone said—
 "Here *lies*"—*that* much of what it said was *true*—
 "Here *lies* the crumbled clay of one who *led*
In doing good; to whom *great praise* is due."
 But all who knew him knew the tombstone lied;
 They knew he'd led in *nothing*, good or bad;
 That all the praise he'd earned was when he died,
 And all the *good* he'd done was to be dead!

So you and I will soon be dead. So, too,
 Our tombstones will set forth in kindly lies
 Our *many* "*virtues*," which, *in fact*, were *few*;
 They'll boost our reputation to the skies;
 A man who couldn't get a decent job,
 Or credit for a ten-cent loaf of bread,
 Can get a handsome six-line lyric sob
 Chiseled upon his tombstone when he's dead!

The Crimson Alibi by Octavus Roy Cohen.

Author of "The Morning After," etc.

CHAPTER XX.

THE ARREST OF LARRY CONOVER.

AN over-enthusiastic salesman, in demonstrating David Carroll's car, had fervently attested to its ability to do upwards of sixty miles an hour. As Carroll, with Leverage at his side, headed down Highland Road toward the city, in answer to Jim Sullivan's urgent summons, he very soon learned that the salesman had exaggerated.

For Carroll clamped down on the accelerator until the sides of his shoesoles carressed the floor of the car and the speedometer climbed slowly to fifty, then fifty-one, and gradually crept up to fifty-two miles per hour, beyond which it declined to go.

Eric Leverage, teeth tight shut, and eyes staring with real fear, clutched desperately at the top uprights and prayed that the motor had developed its maximum. Even at the fifty-two miles at which the salesman would have sneered as a mere snail's pace, the roadster bade fair to leave the road, turn on its side and die, peacefully.

It swayed drunkenly as it shot ahead, as a too hippy person walks; it zipped from one side of the road to the other and slued breath-takingly before answering to the firm hand on the wheel.

Carroll, never a speed demon at best, was driving as he had never driven before.

Once, a boulevard motor-cycle policeman overhauled them after a chase which brought delirious cheers from the children playing on the Highland Road lawns, and was keenly disappointed to learn that he had been chasing his police superiors.

The detective sat at the wheel, his face set as though graven in marble, muscles tensed to the strain, eyes riveted on the broad, macadam roadway which unwound, like a great, endless ribbon beneath the whirring wheels.

On they sped, with never a let-up save at important crossings where there was danger of meeting street-cars: they whizzed on with the motor sending its staccato roar into the still air, the special siren whistling eerily and the wind whipping into their faces.

It seemed as if the sky-line of Berkeley City's civic center came jumping toward them. Leverage lost all sense of motion. He held grimly to his seat, too terrified for verbal protest. And not until they had reached the environs of the city proper, did Carroll slow down to a respectable gait of twenty-five miles.

Leverage leaned back and drew a breath of relief.

Facing the prospect of combat with a cornered convict with a calm, matter-of-factness, he had been petrified with fear at an exhibition of fast driving wherein he had been deprived of even the exhilaration of

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handling the wheel. And as they struck into the more crowded streets of the city itself he mopped nervously at a face beaded with cold perspiration and accounted himself lucky to be able to answer, "Present."

They struck straight through the city, skirting to a back street, that they might not strike the midday traffic jamb, and kept going toward the banks of the muddy river which loops in its course on one side of Berkeley City and furnishes a sluggish source of water-power.

On the near bank of that river a noisome tenement district had long since sprung up and flourished like a fungus growth: frantic efforts of civic improvement associations, chambers of commerce, and city police to the contrary notwithstanding.

The slum district radiated from a particularly vile section which was known as the "hell's half acre," and the half acre itself was a Mecca for crime and criminals such as few cities of triple Berkeley City's population could boast.

In the half acre could be found the scum of the State's criminal element. It was an executive headquarters for past masters of the under-world arts. Its committee meetings were held in a half dozen disreputable rooming-houses which displayed signs proclaiming to the world that they were "hotels."

One of the quietest and most vicious of these hotels was Carter's, a three-story, red-brick structure on a dirty, saloon corner. Carter's had been headquarters for the Lefty Lewis gang, for the infamous Pete Hardwick gang of train-wreckers, and a dozen other bodies of criminals who had sought immunity from the police in organization.

Carroll was not unfamiliar with the district. As he drove his car slowly between lines of street vendors, through a maze of dirty, romping children, and on into the reek of the half acre, he felt that Sullivan's warning that he come armed had not been misguided.

Patrolmen operate in pairs in the half acre, and as Carroll parked his car a block away from Carter's Hotel, he summoned the two men on the post and gave them directions.

"Chief Leverage and I are going into Carter's after a man. I want you two men to stroll down that way casually, after we get inside. One of you keep a view of the front, and the other get around on the side street and watch the side door. If you hear any excitement—shooting, for instance—come on the jump, up to the third floor. Keep your eyes peeled for a chap making a getaway. If you see him: get him—preferably without shooting—but get him!"

They nodded and saluted. One of them saw fit to throw in a friendly word of advice.

"Got your rods handy?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Keep 'em so, chief. That's a plumb nasty place inside."

A crowd of the unkempt and curious had gathered. Carroll raised his tone to camouflage pitch, and said: "And so we'll be very much obliged if you officers will keep an eye on this car." Then he and Leverage cut across the street and started down toward Carter's.

The block on which they walked was a cañon of towering brick tenements, scarred on their fronts by rickety, rusty fire-escapes populated with slovenly housewives and unwashed children. The city street-cleaning department had been laying down on the job on this particular street, although the street-cleaning department would have offered in extenuation that it could do nothing: the entire section needed disinfecting.

The entire street floor of the Carter Hotel was used to house a collection of steamy little shops, and the entrance to the hotel itself was through a door over which hung the dilapidated sign.

Entering this door, Carroll and Leverage, their hands occasionally touching the butts of their revolvers by way of reassurance, mounted a seemingly endless flight of unbelievably narrow, oilcloth-covered stairs.

At the top they found themselves in a boxlike square, in one corner of which was an old table, two chairs, and a greasy book which evidently did duty as a register.

A slatternly woman slouched forward and inquired their business in tones which bristled with hostility. The men were far too respectable-looking to have business in

Carter's Hotel which could be of benefit to that institution.

Leverage flipped back the lapel of his coat, displaying the shining detective's badge fastened to the lining. The woman flashed him a sour glance.

"Well, whadaya want?"

"Nothing, except that you keep your mouth shut about our being here. There are a couple of uniformed bulls down-stairs, and if anything busts loose up here they'll come a gunning."

"Nothin's gonna bust loose here," came the sullen answer, "unless yous fly-cops bust it."

"Then you just sit tight an' don't rock the boat. We're not going to raise any rough-house if we can help it; see? But we don't want any interference from inside. Now—where's the other fellow?"

"The tall, thin guy?"

"Yes."

"In th' hall, up-stairs, gum-shoein' around 318."

"That's where this Mr. and Mrs. Carson are, isn't it?"

"Guess so. He's had th' room f'r a coupla days."

"And you just took it for granted that the girl was his wife, eh?"

"She said she was, an' I ain't here to look after the morals of the people that comes to this hotel. Just get that in y'r bean. Y' ain't got nothin' on this joint in that line—'r any other, f'r that matter."

"Worse luck," retorted Leverage cheerfully, then turned and led the way up a second flight of steps, even more viciously narrow and dark than those leading from the street to the pseudo lobby.

At the poorly lighted landing at the head of the stairs, they met Jim Sullivan, and that individual was frankly glad to see them.

"I've been scared stiff," he admitted frankly. "This ain't the kind of a joint I'd choose for a pleasure party. What I don't see is how the devil a girl as decent-looking as Ellen Garrison is, could ever have nerved herself to get inside this place."

"Conover," commented Carroll briefly. "There's no limit to what a woman will do for the man she loves. This, for instance."

"She couldn't do more," agreed Sullivan.

"Have they gotten wise to the fact that you're here?" asked Leverage.

Sullivan shook his head.

"I don't think so. At least they haven't tried any funny stuff. They're talking in there, but I can't hear what they're saying. I haven't tried to start anything. I was willing to handle anything that broke, but getting under way before you got here—that sort of stuff isn't in my line if I can worm out of it."

"You haven't seen the man, have you?" queried Carroll.

"No."

"So you're not sure—"

"I'm sure of nothing, chief, except that the man in that room is the man who was with Ellen Garrison in the Quincy House night before last!"

"You've been on the job, Jim. What's your plan of campaign?"

"To get Conover?"

"Yes."

"Well—it struck me, chief, that we ought not to get him any more excited than we have to. Whether he killed old man Quincy or not, being an escaped convict as he is, there isn't much he'd stop at to get away from us. It's a cinch that the girl has financed him, and fifty to one that he's heeled.

"I figured that if we busted into that room, by the time we got there he'd be backed in a corner with his rod handy and ready to do business. He'd either pot one or both of us or we'd have to get him. And that—" he shook his head, "would be right unpleasant."

"Very," agreed Carroll. "And your preventive for this?"

"Seems like we might mosey down the corridor and stand very silent outside of 318. Sooner or later the girl will get ready to go—sooner, I'm thinking. She'll open the door right gently and take a peep to see that the coast is clear. If we bust in right then, we can get him covered before he can say 'boo.' And then we can talk turkey."

"Good idea," approved Carroll heartily.

"What say you, Eric?"

"Knowing what I do about this dump,"

grinned the plain-clothes chief, "I'd say that the less rookus we raised the better off we'll be. It's open season on cops when gunnin' starts down here, and while I ain't running away from it when I've got it to do—I'd rather handle things tactful-like, as Jim, here, suggests."

"It's a go, then," approved Carroll. "I'll stand on this side of the door-frame, and you and Leverage stand on the other side. Keep flattened against the wall, and leave it to me to start the ball rolling."

"No gun-play unless there isn't any way to avoid it. There's always the chance, you know, that Larry did not kill the old man, and we know that he's innocent of the Fairchild & Co. robbery for which he was sent to the pen, so we don't want to kill him unless we have to."

"Innocent?" gasped Sullivan in surprise. Leverage told him briefly the story of Lefty Lewis's blanket confession, and when he finished, Sullivan shook his head commiseratingly.

"The poor fellow," he said. "If he did kill Quincy—I don't blame him!"

"And now," said Carroll softly, "let's get on the job. There's no telling when that door will open, and we want to be right on the job when it does. Keep your guns out."

Silently as ghosts they moved down the carpeted hallway and took their positions against the wall, on either side of the door marked—in chalk—318. Then commenced a vigil that took all the moral and physical stamina they possessed.

Inside the room they could hear the murmur of voices: low, tense, and vibrant. Occasionally a meaningless word floated to their ears and was lost in the dinginess of the hallway. After they had been there for fully three-quarters of an hour—which seemed to them to be three hours—they heard a choky "good-by," in a man's voice.

The three men shifted tensely and took tighter grips of their revolvers. Leverage's jaw was set grimly, Sullivan was plainly nervous—only Carroll showed no emotion, although had the light in the hall been brighter one might have seen that his eyes had lost their habitual blue softness and had assumed a cold, steel, glint. His slen-

der frame was taut in every muscle, he was poised on the balls of his feet as a runner poises before a dash.

The good-bys within the room were long, and punctuated by the sound of a woman's sobbing. Carroll flashed a message to Sullivan—flashed it by means of his eyes and an expressive gesture, which was to the effect that Sullivan should take it on himself to see that the girl did not escape or cause the trouble which a desperate, cornered woman can easily cause.

A key grated in the lock of room No. 318. Then there was silence. Carroll's eyes, fixed with hawklike intensity on the door-knob, saw it turn slowly—very slowly. Finally the door swung back and a woman's voice came to them plainly: the voice of Ellen Garrison—"Good-by, sweetheart."

The door opened slightly. It opened wider. The girl's shoulder appeared—thrust cautiously out to see that there was no one in the hall. And then Carroll gave the signal.

Sullivan's hand was clapped tightly over the girl's mouth: he held her motionless in his steely grip. At the same instant Carroll sprang through the open door to face a young man who stood motionless—stunned with surprise.

"Hands up!" Carroll's voice snapped like a whip-lash. His revolver was trained on the heart of the pasty-faced young man who stared at him in mute horror. Eric Leverage ranged himself beside Carroll and the hands of the cornered man rose slowly ceilingward. Carroll heard Leverage say:

"We've got our man, chief; that's Larry Conover!"

CHAPTER XXI.

A DARK PROSPECT.

THE man was Larry Conover, but even Eric Leverage, hardened as he was to the pasty, colorless flesh of the penitentiary inmate, experienced a sense of shock. He remembered Larry as he had been on the day of his trial and conviction: broad, healthy, alive with ruddy color, exuding vigor and sheer animal spirits. And now—

A tall man with white skin drawn tightly over jutting cheek-bones; eyes deep in the sockets and staring as from a skull; hair clipped short and shoulders sagging.

Ordinarily, Leverage would not have been compassionate, but as he looked at what had once been a magnificent man he was struck forcibly with the idea that it had all been unnecessary: the conviction, the prison term, and the consequent red stain of murder.

The magnificent spirit which had been Conover's four years before was gone. After the first impulsive movement toward the window—three stories above the flagged pavement—he turned toward them, the light of the cornered rat in his sunken eyes. He shrugged his shoulders with a pitiful, helpless, almost appealing gesture.

"Well?" he questioned, and paused.

"We've got you at last, Larry."

A pitiful wail broke through the tense silence of the room. Ellen Garrison broke from Jim Sullivan's grasp and threw herself sobbing in the arms of the escaped convict.

"Oh, Larry—Larry, boy! It is all my fault. I—I—thought he was asleep—and he wasn't!"

He stroked her hair gently and unashamed tears sprang to his eyes. "There, there, little girl. You did everything you could. Perhaps it's just as well. We would never have known a moment's peace. You've been a little wonder-woman. Don't cry, dear."

But she clung to him passionately, shaken with a paroxysm of sobbing.

"It isn't right, Larry—it isn't right. You—you—don't understand. They've come to arrest you for—for—the murder of Mr. Quincy."

He nodded hopelessly.

"I understand that, dear. There isn't any use fighting against it. They've got me, and they'll railroad me through just as they did before—"

Leverage stepped forward. His voice was very gentle.

"Listen to me, Larry Conover. We came after you and we landed you because we had to. But I want you to know that you've got friends in the three of us—"

"Yes—" bitterly; "swell friends. What's this, a new sort of third degree?"

"I don't blame you for being sorry—and I'm sorry as hell that you croaked old Quincy."

"But I didn't," with sudden vehemence of passionate denial. "Before high Heaven I didn't!"

"I'd give a pretty if you could prove that, Larry. But the cards are all against you—"

"Just as they were before."

"Yes—just as they were before. But if we have anything to do with it, they're not going to get you for murder. Manslaughter, maybe—something easy like that—"

"I'd rather they'd hang me," said the man dully, "than send me back to that pest-hole. I'm glad old Quincy is dead, but I didn't kill him any more than I robbed the Fairchild safe. You were on that case, Leverage; you didn't believe I was guilty."

"No, Larry, I didn't believe you were guilty. And now I *know* that you were not!"

"You know it? What do you mean?"

"No longer than two hours ago a notorious yegg confessed that he robbed the safe at Fairchild's. That cleared you—"

Larry's head went back. His nostrils dilated and the breath whistled through his thin, white lips. The full significance of his position flashed through his mind.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed, "when you've got my neck in a noose you tell me that you know I was not guilty in the first place! When you've got me dead to rights on a murder charge, you tell me I'm clear of the burglary offense!"

"I got railroaded to the pen for a crime I didn't know a thing about—I escape to have the freedom that belongs to me—I happen to be in his house when he's killed—and now I'm going to be sent up for life! Is that just? Is it fair? Doesn't the law ever try to make amends for its mistakes? If you knew all that, why couldn't you play hands off? Why couldn't you strain a point and let me go? Ain't there a single heart in the whole pack of you law-hounds?"

"And why did you have to go tell me

this? I wouldn't have minded it so terribly much if I'd thought that the old conviction was still hanging over me." He faced Ellen and held her at arm's length: "You hear that, sweetheart? They tell me they know I never robbed the Fairchild safe—they tell me, after they've got me framed on a murder charge. *After*—not before!"

"We didn't know it ourselves till a few minutes ago, Conover," broke in Carroll. "I pledge you my word, we'll do what we can to get you off. Murder is murder, you know."

"It is to me," said the man hopelessly. "It doesn't seem to matter much whether I'm guilty or not."

"You insist that you did not kill Joshua Quincy?"

"If it was any use—"

"Did you kill him?"

"No! I haven't even seen him since the day of my trial!"

"Then," questioned Carroll, "why did you run the risk of hiding in his house day before yesterday?"

"I guess maybe, Mr. Carroll, if you'd been torn away from a three-weeks' bride and sent to the penitentiary—and if you'd made a getaway from there after four years of hell—I guess maybe even you would take a chance to be with her a little while—wouldn't you?"

Carroll leaned forward. He heard Leverage gasp. "Your *wife*?"

"Of course."

"Ellen Garrison is your wife?" Carroll was readjusting himself to this revelation.

"Since when?"

The ex-convict nodded toward the girl.

"Show him, dear."

From the bosom of her dress she drew forth a folded paper which she extended to Carroll with quiet dignity. It was a marriage license, dated three weeks before the date of Conover's arrest for the Fairchild robbery, and pinned carefully to the back of it was the certificate of their marriage, in Whitfield, a suburb of Berkeley City. The certificate of marriage was signed by a minister of whom Carroll had heard.

"Why didn't we know of this?" he questioned of Conover.

"For the same reason, I guess, that you

didn't know about who really robbed the Fairchild & Co. safe," answered Conover bitterly. "But the fact is that Ellen and I were engaged, and one evening we suddenly decided to get married. We also decided that Ellen was to keep her job for a while, and so we thought we'd better keep the marriage a secret—"

"Why?"

"Well—it sounds like a silly reason after the real things I've been through for the last four years; but at that time I was thinking that the boys at the store would kid the life out of me if they knew my wife was working as a house-maid. It was what I used to call pride in those days.

"And then, after they arrested me for the robbery—and convicted me—I made Ellen promise that she'd never tell that we were married. And," with a touch of hauteur, "I wouldn't have let her tell even yet if it wasn't for the fact that every one will know that there was a man in her room yesterday, and she wouldn't have a shred of character left unless it was known that the man there was her husband."

"Would you mind," asked Carroll, "telling us everything that happened day before yesterday, from the time you reached her rooms until you got away?"

"No. I guess there ain't anything I can say that will hurt me any. You've got the dope on me. And while it won't help any—"

"I hope that it will," said Carroll.

Conover looked at him peculiarly.

"Damned if I don't believe you do," he blurted.

"We all do."

"I was up there in the room all afternoon, knowing the first comfort I'd had in four years. I smoked—smoked real cigars that Ellen had bought for me. I ate a good dinner that she smuggled up from the kitchen. Everything was fine until after the dinner hour, when the housekeeper knocked on the door and insisted that some one was in there."

"Where did you hide?"

"In the clothes-press. Ellen locked it and hid the key."

"But before you did that you put out your cigar and threw it into the fireplace?"

"Yes, and forgot it in the excitement. After that there was nothing for me to do but lay low. I fancied that Mrs. Burrage would be keeping an eye on that hall to see if any one tried to get out of there. And then, after we were sure that she had gone to sleep, I was afraid to try it because Ellen, listening at the head of the steps, heard a quarrel between Joshua Quincy and his nephew."

Conover's hands were working spasmodically as he talked. His fingers closed around a scrap of paper on the dresser and he tossed it from him with his left hand. Carroll's eyelids quivered slightly as Conover continued:

"I don't see how any one could have helped quarreling with the old man. I have never seen a person so universally hated. But anyway, they were quarreling, bitterly, Ellen said. She held her post there, waiting for the young fellow to go out.

"I guess it must have been quarter past eleven o'clock when he did go, and then she came to me and told me I'd better make a try at getting out of the house unseen. We slipped down the hall and the back stairs. She led me into the butler's pantry and turned on the light. Then she let me out of the back door and turned the light off.

"I thought I was safe then. The night was very dark, and I stood in the shadow of the house trying to accustom my eyes to the gloom. All of a sudden I saw some one come around the corner of the house, and I could see that he had seen me. I made a break for it—ran as fast as I could—which ain't so very fast after what I've been through for four years—straight to the back of the grounds, through a clump of bushes. I vaulted the fence at the rear, ran to the next corner and hid there. I could see into the grounds, and by the way the man I had seen was looking around, I knew that he'd missed me.

"He looked all through the grounds and then walked on around the other corner and started toward the front of the house." Conover stopped.

"Well, and after that?" Carroll prompted him.

"I beat it. Straight down the street and

into the town and straight to this dump where I've been hanging out under the name of Frank Carson, since I hit town. I was planning to go West—Ellen had saved up and staked me—and after a while when the excitement died down she was going to join me. But now," he spread his hands wide with a hopeless gesture, "it's all off—"

"Listen to me," said Carroll gently; "I want you to believe that I want to clear you of this murder-charge, if you are innocent. If you did it I'm going to send you up; but if you didn't do it, I'd like to see you get off. Will you do something for me?"

"What is it?"

Carroll produced a pad and a fountain-pen. "Sit down at that table and write a sentence for me."

Conover shook his head in puzzlement.

"I don't get you—"

"Just sit down at that table and write something for me."

"What?"

"Anything."

No one understood—least of all Conover, who suspected a trap. But he instinctively liked Carroll and finally he took the pen and paper, seated himself at the table and wrote a sentence—wrote it with his left hand. He rose.

"Now," said Carroll strangely, "wad that up, stand in the corner yonder and throw it to me."

Bewildered at the strange request and not understanding whither it led, Conover hesitated again. But he did as asked: took his place in the opposite corner and threw the wad of paper at Carroll. The throw was made with the left hand. Carroll caught the paper deftly and tore it to bits.

"Just so you'll understand that it was no trap," he explained, smiling.

"What was it, then?"

"A little idea of mine, that's all."

Ellen turned on Carroll.

"Can't you let him off," she pleaded. "You know he didn't kill Mr. Quincy: you know it! I can see in your eyes that you know it—"

Conover stopped her.

"No use, sweetheart; they've got to take me in. It's better not to beg them."

"Thanks, Conover," said Carroll. "I feel rotten enough about the thing now. I'd hate to have to refuse her."

He turned on Ellen.

"I wonder if you'd answer a question or two for me?"

She glanced at her husband.

"Shall I?"

"Yes."

"First—this," the detective quizzed, "Larry says that you listened at the head of the steps to the quarrel between Joshua Quincy and his nephew: is that correct?"

"Yes, sir. I was sure that Mr. Andrew would leave the house eventually, and I knew that Larry could get away then."

"You heard most of the quarrel?"

"Almost all of it."

"Did you see Andrew when he went out?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did he do? What was his manner?"

She turned piteously to Larry.

"Do I have to tell him?" she begged.

He nodded.

"I guess we'd better stick to the truth, Ellen."

She faced Carroll again: head back, and conviction in every clear word:

"It's robbing Larry of his last chance," she said, "but you heard him tell me to stick to the truth. Well—

"The truth is," she drew a long breath, then took the plunge, "the truth is that Mr. Andrew did not kill his uncle!"

"Did not?"

Even Carroll showed his surprise.

"How do you know?"

"Because just as Mr. Andrew was going out the front door his uncle came through the library and shook his fist after him. 'Never set a foot in this house,' he said, and then I saw Mr. Andrew leave."

CHAPTER XXII.

FANSHAW VISITS CARROLL—AGAIN.

TWO hours later, three sober-faced men: David Carroll, Eric Leverage and Jim Sullivan seated themselves before a tasty lunch in Carroll's apartment.

Freda bustled about the cozy little dining-room, afraid that some tiny detail tending toward Carroll's comfort might have been overlooked. She was a bit frightened—and considerably awed—by the graveness of their faces.

Even Leverage, whose chief delight in life had seemed to be found in teasing Freda, had nothing for her save a very brief nod.

They ate, in silence. The fact that they did not compliment her on the lunch did not bother Freda. She could see by the rapidity with which the food disappeared that it appealed to their ravenous appetites. What she did not like, nor understand, was the deep worry-furrow between David Carroll's eyes; that and the tense, set expression of his face.

It was not like Carroll to show his worry. Save for the sometimes steely glint in his blue eyes, he was wont to wear an expression of almost beatific placidity. And so Freda worried because Carroll worried, and Carroll worried because things looked very dark indeed for Larry Conover—and because the whole legal system which had hounded Larry unjustly and driven him to the crime—now seemed to him to be utterly at variance with the spirit of justice.

They had taken Larry to the city jail, and Ellen, his wife, had gone with him. There, Carroll had taken it upon himself to place Larry in a private cell, comfortably furnished—such a cell as that occupied by Andrew Quincy—and to allow Ellen to remain with him.

True, a special guard was placed outside the door, with orders to listen for the slightest unusual sound from within the cell—but at least Larry and his wife were free from prying eyes: free, reflected Carroll bitterly, to share their utmost of misery.

Carroll ate abstractedly. He was swayed by his instinct, violently swayed in favor of Conover's innocence. And yet Joshua Quincy had been killed. *Somebody* had murdered him. Who?

From the jail, Carroll had driven to the Quincy home, and once more had gone over the scene of the crime, paying special attention to the body itself. The theory of suicide, he soon abandoned.

He was convinced that Quincy had been murdered. But by whom?

Not Andrew Quincy; Ellen herself had cleared him.

Not by Dorrington.

Larry Conover appeared to be the one remaining possibility, unless there was a phase of the crime which had entirely escaped his notice.

He wanted to think: to piece together the loose threads which had floated to the surface during the whirlwind course of his investigation. He rose from the table and the others followed him into the study which adjoined his dining-room. They lighted cigars and sat around like so many bewildered owls.

Suddenly Carroll rose. For the first time in four hours he smiled. Jim Sullivan knew the signs:

"Got the answer, chief?"

"I don't know—yet," answered Carroll from the window, without turning his head. "I don't know—not yet. But— Well, what do you fellows think? Talk it over: it'll help me to get straightened out."

"Me," said Leverage heavily; "I'm damned sorry to say that it looks like Larry Conover. Maybe that's because it has looked like Conover from the first. But it ain't Dorrington and it ain't Andrew Quincy—"

"You believe what Ellen said about Andrew? That his uncle followed him through the library as he was leaving: proving that he was alive when Andrew left the house? You believe that?"

"As I believe that the sun will rise tomorrow, chief. She certainly wouldn't lie to save the only other man who might have been guilty. She wouldn't go around hunting for chances to put the noose around Larry's neck, would she?"

"No-o."

"Surely, you don't think there's a chance that Andrew was the one?"

"No. I'm convinced that it was not Andrew."

"Maybe you think it was Dorrington?"

"No, I don't think that."

"Then, in heaven's name, what do you think?"

"I'm not sure. Larry Conover's in a

tight place, and I'm sorry for him: sorry all the way through. I'd do anything on earth to clear him." Suddenly his face brightened.

"By George! I know who will help me out."

"Who?"

"Ever hear of Roger Fanshaw?"

"I have," answered Leverage instantly.

"He's as good-natured a crook as ever walked free. Bucket-shop man, gold-brick expert, founder of ten dozen stock-swindling schemes—and clever enough to keep out of jail. He's on the blacklist at headquarters but we've never landed him yet."

"You ever hear of him, Sullivan?"

"Yes—and unfavorably. But nothing definite."

"He's been mixed up with Joshua Quincy in several dirty deals, hasn't he, Leverage?"

"We think so. In fact, we know it—but Quincy used him. Kept in the background himself. Trust a rotter like Quincy to get some one else to do his dirty work. But why all the fuss about Fanshaw?"

"He knows a good deal about this case," commented Carroll. "I'll ask him to come here."

Sullivan and Leverage looked at each other and shook their heads in bewilderment as Carroll lifted the receiver on his desk-telephone and called Fanshaw's number. In a few minutes a woman's voice came to him over the wires: "Mrs. Burton?"

"Yes."

"This is Mr. Fanshaw's friend: the one who was there last night. Remember?"

"Yes, indeed, sir. You wish to speak with Mr. Fanshaw?"

"He's there now?"

"Yes. I'll call him to the phone."

In a few minutes a deep voice came booming over the wire.

"This is Fanshaw."

"This is David Carroll."

"I guessed as much by what Mrs. Burton said. Where are you?"

"At my apartment."

"Anything new?"

"Plenty."

Fanshaw's voice quivered with eagerness.

"Got your man?"

"I think so. I want to see you a few minutes. Can you come over?"

"There?"

"Yes."

"I'll be there in twenty minutes."

"Good. Just ring three times when you get here, and I'll let you in myself."

He put down the receiver and faced the others.

"Surprises you, doesn't it, that I'm on such intimate terms with Roger Fanshaw?"

"Nothing you do surprises me," commented Leverage. "But what does it all mean?"

"Fanshaw was the first person to tell me anything about the Quincy case."

"How does *he* know anything about it?"

"He was there," announced Carroll calmly.

"Suppose," suggested Leverage, "that you spill the story. That's what you're driving at, ain't it?"

"Yes."

Carroll lighted another cigar and seated himself in a big leather chair. And then he started with the arrival of Fanshaw, on the previous morning, and detailed to them the man's strange story of his intention and plan to murder Joshua Quincy, only to find his intended victim dead by the hand of some one else.

The two detectives listened, spellbound, their eyes wide with astonishment. They fairly gasped when Carroll reached the dramatic end to his recital.

"The reason I haven't told you this," finished Carroll, "is that I didn't want you to be influenced by anything you might happen to discover. As a matter of fact you found nothing against Fanshaw. Neither did I—except that Fanshaw was the man Dorrington saw hiding in the front of the grounds after he had chased Larry over the back fence."

"That part of Conover's yarn did strike me as fishy," commented Sullivan, "although I didn't pay much attention to it. It didn't seem to matter much either way, and I never considered another person in the case."

"It was a natural oversight. I doubt if I would have paid any attention to it if it

hadn't been for the fact that I started in on the case with Fanshaw's story in my mind. But, as I say, his alibi worked. Dorrington did not see him—but it was fear that Dorrington had seen him, which drove him to come to me and ask me to get busy and find the real murderer.

"Do you know," Carroll smiled, "it's a fact that when I visited his boarding-house, last night, I found his estimable landlady ready to take an oath that she heard him groaning from eight o'clock at night until about half past one the next morning. And now—what do you think of Fanshaw's story?"

"Me?" answered Leverage. "It seems that every one who ever had anything to do with the old geezer was jinxed. Not but what Fanshaw would have been willing to kill the old bird. It's just a pity that some guy like him, who'd be better off in jail couldn't be sent up for it, instead of a decent guy like Larry Conover, whose last chance is taken away from him by the dead man."

Silence fell upon the group—a silence broken suddenly by three whirs of the electric bell. Carroll left the room swiftly and intercepted the girl.

"I'll answer it, Freda. You go on back to the kitchen," he ordered.

He was smiling cordially as he opened the door to admit Fanshaw. The eyelid which drooped over Fanshaw's left eye quivered slightly as he saw the three hats on the rack, but he said nothing as he followed the chattering Carroll into the study. But at sight of Leverage and Sullivan, Fanshaw stood motionless, a bit of color draining from his cheeks. In the most casual manner in the world, Carroll introduced them to Fanshaw and hospitably begged his visitor to be seated.

Fanshaw perched gingerly on the edge of a chair, staring uncertainly at Carroll and the other two detectives. A tenseness was in the air which was reflected on the faces of three of the four men. Only Carroll seemed unperturbed. He was smiling broadly, boyishly. He seemed thoroughly happy—perfectly at ease. He rose, and with hands in his pockets, strolled about the room, saying nothing and thereby height-

ening the uncomfortable atmosphere with which the place was surcharged.

He strolled toward Roger Fanshaw. He came very close. There was a leap—a flash in the midday light—a double click. Fanshaw was on his feet wrenching futilely at the shining hand-cuffs which encircled his wrists!

Leverage was the first to speak: "What th' hell?" he gasped.

Carroll faced him and spoke quietly, still with the boyish smile playing about his lips:

"There's the man who killed Joshua Quincy!" he announced, gently.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE LIE THAT LOOKED LIKE TRUTH.

SILENCE fell upon the group—silence broken only by the stern ticking of the ancient grandfather's clock in the corner; silence broken by that and by the faint roar of the city, which came to them softly, subdued by the distance.

They were staring at Fanshaw; Fanshaw whose left eye was concealed beneath the now closed lid; Fanshaw who was staring dumbly at the shining hand-cuffs on his wrists—trying to adjust himself to the sudden, startling change in the aspect of things. He had left his boarding-house in an intoxication of jubilation—Carroll's declaration that he had his man, had held out to him the hope of perpetual safety.

And then—this!

A sextet of keen eyes were upon him, watching every play of color on his face, every quiver of the telltale lid of the left eye, every nervous, spasmodic movement of his big, muscular hands—so helpless now in their circlets of steel, symbolizing the dread grip of the inexorable law.

Fanshaw stood quiet, shaking his big head—shaking his head and muttering doggedly: "I didn't do it! I didn't do it!" Gone was his wonted poise, routed before the onslaught of stark surprise. Surprise and horror.

"Tell us about it, chief," begged Leverage. "Because if this bird told you the story you told me, then it's a marvel you

landed him. It had me buffaloes right. How did you come to know that Fanshaw did it?"

"I didn't," said Carroll, simply, "until I was quite convinced that no one else could have done it.

"I'm intensely human and, I'm afraid, a little gullible. When Fanshaw told me his story, I swallowed it hook, line and sinker. It seemed perfectly all right to me, I was as unsuspecting as a new-born babe.

"You see, his psychology was sound as a dollar. It was perfectly natural that a man in the position he claimed to have been would be more frightened than if he had really carried his plan through. Therefore I did not question that phase of his story—especially when it was corroborated by the fact that—as I afterward proved—Dorington really did see him in the garden.

"You've heard of perfect crimes; crimes planned with a meticulous attention to detail so that their perpetrator could not be caught. This was one—almost.

"But Fanshaw went the customary perfect crime one better—at the first indication that something had gone wrong he came to the detective whom he knew would in all probability handle the case, and put into his hands—in a bunch—every bit of evidence which could possibly incriminate him.

"Get the infernal cleverness of that? I knew that Fanshaw had been there, I knew his motives, and as the result of his extraordinary story I went into my investigation firmly convinced that Fanshaw was innocent.

"After that, no matter what evidence against Fanshaw I might uncover, it was discounted a hundred per cent in advance. He had disarmed me. My suspicions were killed before they were born.

"And I admit frankly that his story would have given him his liberty—would have worked as he planned it to work—had it not been for trifling flaws in its consistency. You see"—Carroll paused and smiled slightly—"he made the mistake of telling me one outright lie, and too much of the truth.

"He was especially clever in admitting to me that Quincy had in his possession a check which he—Fanshaw—had forged.

He gave that as his motivating reason—as asserting that Quincy intended using that as documentary evidence to send him to the penitentiary. His motive was ample.

“But when I searched for that paper it was not there. At first, I thought that Fanshaw had taken it, so I called on Thaddeus Standish—Quincy’s lawyer—and learned that Standish had the paper in his possession. Therefore, knowing what I now know, I realized that after killing Quincy, Fanshaw carried out his original plan and searched for that check.

“He didn’t find it, and disarmed me further by asserting that he hadn’t even hunted for it; admitting his guilt of two lesser crimes to conceal the greater!

“I was prepared for minor discrepancies in Fanshaw’s story. No man who had been through what he had, could be expected to retail his yarn with a flawless fidelity to detail. But even at that—and I took the trouble to interview him yesterday evening about this point—he went too far when he said, several times, that he had not entered the room in which Quincy was murdered.

“If you remember the scene of the crime, you will recall that the chair is a high-backed, leather one, facing the wall opposite the door leading from the library—the door through which Fanshaw admits he entered the study.

“A person standing in that door *could not have seen the body!* More: he could not possibly have seen the knife, even if the body had been visible. And there was no doubt that Fanshaw had seen the body. Therefore, it was simple to deduce the fact that he had lied about not entering the room.

“That is item number one. Item number two, has to do with the fact that the shade was pulled down. It is certain that the shade to that single window was pulled down by a man who wished to conceal what he had done or was about to do. Preferably—what he was *about* to do, for if we presume that the murderer pulled the shade down, we must also admit that after the commission of the murder the criminal’s one thought would have been to make his getaway.

“But there again we run into Fanshaw’s

story. He went to that house prepared to kill, and then rob! A man carrying through that program would pull down the shade first thing. And Fanshaw was the man who pulled that shade down! You will remember that he admitted that from his vantage point behind the clump of lilacs near the front gate, he had watched the movements of Andrew Quincy in the study. He could not have watched Andrew had the shade been down. Therefore, it was up while Fanshaw was in that yard before he entered the house.

“To clinch that matter let us consider Dorrington’s story. Andrew left the house—Fanshaw tells that himself—and at that time the shade was up. Fanshaw admits that he entered shortly after Andrew left. He entered through the library window, walked through the door to the study and immediately pulled the shade down to conceal his subsequent actions from the gaze of passers-by. It was after he had pulled the shade down that Dorrington returned to make peace with Joshua Quincy.

“Had Dorrington gone immediately to the house, he would have caught Andrew. But Dorrington paused to wonder why that shade was pulled down. It was unusual. And speculating on it, he heard a noise in the rear of the house.

“He went around to investigate. He saw Larry Conover, and chased him. He lost Conover and circled the house in time to see Fanshaw hiding under the bushes in front. All of these maneuvers of Dorrington’s took quite a little time—and during that time Fanshaw had killed Quincy and hurriedly searched for the forged check.

“This fact, too, you will notice, automatically frees Dorrington of possible complicity in the crime. Fanshaw himself admits that Quincy was dead when he entered the house, and when Fanshaw was in there, Dorrington had not been in the house since he had been discharged by Joshua Quincy immediately after the dinner hour! We have the testimony of Dorrington, Conover, and Andrew to verify that.

“Now, then—Fanshaw told of seeing Andrew in the study with his uncle, and of seeing Andrew leave. But, watching that room as he was, and with both of the doors

leading into the study, within plain view from where he was hiding—Fanshaw never once mentioned seeing either Conover or Dorrington in that room! Therefore, on his own story he exonerates both Conover and Dorrington—constructively, at any rate—and narrows suspicion down to Andrew.

“Andrew, as we now know positively, is not guilty. Ellen told us at the time when it incriminated her own husband—that she saw Joshua Quincy follow Andrew into the hall as he was leaving, and shake his fist at him. Not the reception-hall, mind you; but the hall leading from the reception-hall to the rear of Quincy’s study. Therefore, while Andrew was visible to Fanshaw, Joshua Quincy was not. And it is well established that Andrew did not reenter the house.

“Thus far, the evidence in the case—put together into a complete story now, but coming to us in distorted fragments—completely absolves Dorrington and Andrew Quincy. The remaining suspect is Conover.

“Now we have to consider two facts: the first is that Fanshaw would have seen Conover through the window. The second is that Conover, had he killed Quincy—and I confess that until I began piecing the evidence together I thought he was guilty—would have entered from the rear hall, stabbed his man and gone out by the same door, so that he would have been nowhere near the shade. And had the shade been pulled down during the course of Fanshaw’s vigil in the garden, he would have commented on the fact.

“But even that does not clear Conover. Not by a long shot. A mere discrepancy—that’s all. But, you see, it is a cumulation of discrepancies in Fanshaw’s story, which has at length convinced me.

“Three times I have examined the body, and you two men can, of course, plainly remember the position of the knife before I extracted it from the body. You will recall that it entered the body from the left side, having been plunged with an upward stroke. The blade found the heart.

“Gentlemen, that blow was delivered by a right-handed man! Fanshaw is right-handed. So is Andrew. So is Dorrington. But *Larry Conover is left-handed!*

“Just an hour or so ago, at the Carter

Hotel, I puzzled you by asking him to write for me and then to toss me the bit of paper. I had noticed that he used his left hand, and I wanted to establish fully that he was a left-handed man.

“I didn’t keep silent about it then for any love of theatric effect, but merely because I was not ready at that time to tell you about Fanshaw’s story, which had come to me in a semi-confidential way. Now that I am convinced of his guilt—conditions have changed. I feel that I am justified in using his own partial confession to piece out a chain of convicting testimony.

“Conover, being left-handed, could not have inflicted the blow that killed Quincy. It would have been a physical impossibility for him to have done so. He would have had to tie himself in a knot to thrust the knife home from the left side of Quincy’s body, provided the knife were held in his left hand. And that, while not in itself sufficient to clear Conover—is certainly ample in view of the other mitigating circumstances. Do you agree with me?”

Eric Leverage nodded.

“I hand it to you, chief. It’s a dandy case—but—but—”

“But what?”

“There’s one thing you overlooked.”

“Which is?”

Leverage glanced uncertainly toward Fanshaw, who was sitting slumped down in his chair, still gazing at the handcuffs, as if hypnotized.

“Shall I spill it before him?”

“Certainly.”

“How do you know it wasn’t suicide?”

Fanshaw’s head jerked up with sudden hope.

“Yes,” he croaked; “how do you know it wasn’t suicide?”

“That,” answered Carroll, quietly, “is the missing link in the chain which I have given you. It is the thing which has puzzled me; and yet I have had the evidence from the very first, although until a few minutes ago, I couldn’t properly value it.

“You see—my perspective was too close; circumstances and counter-circumstances came hurtling at me in great gobs, and confused my view of the case as a whole. It has taken careful thought to put the puzzle

together, and I haven't had a chance for really constructive thought until a few minutes ago. I hope I may be excused for appearing a dullard in the matter. I'm not the transcendent sort of detective, as I've warned you more than once.

"But as for the final link in the chain—here it is!"

He walked to the mantel and took from it the cigar humidor which he had brought with him from Quincy's safe. He unlocked it and opened the top. Inside was the dagger with which the crime had been committed.

"Even the veriest novice in these modern times," said Carroll, in a calmly conversational tone, "looks for finger-prints when he starts in on a case. Every detective knows the value of finger-prints, and every crook knows their danger. I was no exception to the rule. The handle of that knife is a wonderful place for finger-prints—a beautiful, unengraved, polished silver handle.

"I looked for the finger-prints the minute I saw the knife. But, my friends, there is something in this case far more damning than the presence of finger-prints—and that—" He paused and gazed at them with pardonable triumph—"that, gentlemen, is the fact that on the beautiful polished silver handle—*there is not a single finger-print!*"

"What?"

"Not one. Not a trace of a finger-print. Had Joshua Quincy committed suicide, the prints of his fingers would have been smeared all over the handle. As a matter of fact, in nineteen cases out of twenty, the fingers of a man committing suicide in such a manner, would remain clutching the handle.

"As to Dorrington, Andrew Quincy, and Larry Conover—if any one of the three killed Quincy, it was done in the heat of passion, and their finger-prints would have been left all over the handle of this knife—for any and all to read.

"It is common to find finger-prints. But—consider this—the absence of finger-prints in connection with a crime, is proof positive that there is a professional criminal concerned in it.

"It is also proof that the professional criminal planned his crime in advance and took the precaution to wear rubber gloves!

"It is extremely unlikely that either Joshua Quincy, his nephew, Dorrington or Conover had the rubber gloves. Who, then, was here night before last who had a motive for killing Joshua Quincy, and also was equipped with rubber gloves?

"Who had actually planned to commit the crimes of murder and robbery? And what man, planning such crimes, would neglect to provide himself with so vital a thing as rubber gloves?

"I am sure you will agree that there is only one answer. It was not suicide, and we have cleared Andrew Quincy, Larry Conover, and the butler, Dorrington. It is simply a case of a perfect crime—made too perfect!

"Roger Fanshaw is our man!"

Carroll turned to Fanshaw:

"Listen to me, Fanshaw," he said, kindly. "I have a feeling of sympathy toward you, which I know I shouldn't have. But it's there—perhaps because Quincy was a rotter, after all, and because he worked you for years. You're going to be punished for the crime, and I believe that if you plead not guilty, you will swing for it. I don't want to see you hanged.

"I cannot promise results. But I will promise this: if you will formally confess to the murder of Joshua Quincy, I will do my level best to see that you get a sentence of life imprisonment, instead of the rope. How about it?"

Fanshaw raised a haggard face to Carroll. He moved his hands helplessly and the chains jangled.

"I believe you will help me, Carroll," he said, in a slow, tired voice; "and I don't know that I'm sorry it's all over. If you'll draw up the paper, I'll sign it."

As Carroll rose to get pen and paper Leverage buttonholed him:

"Say, chief," he whispered, hoarsely, "let me be the first to tell Larry Conover and his wife, will you? I want to see the faces of them kids when they learn that they're free!"

"Go tell them, Eric," said Carroll.

(The end.)

Shaffles Picks A Winner

By

R. R. Rivierre



SHAFFLES classed her as the real article, guaranteed fast colors, the moment she entered the door. There was nothing individual about her dress. Seven-a-week, third floor back, and bath privileges, was written all over the crêpe de Chine shirtwaist and short, black taffeta skirt.

Regardless of that, in Mr. Shaffles's expert opinion, Queen Victoria couldn't have touched her walk with a fishing-pole. Moreover, when an unimpressible check-room employee swallows his gum upon receipt of an imitation fox fur, there is something beyond doctor's orders in the motive.

Shaffles was not the only young man aware that something unusual stood near the ticket gate, absorbed in the shifting throng of dancers.

"Some clever little outfit, I'd say! Regular wax-doll, knock 'm dead, three-speed stepper. You bet!"

This from big Olie Stoll, in a voice pitched well above the dance music, to an admiring arc of satellites. Olie's pianola personality was almost as prominent around Linn's as the orchestra. If the three hundred odd shop girls who danced there every Saturday night followed the habit for any other reason than Olie Stoll, it was a secret to him. "One of these days," he often remarked, "I'm gonna take up bowling, and they'll turn this place into a car-barn."

"And I'd just like to lay good money," said Olie, slanting an appraisive eye toward the ticket gate, "that she can trip around a trifle, too. I got a strong hunch to chance her for the prize."

"T'ought you an' Fritz were teamin' for the cup," put in one of the group. "Want a mad lady on your hands?"

"Take the siding, Slag! I'm outnumbered. Couldn't please 'em all with assistants. Now watch closely while I steer alongside this birdie."

Whereupon the incomparable Olie gave his orange scarf a deft fluff and crossed to where the girl stood. Gently he tapped her shoulder.

"Merry Christmas, girlie. Nearly missed you in the crowd. Awful crush to-night. I guess this next scud is ours, ain't it?"

Immediately the delicate, almost imperceptible manipulation of chewing gum ceased. A pair of large, penciled eyes regarded the interloper's shoes in cold scrutiny, lifted slowly past striped cuff and specious tiepin, and fixed on his cool grin.

"Say, homely," drawled the young lady, "what's the idea of punching people like they was slot machines? Can't a goil drop in here once in a while for a good time without having to battle every janitor and vulcanizer on the lot? Chase along and comb your hair! I ain't running no dancing class this season."

At such unpremeditated and pronounced belligerency Olie was prompted to retreat, but the eyes of his three friends were upon him. Failure now meant an impaired reputation.

"Stow that picnic wit," he advised, taking a familiar hold on one filmy sleeve and moving toward the gate. "You want to dance with me all right. We ain't fully acquainted, that's all."

Before the girl could reply or twist herself free, Olie bit out a groan, reached wildly for his ear, and wilted to the floor. Above him Mr. Jimmy Shaffles carefully straightened a disarranged cuff and smiled engagingly at the frightened little figure in pink and black.

"Pardon me," said he, stepping over Olie, who was giving a creditable imitation of an Arizona petrified tree, and offering his arm, "but I believe this is our dance."

A bit dazed, the girl hesitated. Then she saw people making hurriedly in their direction and understood. Together they passed through the ticket gate and drifted off into the maze of dancers.

"Gee, Mr. Willard," cried the rescued, suddenly, as Shaffles skilfully circled an awkward couple, "if thanks were beer checks you'd control Milwaukee. I was just planning to land on his headlight myself when you put over that sleeper. Some shove! All he needed was flowers and a mahogany overcoat to complete the picture."

Shaffles grinned modestly and bent his energies to an intricate dip in which he was followed unerringly by his partner.

"You're new here, aren't you?" he asked at length.

"Is that a slam at my footwork?" exclaimed the girl.

"Not at all! I was only going to hint that Saturday nights at Linn's would be a good habit for a kid like you not to get. This place isn't famous as a girls' finishing school. I guess that little affair a minute ago speaks for itself."

"You mean right, I know, Mr. Willard," replied the girl, her face dimpling with a faint smile. "But what's a frail going to do evenings? Stand down on Broadway and wait for a parade to come along?"

The young man considered. A sound of hand-clapping broke in on the crash of traps and trombone.

"Aren't there other places?"

"Sure there is. Grand Opera and the Palace Tavern. But them pale tea things that coopay up to Mrs. Forbes-Lindsay's private auxiliaries ain't troubled with weak ankles and floorwalkers. Seven-fifty every time the landlady hands out bath-towels don't even spell movies. Not if you eat regular. Of course now and then some wild spender from the shoe department happens around with tickets for Central Park and we nearly collapse with the excitement. Linn's jazz band is a quiet nerve-cure after that."

"It's tough on you kids," responded Shaffles, earnestly sympathetic, "darn tough. Congress ought to take on a little more help and look after these things. Listen!" His voice lowered to an inspirational whisper. "I might as well introduce myself. Jimmy Shaffles of the Empire Company. Not Willard. Come to think of it a million dollar trick like you ought to get on easy. We use rafts of extra girls. Can't get enough. Decorating sofas in a ball-room set, beats checking sales at a rummage counter. Steady work and human wages, besides. How does it sound?"

"What is this Empire Company—a furniture factory?"

"No. Feature films. Moving pictures."

"Gee!" cried the girl rapturously, "gee whiz! You're a star!"

"Not exactly." Shaffles hesitated and colored painfully. "Office work. But I know Cecil Neilan—chief stockholder and head of the production department. A word from him goes. You might even get a small part at the start."

Disappointment was so frankly indicated on the girl's face that Shaffles dove into a gamut of popular steps to cover his confusion. Immediately a storm of hand-clapping set up, sprinkled here and there with piercing whistles.

Then Shaffles became aware of a spreading void of waxed surface. The great floor was deserted save for two couples at the farther end. Even as he looked a group of men beneath the orchestra stand appeared to consult hastily, an arm gestured vio-

lently, and one of the teams melted away through an exit.

"Will you lamp the rink?" gasped the girl.

Shaffles nodded.

"Slipped me entirely," he said. "It's the prize dance. Now hold tight and we'll hand this crowd the one complete treat of their lives. Hear that noise. We've got the cup in a walk."

They were drifting close to the brass railing. Spinning, gliding, whirling, dipping, they skirted the solid hedge of approving faces. Suddenly the trim, little figure flashing along with Shaffles faltered in the midst of a dizzy pivot and crumpled in his arms. Before that amazed young man could come to a full enjoyment of the situation, spectators ducked under the railing from every corner. Some one bawled repeatedly, "a little air, you guys!" and Shaffles found himself feeding the girl ice water in one of the confectionery stalls arranged for patrons just off the floor.

"Open your mouth a little," he said gently. "That's nice. Drink it all."

The girl sighed and stared long at him over the tilted glass.

"Mr.—Shaffles."

"You said it."

"I guess I crabbed the show, all right."

"Don't let that worry you."

"But honest, my head—just went out. Sometimes at the store I get a little lippy the same way."

Shaffles, whose discernment had led him to certain significant conclusions, was prompted to reply, "I shouldn't doubt that," but refrained and looked at his watch.

"It's getting along towards closing-time," he announced. "Suppose we pull out."

They paused at the tall, green draperies at the entrance. Somewhat uncertainly the girl dug in a bag at her wrist and tendered her claim check.

"You can go get my things, Mr. Shaffles," she said. "But I forgot to explain that guys never see me home. That's one of my rules."

"Why not?"

"My landlady put up a squeal. The last

gent I couldn't shake, walked off with four milk bottles and a pet Chinese porch plant the old girl had been digging around since the Spanish war. It was either promise or find another suite."

Shaffles grinned.

"Well, miss, nobody spoke for an escort job. I don't want your old doormats. Second-story work for me every time. My place is to see that to-night you eat."

The girl reddened to her eyes. "Why—I eat!"

"Sure. So do birds. Nevertheless, we're going to run through every chuck shop in this village to-night from the Blue Grotto to Riley's Cellar. It's all arranged."

"You're a genuine, full-carat kid," faltered the girl. "I can see that. But—"

"Hold on. I know the rest—you haven't known me long enough. We're almost strangers, that's certain, but I don't propose to let anything short of an earthquake break up this little excursion. Just wait here and I'll rustle the millinery." Shaffles precluded further discussion by diving off for the check-room.

When he returned the girl had gone. Wildly he banged through the glass doors and slid across the tiled lobby.

A beautiful, black car, with red wire wheels, was just pulling away from the curb. Through the window of the closed tonneau Shaffles caught a flashing glimpse of his pretty friend. Beside her was a large, bulky man in a top hat.

"Some rich old duck," muttered Shaffles bitterly, watching the green light of the motor fade up the street. "Some dried-up capsule with three casters gone. Lots of cash and rheumatism. No liabilities and hair. Autos, servants, flowers, theaters, wine dinners, diamonds—money! What the little yellow bills won't buy isn't worth having. Even at that—"

Now, there are moments when a man courts battle very readily. As Shaffles turned, crumpling a white fur fiercely in one hand, his line of vision came within direct contact with four young men, standing away from the glare of the lobby, who seemed covertly interested in his movements. It was the orange tie and damaged ear that stamped relief and pleasure on

Shaffles's face. Here was solace not to be found in bottles and hypodermics. He sauntered over to the group.

"Were you, gentlemen, waiting for me?" he inquired, in the same, sweet tone a wife employs when soliciting a new hat.

Some minutes later a squad of police shouldered through the mob that blocked the sidewalk in front of Linn's. At the same time a badly battered figure ducked unnoticed from the throng, scurried headlong into a side street, stumbled over a fire plug, and landed panting on the cushions of a handsome red roadster, with black wire wheels.

"Some old relic," mused the fugitive, as he released the clutch and the car shot away. "Some feeble keepsake with young ideas."

At about three o'clock one warm afternoon a girl leaving the entrance of a department store on Broadway collided with a young man going in. He nodded politely to her apology and continued on his way. She darted through the door and touched his arm.

"Won't you speak to me, Mr. Shaffles?"

"It didn't strike me as necessary," he replied wearily.

"I suppose you're mad because I chased off and left you the other night."

"Oh, no. Certainly not!"

"I think you are."

"Let's not talk about it."

"I'm awful sorry. I had to go. Honest. And you didn't show up at Linn's after that so that I could explain."

"I didn't mind your leaving."

"Then you'll forgive me, Mr. Shaffles?"

"It was the way you went. Most working girls, when they want to be real nice, don't run around with fuzzy dyspeptics in twin-six Sedans."

The girl caught her breath.

"Do they?" pressed Shaffles heartlessly.

She remained silent, a little handkerchief held to her mouth.

"I asked—do they?"

"No, Mr. Shaffles, I guess not. But, you see, that old hand-me-down is the superintendent and—"

"What superintendent?"

"Stacey's—where I sold hairpins and mucilage up to last week."

Shaffles gazed at the girl a moment, the chill gone from his eyes.

"I'll bet you had to kid that old chromo along to keep your job!" he exclaimed hopefully. "I'll bet he wouldn't leave you alone."

"Of course. You're on now. Boiled rice wages and lots of invitations to supper. That's what girls get at Stacey's. I had been standing him off for a month before I met you. That same night he lounged around the counter with another sherry and music bid. I told him the girls were having a big time at Linn's and that I was going. I guess I must have bumped him on the same stall before. He got kind of red under his whiskers and said he wouldn't mind calling for me. I couldn't think of anything to say just then and that's what he did."

She paused and Shaffles shifted the package he held under his arm.

"After he blew me to a shrimp and broiler layout that would have given Mr. Hoover jumping willies, I began to feel brave. Out on the sidewalk I told him what a mean, little pill he was and hit the cement for home."

"Good-by, job," suggested Shaffles.

"Good-by, job," assented the girl.

A rush of shopping traffic pushed through the entrance. Shaffles leaned closer to the girl.

"I said something while we were dancing about work at the studio. Remember?"

"I didn't forget it for a minute—but I thought you were kidding me."

"I wasn't," assured Shaffles. "And there is a better chance for you to get on now than before. One of our new directors is just starting a shopgirl comedy-drama. Department store interiors and that sort of stuff. He's wild about types. He wants the real article. I could meet you on the lot to-morrow and steer the introduction. If he is particularly tickled it means a part. Would you like to try it?"

"Would I?" gasped the girl. "Say, Mr. Shaffles, a job bathing crockery on a tamale cart would look good to me now. Where is this joint?"

Shaffles fumbled in a pocket and handed her a card.

"Meet me on the stage promptly at nine o'clock."

"I'll be there with bells," she said, smiling and holding out her hand. "Good-by, Mr. Shaffles—and thanks, very much, for your trouble."

The girl threaded into the push outside and hurried homeward. On a clattering street corner Shaffles overtook her.

"I wanted to let you know," he said hesitantly, "that the don't-seem-to-place-you stunt I pulled a minute ago was all fool—stage stuff. I've been hunting through the department stores for a week trying to find you and return your fur." He managed a confused grin and held out the bundle he had been carrying. "If you hadn't followed me I would have done the chasing myself."

When Shaffles catapulted into the studio office of Cecil Neilan early the next morning like an impetuous French "75" he interrupted the famous producer in a self-indulgent soliloquy entirely foreign to his notoriously modest character.

"I guess I'm not good," mused Mr. Neilan, smiling suavely around a big cigar and winking delightedly at an imaginary audience.

"I beg your pardon," put in Shaffles.

"I guess I'm—great, grievous cat tracks! Sit down, Jimmy. Regular stranger. How did the type quest pan out? Expected you last week. Got the 'Sentimental Sally' support lined up complete. Tully Foreman blew in yesterday. Signed him for heavy. We must start work by the first. That goes, Jimmy."

Shaffles arranged his twelve-dollar velours hat and ebony walking stick on Neilan's desk and carefully jack-knifed into a chair.

"You can trot out the 'Wizard' and his little camera and begin shooting scenes tomorrow," he announced. "To-day, if you like. I've found the girl to play *Sally*. The genuine article, Cecil. The real, pedigreed goods."

"Then you're serious about that aborigine stuff. You won't consider Gabrielle Roberts?"

"I wouldn't consider the cleverest star on Broadway in place of this kid. Not for a minute." Shaffles leaned forward and tapped the desk. "Gabrielle Roberts, with all her New York prestige, couldn't hold an inch of tallow to what this little chicle-chewing, rag-time doll will do. That is, in this particular character. She's the shop gamin from hairpins to high heels. As *Sally* she'll show up like General Pershing in a Berlin beer garden."

"Have it your way," sighed Neilan resignedly. "Our contract places the choosing of the star with you. I rely on your judgment—although God knows why an author should claim any."

"You wait!" warned Shaffles. "You wait and see! She'll be here in half an hour. I'm to meet her on the stage. Why, Cecil, in the first place, as the most inconsequent, mind you, of innumerable assets, she's the prettiest—"

Some one was knocking at the door.

"Come right in," invited Neilan. He put down his cigar and got to his feet. Shaffles stood up also, only to resume his seat with the precipitate plunge of a depth bomb.

It was she!

It was the little, blond lady of Linn's. Only the black taffeta skirt was gone. The cheap, pink shirtwaist was gone. And the restless, churning movement of cheek and molar—that had vanished, too. Instead there was gold velvet, heavy black fur, rings, poise, perfume.

"Mr. Shaffles," said Neilan, with somewhat elaborate ceremony, "I would like you to meet Miss Roberts."

Shaffles found his feet, grabbing at the extended slim hand. A battery of dancing dimples was trained full upon him.

"I'm glad to please you," he blurted. "I mean—I'm pleased to—Cecil!"

Cecil was grinning placidly.

"Not—not Gabrielle!"

"Even so, Jimmy."

"Well, I'm flop-walloped!"

"Pardon me?" inquired the actress sweetly.

"Didn't I dance with you a week ago at Linn's?" flared Shaffles, fixing the girl with a fierce stare. "Weren't we talking yester-

day in front of Hammond's store? Didn't you promise faithfully to meet me here to-day?"

"Hold up, Jimmy," interposed Neilan. "Miss Roberts and I stand convicted. We've been crooked. To me it's terrible to think of the way we have exploited tender youth and credulity. Overwhelming. Why, only last night I woke up trembling like the German Crown Quince. I saw gray walls—"

"In the name of common sanity!" exploded Shaffles. He glanced at Miss Roberts. There was mischievous mirth in her eyes.

"But after all," rambled Neilan in a toneless voice, "you were a stubborn rascal. You didn't realize the impracticability of picking a girl without the least stage experience, fair a fit as she might have been behind a dress goods counter or wearing the hardwood in a cheap dance hall, to play the lead in a big Empire production. Before the camera she would lose those winning traits of environment. Her acting would be about as natural and ingenuous as artificial flowers. Your little shoplady heroine is a difficult part. Miss Roberts broke into Belasco's payroll through her clever interpretation of similar rôles. I wanted her to play *Sally*."

"I believe we went over that before," reminded Shaffles uneasily.

"We did. And I agreed to that star-selecting clause. You had a rattling fine play. Too good to pass up. You see, I counted on disillusioning you of your type bug. But when you refused flatly to consider the best little character actress in the country I went ahead and got crooked. I wired Miss Roberts in New York to come ahead. We found out your haunts. One night we drove over to Linn's and she met you there." The broad, pleased grin had spread again over Neilan's face and he nodded toward the actress. "The real article, Jimmy. The gen—uine, pedigreed goods."

Shaffles had a sense of humor. He laughed until Neilan grew apprehensive and ducked from the office—presumably in search of the studio surgeon.

"But the missing milk bottles," pon-

dered Shaffles, when he and the girl were alone, "the fainting, that wealthy old weasel at Stacey's—"

"Just stage stuff," she replied, smiling winsomely. "Little white prevarications. I had to have a setting of some importance, you know."

Shaffles pondered again.

"You'll make a wonderful *Sally*," he ventured.

"Then you still wish me to take the part—after such duplicity?"

"After such a convincing rehearsal, you mean. Of course I want you. Why, no one in this world or the next could even *chew gum* as cleverly as you did that night at Linn's. Either you star in this piece or it never goes on. I'll chuck it in an ash can first."

"I'd love the part," said Miss Roberts simply.

An insidious silence crept into the office and enveloped the two. Shaffles became absorbed in the reflection of the window light on Miss Roberts's hair. It was bright gold and curly. That, he remembered, was exactly what his script specified for *Sally*—"Rather small figure. Eyes big and expressive. Hair bright gold and curly."

"Mr.—Shaffles," Miss Roberts was saying hesitantly, "do you remember shaking hands with me when I came in?"

"Why, yes. Of course."

"Well—would you—did you know that you have been holding my hand ever since?"

Shaffles started. Then a determined gleam struck his eye. Why not take a chance? It would be a little premature, perhaps, and the papers said she received a hundred mash notes a day—said she had refused English coronets and half of Pittsburgh's steel fortunes—said she was the most talented young—but why consider that? There was no grass growing under his own feet. At times the papers talked about him, too. He leaned toward her in an affectionate manner.

"Tell me, Gabrielle—your hand—is it tired?"

"Why, yes," she replied softly, avoiding his eyes. "That one is—but, you know—Jimmy—I have two of them."

His Inner Self



By Philip M. Fisher, Jr.

"MY young friend," said the professor, condescendingly, "have you indulged in introspective cogitation, as it were?"

"Huh!" said I.

The professor's benign smile intensified his condescension.

"Ah, you do not understand. I thought you would not," he replied. "But to simplify, have you not at odd moments felt, and at once fulfilled, a certain odd desire to enter into positive ratiocinative argument with the negatives of your true inward self? Ah, ah—as it were?"

I picked up a heavy walnut cribbage-board from the table, examined it with great interest and even thoughtfully weighed it in my hand. I made no other answer. Professor Eisenkopf's apprehensive eye at once contradicted the benigance of his lips. Professor Eisenkopf, as is readily seen, was at least in this definite and practical way, and in spite of his conceit, at once a mind reader and logician.

His frame stiffened. My heart melted.

"Do you mean," I asked, gently, setting down the board as I sat upon the edge of the heavy library table, "do you mean—have I ever taken the trouble to worry about my real secret self? To wonder where it is, and what it might be?"

Professor Eisenkopf's eyes sparkled and his frame was transmuted from its oaken stiffness of alarm back to the relief of plaint aspen. He rubbed his hands happily—and bowed with renewed graciousness.

"Exactly, Mr. Hemmingway, exactly!"

To myself I chuckled. To the lean professor I said abruptly:

"Thanks. I have not."

His eyes showed positive horror.

"What? You never—"

"Never!" I nodded.

His eyes widened with growing pity.

"You—you—"

"I have never had the time," I explained, to soothe his wounded soul. The study of the "inner self" was his hobby, and I knew it. But I think I must have been born "ornery." And here I saw a chance to tease the professor and have a little fun.

"The time!" cried the professor, raising his hands reproachfully.

"Perhaps I had better say," I added, cruelly again, "the opportunity."

The professor sank into a chair.

"The—"

"Don't take it so hard, sir. I may be wrong in both these statements. After all, it might simply be that I lack the ah—the—"

"Yes, yes, yes?" cried my companion, earnestly, and with renewed enthusiasm.

"The inclination, sir," I murmured weakly.

"My God!" The professor fairly sobbed. "My God!" he blurted out once more. Then: "And you call yourself a modern man, even ultramodern!" Professor Eisenkopf's voice rose high.

I nodded proudly, and answered gallantly, but with a certain self-effacing weakness which I knew would take.

"Your statement, sir," I said, "is cor-

rect *in toto*. And your perception of my own inward character is wonderful, wonderful. What need, then," I added, with malicious show of interest—"what need of my tearing out my inner self and its secrets, and subjecting them to my own personal examination and to perhaps necessary mental castigation, when you so ably do the former for me?"

The dear professor rose nobly to my bait.

"I will help you—will start you at once, Mr. Hemmingway. I have always observed that you were a true man of my heart—did I not leave my studies to come up to-night simply to see you and talk with you on questions of the day? All this time I might have been working on my experiments—and yet I came to you—to you. And so I will help you to seek your true inward self. Ah, Mr. Hemmingway, your inner self—what a field for exploration—and even exploitation, and development. Your inner self, your secret self, your true self, your—"

"Myself self, to put it simply, sir?"

The professor's hand switched at his smooth-pointed goatee.

"Exactly, Mr. Hemmingway, exactly."

"And this self self?" I hinted, breathlessly, giving visual evidence of a great thirst for knowledge as well.

"Your true inner consciousness!" he cried, enthusiastically. "That part of you that prompts you to do things which you are prevented by your artificially developed reason from really carrying out. The part that would act on whim, desire, impulse. The part of yourself that would control your every act, or at least would like to so control, if your reasoning and cultivated mind did not exercise its calming power and prevent."

"You mean—if I suddenly thirst for an egg-chocolate-malted-milk just horribly, and suffer for it real pain, and am just about to call for one, when reason says: 'You have just finished your fourth, good friend. Remember, no matter how you thirst, it was the last drop that burst the camel's tummy. Forbear for your own stomach's sake! Beware the tides of—' Well, that's about it, isn't it, sir?"

"Exactly, Mr. Hemmingway, exactly!"

"Well," I said, "begin."

Professor Eisenkopf's jaw dropped.

"Begin?"

"Precisely, sir," I replied, eagerly.

"But what shall I begin?" he cried.

"To set me in the right track, professor. To guide me in the tortuous paths of introspection lest I fall by the wayside and die in the muck of my own imagination."

The professor's hands clasped in his excitement. Then he calmed suddenly and gazed intently at me without a sign of emotion, stared until I almost squirmed beneath his scrutiny. Then, as suddenly again, he smiled and nodded vigorously.

"A man of my own heart—how ably expressed, Mr. Hemmingway. "Now," he settled himself comfortably in my heavy leathered chair, "to begin. My first requirement is this—ah." The professor paused, and gazed in abstraction at the ceiling.

"Well?" I hinted, after a moment.

"Exactly!" he cried, fixing his eyes upon mine. "Your mind must be opened absolutely. In answering whatever questions I ask, you must be absolutely frank. That is my first condition."

My face, I hope, remained sober. I remarked without hesitation that I would follow his directions. I would be frank—very frank.

"The second requirement?" I asked, gently.

"My second requirement," said the professor, "is this: You must take a sheet of ordinary letter paper and write upon it some secret you have always entertained. Let it be something as nearly unbiased by propriety or custom or reason as possible. Let it be simply a frank and open-minded statement of the thing as you see it. Let it be an expression, as near as you can make it, of your true inner self."

I nodded—and found the paper.

"I will go into the next room," I said, "for privacy, and for greater secrecy in order to make this examination a real test," I added. "I am very desirous, I assure you, Professor Eisenkopf, of really knowing what my inner mind is."

I stayed in the other room several minutes and thought. Then I went back and held out the folded paper, already sealed in

its envelope. Professor Eisenkopf waved it aside.

"Place the envelope under yonder cribbage case," he directed. "I will not touch it yet. But I will endeavor, by bringing out your true thoughts, which represent your true inner self unhampered by reason, to lead those thoughts in such a way as to finally come to the very one which is written upon that paper. I will show you, by analyzing your many minor thoughts, how one may by simple process of reasoning arrive at the one great absorbing thought which is the all-inclusive expression of your true inward self. Do you follow me?"

He bent his hawkish features upon me as I drew up another cushioned chair before the fire. I took the time to inhale a first comforting breath of the long Havana between my teeth. "Start right in, professor," I said to myself. "You'll think long before you discover what is on that paper."

"So far the way is clear, sir," I answered, aloud. "You will question me regarding my inner self. I will answer as best I can, very frankly, and with no evasion of the issue. And in the end, by a process of reasoning, you will discover for me the one real absorbing thought that is my true inner self. You will name what is on the paper, there—the true expression of my real self."

"Exactly, sir, exactly." The professor's black eyes snapped. "First, now—what is the thought that is uppermost in your mind at this very instant?"

"I must be frank?" I reminded him.

He nodded gravely. "As to your physician, sir."

"At my ranch," I answered, slowly and exhaled a thin stream of blue tobacco smoke—"at my ranch is a sick cow."

Professor Eisenkopf's delicate brows rose a trifle, I fancied, at the matter of factness of my answer. Then, as if a thought had struck him as already certain, and as if my answer had been in accord with it, he nodded.

"Ah—ah," he murmured. "At your ranch there is a sick cow."

His voice was wondrous, now, and dreamy. Poor professor—he'd discover my true inner self, oh, yes. That paper—

"Deduction number one correct," I ap-

proved, as I flicked my ash upon the hearth. Then, after a moment's frowning silence on my companion's part: "Next?"

"And er—er—the cow's name?"

"Euphrosonie," I promptly answered.

The professor's brows knitted once more. Once more he thought in silence. Then once more he murmured:

"Euphrosonie?"

"Deduction number two correct," I declared. "Fine, fine—remarkable! And following that?" I am afraid I almost was rude, almost gave myself away. But without a word, the professor sank back in thought.

And while he thinks—let us for a moment philosophize.

Reason is a queer thing. A queerer thing still is reasoning. And when one reasons falsely the superlative of queerness may be reached—and the deduction, though arrived at by a process of reasoning, and though it seemed reasonable enough, yet it is not within reason. And when one reasons rightly the deduction will be correct and within reason, and yet queerly enough, may at the same time, as we think the matter over, be unreasonable.

Thus, in following false logic, one may find himself reasonable but wrong. And in following correct logic one may find himself unreasonable, but right. Therefore the reasonable is not always right nor is the unreasonable always wrong. Yet, we hear, a thing must be either right or wrong. Then does it not follow—or does it—that the reasonable may sometimes be the unreasonable?

After this brief mental hiatus the curtain rises in haste.

The professor has been thinking. The professor wishes to lead us to that all-absorbing thought which is my inner self. He is trying to lead to the paper, in that sealed envelope, under that book, on my library table, wherein is—but we will see if he scents the reasonable trail, or not.

"You have a ranch, then, I take it?"

"Correct in first detail," I replied. "But as to the second—you don't."

He stared at me thoughtfully a moment, then frowned in grim reproval.

"It is a dairy ranch?"

"It's in the middle of the sunny San Joaquin," I answered. "And I have no irrigation plant."

"Then this—this—what did you say the name was?"

"Euphrosonie," I repeated.

"Ah—then this Euphrosonie is the only cow you have; only a family cow, as it were."

"Correct, again," I nodded, then added: "As it is."

"And she is kept for her milk?" the professor went on, raising his fine brows once more.

"Only on the side," I answered. "Her real purpose is architectural. Ah," I went on, "in the delicious San Joaquin twilight, with the sun a golden orange flattening fast beneath the western valley haze, and the coolness of the river breezes sweeping up from the bays below, and the stars peeping out in the deepening blue overhead, and a glowing glory reflected over all from the tinted snows of the far-off Sierras; ah, 'tis then that Euphrosonie does her part. Euphrosonie adds tone to the lovely scene—as well as milk. Ah, professor, it is wonderful what that cow can do. Why, she—"

Professor Eisenkopf's hand stopped my flow.

"Thank Heaven," he said, "that all poets are not yet driven from this earth!" Then he paused.

I started. The professor was really a pretty good chap, after all. And this despite his theories. I reached out and humbly touched his kness.

"Thank you," I murmured. But he heard not—his mind was working toward that hidden paper and the expression upon it that would show my inner self.

"Good!" he went on. "Things progress admirably. You own a ranch—therefore you love the out of doors. The fact that you keep a cow shows a tendency toward domesticity, and a longing for home and family life. That you say you keep her for her beauty as well as her milk, combined with your so wonderfully expressed appreciation of the San Joaquin's evening wonders, leads me to the conclusion that you are at least an artist."

"An uncle of mine," I muttered,

"painted my windmill and my R. F. D. box."

The professor ignored my frantic boast.

"And that you do not live upon the ranch," he went on, "shows a love of ease and luxury. Good—but Eu—Euphrosonie is ill, you say?"

I nodded. I had said that the cow was indisposed, certainly. But how was this reasoning going to lead to the discovering of my real inner self?

"And that thought was uppermost in your mind when I asked you my first question? Is that not correct?" continued Professor Eisenkopf. "You were thinking of that suffering animal far up in the San Joaquin—and held that thought above all other thoughts? Is she very ill?"

"Quite," I answered, sadly.

"And is her pain great?"

"No sooner had I left the ranch last week-end than her moans mingled with the chirping music of the crickets in the stubble," I murmured.

"Ah—it is sad, it is sad. And you are worried?"

I nodded again—dumbly.

Professor Eisenkopf eyed me gravely a moment, and with his elbows on the arms of the chair, thoughtfully tapped his fingers together.

"And to-day is Thursday—four days have passed since you saw her last. And yet still the impression made by her pain is uppermost in your mind. My deduction from this is obvious, Mr. Hemmingway. You are not only a lover of the great outdoors, an artist, but also a man of sympathy.

I gravely exhaled a whirling flood of good Havana smoke.

"Obviously," I repeated. Then lower: "The darn she-cattle cost me sixty-five bucks!"

"And yet," continued the professor, his black eyes searching mine, "and yet with all this trouble and anxiety and temperament, you can sit here calmly and do your best to aid me in teaching you how to look into your true inner self! It is wonderful—and I am almost arrived at my goal. In but one moment more I will name that inmost thought that is yourself—and you will understand, and see, at last! And to think—"

the mention of this simple cow has brought me to my conclusion. The science of logical reasoning is, indeed, wonderful, wonderful."

I nodded. Maybe it was. But I doubted it. The professor's reasoning was reasonable enough—that I had to admit. But, then, he might be like the chicken thief, who was very careful and quiet as he entered the roost shed. And very cautious as he felt of the chickens as they *cluck-clucked* in their dreams. And entirely reasonable in seizing one which displayed a singular sleekness to the touch. But wrong in conclusion—for the thing he seized was a fat-fed pole cat bent upon an errand similar to his. And the professor's conclusion might be just as er—ah—bad.

The professor was very, very calm now. I could see that what he had said was true—he was approaching the climax of his logic. He would soon tell me what was on that sheet of paper. He would divulge to me my true inner self!

I was learning rapidly—wonderfully! My true inner self! The secret would be out! Inwardly I helped myself to a hearty, and I must say, a conceited chuckle. "The higher we soar," I reminded the professor, in the depths of my silent thought, "the harder the fall." Poor professor! But, then, I was here to learn.

The professor's eyes, seeming all pupil, fixed themselves upon mine—and my inward chuckle then threatened again to break out. But I restrained myself—and wondered to what conclusion Professor Eisenkopf would arrive. Quite suddenly he leaned forward and tapped upon my knee. I leaned for the shock—my inner self—and steadied my features to sphinxlike gravity.

"I have it!" he cried, enthusiastically. "I have it! Listen! The thought that was uppermost in your mind, of this unfortunate Euphrosonie, this cow, has given it to us. Listen!"

I looked into his eye—and then I listened. What was this the professor was saying? What—was his reasoning so truly logical? Had he come really to a reasonable conclusion? Was— And would the paper in that envelope prove—

"Listen, you!" he cried.

"You bought a ranch, not a farm—but

to boast about. You are too lazy to run it yourself—so found a man who'd take the trouble. You bought a cow because the man you hired to run the ranch out of debt for you has a growing family, and for that reason only. Your cow is ill, if she is ill at all, because you cut her rations and raised Cain about her feed, when you so honored your ranch with a visit this last week-end.

"You have no poetry in your heart because in place of a heart you have a throbbing lump of rotten and iconoclastic cynicism. You made a mock of something I would do to really draw you from your self-dug pit of miring conceit and asininity—and scoffed at my earnestness in my very face; and I your guest at your very hearth."

The professor rose, his eyes flashing.

"And your entire self is so absorbed in your entire self, in your own complete selfishness and conceit, that your inner self, your true self, rasps through as raggedly, and as raucously, as a broken tooth-saw through a knot-holed timber. You are an egotistical nonentity, a know-nothing—and you know it not. And my conclusion, easily arrived at, I assure you, sir, is that your true inner self is an *absolute blank*."

I jumped for the envelope wherein lay the folded paper. But he beat me to it. He raised the cribbage board, and seized the envelope. I sank down into my chair, and covered my eyes with my hands and groaned.

The professor was very, very silent after I heard him rustle that paper open. Then suddenly he burst into a peal of ironic and sneering laughter—and I trembled in my shame and exposure.

The professor was right—and my own act had proved it. For the paper, itself, was absolutely blank.

Dimly I heard the professor move toward the hall. Quickly I jumped to my feet, and took him by the arm and lead him back, and held out my prime Havanas, and sizzled something in a glass.

"Sit down," I pleaded. "I want to learn—to learn how to make something out of nothing."

And, Heaven be praised, the professor was the man that I was not—and sat.

Heart to Heart Talks



By the Editor



ROMANCE clings to the very names of some parts of this big, wonderful world of ours. High up in the list of these blessed places is the Spanish Main, still sailed by the shades of treasure ships and the craft of the buccaneers and pirates who preyed upon them; still haunted by the ghosts of bloody-handed adventurers, who stands grim guard over many an ill-gotten and still unfound treasure of gold and silver and precious stones.

Yet all the romance is not of the past. Mysterious schooners still sail on errands that will not bear the light of day. Blood runs hot in the veins of the people who inhabit the islands in these seas of high adventure—people of a dozen races and with the passions of the four quarters of the earth. Along the white beaches love and hate and death are swift and sudden. Darkness follows swift upon the heels of brilliant sunlight; the velvet blackness of the starlit night is rent by the jagged gleam of light-sail; graceful palms wave over peaceful coral strands which are the scenes of violent crime—the stage is always set for romance, for love, for tragedy. And upon this stage steps—Janie Frete!

What reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY doesn't love that little lady of many adventures and many charms; Janie of the brave heart and quick wit; Janie the shrewd, the daring, the demure, the reckless, the knowing, the lovable? Our readers know that a Janie Frete story is a *good* story. Her name raises high expectations—and they are all fulfilled in the four-part serial which starts in next week's issue—

A SHORTAGE IN PERFUMES

BY RAYMOND S. SPEARS

Author of "Janie Frete, Intruder," "The Green Sachem," "Trail of the Otter Pelts," etc.

One of Janie's many friends among those knights of the open road, known to an unsympathetic world as "tropical tramps," found a treasure; not of gold or silver or gems, to be sure, but yet a real treasure; sealed it in an iron cask, and buried it on an uninhabited island, intending, of course, to return for it. But he didn't—death claimed him. So he left the treasure to Janie; but when she heard of it, it was through Captain Taulk, expert and widely traveled *parfumeur*, who had decided that he was the man who really needed the contents of that buried cask.

You know Janie Frete well enough to be sure that Captain Taulk had a lot of excitement coming to him when he started to defraud her of what was rightfully hers!

It's a fast-moving, colorful tale; with characters who are *real* flesh-and-blood men and women—a drama staged on the world's most romantic stage, and worthy of its setting. And one of the characters—Sorilla of the turtle fleet—is worthy to take rank with the charming Janie Frete herself.

WHEN the stripped and bleeding victim of man's inhumanity to man, the derelict of life's fitful fever and its impregnable handicap turns for sanctuary and for shelter, nature spreads

her bosom wide to ease his tired heart and guides his stricken footsteps to her hidden wells of healing. The open face of the calm fields, the brooding quiet of wooded hills, the inviting cleanliness

of blue lake and winding river—all are magic medicine for the ills to which flesh is heir, from the bruised heel of a little boy to the battered heart of a man.

And swifter still to ply her healing touch, for those who have won to an understanding of her moods and temper, is the sea. For unless a man is willing to partake of the sacrament of the sea, she casts him forth as unclean and unfit for the uses of her watery way. Men of the sea are a race apart, and there is always something provoking about their very presence. One senses immediately they cannot be commonplace or they would not follow the wind and the wave.

Our novelette for next week—

FI-FAM LAGOO

BY BURKE JENKINS

is a story of the sea, and a very entrancing story you will find it. For here are ranged no ordinary seamen, but men who upon the watery plain played for the highest stakes, knowing full well their jealous mistress would impartially apportion the victory. If you appreciate primitive passion, great simplicity, and an artfully told story, watch for the docking of a ship from Villikao.

THE title of Max Brand's incisive little tale in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY—"VICTORY"—might lead some suspicious soul into thinking here is another war story. Nothing of the kind, wise reader! Guess again! Brand's hero left no record of his war impressions and opinions, but it is a safe bet his heart was in the right place. He never came within speaking distance of anything so concretely real as victory in the current meaning of the term; but, after all, is not victory in any sense as much a matter of intention as achievement? In casting up the account of J. Augustus Vicars, he would be a daring man indeed who would seek to strike the balance.

IF the elegiac inspiration of one of the most eminent of the Victorian poets could be trusted, tears are a nobler gift than laughter. But, the spontaneous conviction of the whole American people cries out against this tragic judgment. Humor, the most potent panacea for human infirmity, from penury to peevishness, is the most precious gift of the gods. Love alone has a longer line of clients, and love is just a little uncomfortable, not to say heroic, unless sweetened with a soupçon of humor. In proof and verification of the above platitudes, we have only to refer you to one of the best Samuel G. Camp stories we have ever published. It is called "TREAT 'EM ROUGH," and will be found in next week's magazine.

FEW of us who work for the "other fellow" but feel at times the ways of promotion are past

finding out. The system is incomprehensible except to those who pull the strings. If, like ourselves, you have exhausted the correspondence school short road to success, or gone on the rocks with the plausible promoter of latent talent, who improves your memory or sells you the great trade or professional secret at so many dollars down and the rest in weekly instalments, you will be particularly interested in H. P. Holt's story, "WRECKING THE AGATHA," which vividly narrates the desperate chance one man took when all the approved formulas had failed to impress fate or his chief. This is one of the excellent short stories to be found in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

CRIME and criminals lie all about us, thick as leaves in Vallambrosa. But the average son of democracy who pays his taxes, votes conscientiously, and goes to church regularly (on certain stated occasions), is somewhat at a loss to understand the depths of municipal depravity which are periodically exposed when the two dominant political parties change places of victor and vanquished. From which you would naturally infer, when we go on to speak of Frank Blighton's story, "ACE IN THE HOLE," that this tale of mystery and crime was primarily concerned with political issues. Nothing of the kind. Read the story itself in next week's magazine, and you will have your reward.

"ALL SOLD OUT"

TO THE EDITOR:

Enclosed you will find money for issue of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY of November 23. I am sending for same for the reason that after going to every book and magazine store in town I am unable to find the least sign of one. I was informed by each store that they had arrived Saturday morning and were all gone before night. That shows you how much they are liked in this vicinity.

I am reading "The Substitute Millionaire," which I think is one of the best stories I have read in a long time. You cannot imagine how badly I felt to know that I had to wait so long before I will be able to continue this story. While I am writing this letter I will take the opportunity to tell you how much good this magazine has done me. I had my leg broken a couple of years ago, and have had three operations on it. No matter how much pain I was suffering, I could always read the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, although at times, after my numerous operations, the pains were so great as to make it almost impossible to read anything.

I am anxiously waiting for this last edition, and assuring you that the next time the magazines arrive I will be the first one at the store, so

as to be able to get a magazine before they are all sold. I beg to remain,

E. J. DIEKING.

Los Angeles, California.

FROM 17 TO 72

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been a constant reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for several years, and I think it is a splendid magazine. We get the magazine from the news-stand every week, and after reading it send it on to my soldier brother in France. He enjoys your magazine greatly, and used to buy it himself before enlisting. I think all your stories are fine, but I especially enjoyed "Koyala the Beautiful," "White Tigers," "Everyman's Land," "The Texan," and all of E. K. Means's stories. By the way, why don't we ever have some more of his stories? I think they are so amusing and true to life. I see in this week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY Edgar Rice Burroughs's name on the "Honor Roll." I had been wondering why we never had any more of his wonderful stories. My brother and I both agree that his stories of *Tarzan* are without an equal. I am very fond of reading, but while school keeps I don't have very much time, as I am in high school all day, and at night I have my lessons to learn. Consequently I limit my reading to the magazines and papers I like best of all. You can be sure that the ALL-STORY WEEKLY heads the list. Wishing you the best of success,

MISS JULIA HARPER.

417 Thirty-Seventh Avenue, No.,
Nashville, Tennessee.

TO THE EDITOR:

Enclosed you will find a post-office order for two dollars for six months' subscription for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. I have been a reader of it since long before you changed the name from the *Cavalier*, and I want you to start the magazine with the date of November 23, then November 30 and December 7, as I have missed these three. I think it the best and most interesting of all the magazines I have read. I have been getting them in Omaha, but they come so irregular that I thought best to get them from you. I am an old lady of seventy-two, and have read the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for years. Some stories are certainly good for the blues. In others I find laughter and tears. I hope and pray in the long years to come you will keep the ALL-STORY WEEKLY in view, for I want to enjoy it as I ever have done through the years, be they many or few. Hoping to get the books soon, I am,

MRS. S. F. MOORE.

Hastings, Ohio.

"CLAIRE" SPLENDID

TO THE EDITOR:

I have just finished reading Miss Mildred Thomas's letter about Mr. L. B. Blades's story,

"Claire." I also wish to congratulate you on securing so fine an author, and hope we will hear from him soon again. It was splendid, and I think it taught some of us a lesson. "To think before we speak" to people who are less fortunate than us, who are physically sound.

I have just finished "Lady of the Night Wind," and enjoyed it, as I do all stories by Mr. V. Vanardy. I like the Western stories and those of the North. Had a good sword story like "Black Wolf of Picardy" (*The Argosy*). One question I'd like to ask you to answer when you have time—who was the author of the *Swami Ram* stories, and will we hear from him again in the same? Would like to hear from G. Ogden, J. B. Hendryx, E. K. Means, E. J. Rath, and H. Titus. We have not heard from those just mentioned in a very long time; by "we" I mean the ALL-STORY WEEKLY fans. I read all your short stories, and find them all dandy. So keep up the good work. With best wishes to you, Mr. Editor, and all your authors for a very merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

MRS. L. McDERMOTT.

New York City.

LITTLE HEART-BEATS

Just received yours of the 22nd, informing me you were unable to supply me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY of September 28. Gentlemen, have a heart! Do you realize you are denying me a complete novel by Gregory, besides generous instalments of Hendryx, Franklin, and the Williamsons? Again I say, have a heart! Will you be kind enough to publish this in Heart to Heart Talks, and maybe some of the readers will be willing to exchange a September 28 issue of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for a perfectly good quarter.

FRANK G. HAMMOND.

Guntersville, Alabama.

I have never dropped you a line before, not because I didn't want to, but because I have been too busy reading ALL-STORY WEEKLYS. Your stories are all O. K. I have no kick, but have been waiting for another story from the author of "The Enemy In His Mouth" (Raymond Ashley). Find enclosed ten cents and stamps for postage for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, November 16, 1918, as I cannot afford to miss it, and send to,

MR. G. H. LAWRENCE.

385 Main Street,
Fitchburg, Massachusetts.

I have been reading your magazine since November 14, 1914, and have not missed a single copy since. I have all the numbers on file, and when I get a complete story I start and read it, without waiting for the copies to come each week. I think "The Promise," by James B. Hendryx,

was an extra good story; also, I am always especially interested in the writing of E. K. Means, Burroughs, Jackson Gregory, Isabel Ostrander, and in fact nearly all of the stories in your magazine. It is the *best* magazine published to-day, and the other magazines are not interesting after reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. I have every number of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY since November 14, 1914, to January 1, 1917, all packed complete and in rotation, and as I have read them all I would sell them to any one that would make me an offer for the two years and over of the back numbers. Who wants them? What offer do you make in cash and transportation collect? I will be glad to hear from any reader that deserves these copies and making the offer that they would be willing to pay. Thanking you in advance, I am,

Jeromeville, Ohio.

HARRY CARL.

Enclosed find money order for two dollars for six months' subscription to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, beginning with the issue of November 2. There is no other magazine that can equal the ALL-STORY WEEKLY at the price. I have been a constant reader of it for the last three years, and usually purchase it at the news-stands, but I am now on the farm out in the country, and cannot get it without a lot of trouble. I am in the theatrical business, and I find quite a number of theatrical folks who read the ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

I like E. K. Means best of all your writers. However, there are a *lot* of real writers on your staff. With best wishes, I am,

Respectfully yours,

SAM HOOD.

Cloverdale, Alabama.

Please send me, as soon as convenient to you, the following numbers of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY: November 23, 30, and December 7. Am enclosing forty-five cents in stamps for same. I have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for several years, and have enjoyed every number. I like your serials best. My favorite authors are Edgar Rice Burroughs, George Allan England, J. U. Giesy, J. B. Smith, E. K. Means, Captain Dingle, and many others. Hulbert Footner is another one of my choicest. "The Huntress" couldn't be better. I wish good luck to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY as long as it lives. Hoping I shall receive the copies, I am,

MISS LUELLE WEEKS.

Lava Hot Springs, Idaho.

I have been a reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for two years and *The Argosy* for so long I can't remember. Why can't we have a "different" story every week? They are great. I have no certain author, but for sea stories, give me Captain Dingle. What year did "To the Victor" appear

in the ALL-STORY? Can I get the four numbers by sending for them?

GEORGE HOVEY.

Indianapolis, Indiana.

NOTE: "To the Victor," by Harold Titus, was published in the *All-Story Cavalier* May 23 to June 13, 1914 (four issues). Unfortunately these issues are now out of print, but the story has been published in book form under the title "——I Conquered," by the Rand-McNally Company, Chicago, Illinois; price \$1.25 net. You can probably procure it from your own book-dealer or from the publisher direct.

Although not a regular subscriber to your ALL-STORY WEEKLY, I think it is the best of them all. I buy mine at the news-stands, which amounts to the same thing. On account of changing places often, I find it more convenient. Having a touch of cowboy blood, I like all the Western stories. Think "The Texan" immense, and I stand right behind Mr. H. Dock, of New Jersey, as an admirer of "Claire," not only on account of her build, but just naturally a real she-woman. I am just itching to get hold of "H. R. H. the Rider"; it should be here on sale to-day. If *Whistling Dan* with *Satan*, *Black Bart*, and *Kate* run along like they start out, I've sure got a treat ahead. The short stories all speak for themselves. I only wish there were more of them. In fact, I don't find any that bore holes in me. I read the verses, too. I wish there were more writers of verse like Margaret G. Hays; she puts the pep in her lines. Just keep tying your rope on all the best ones, and the ALL-STORY WEEKLY will have a life-long success.

L. ELLIOTT.

Baltimore, Maryland.

Just a line to let you know how I enjoy your magazine, especially E. K. Means's stories. When I read his story entitled "Monkey Lodge," I loaned it to several of my friends, and they vowed they wouldn't miss another of his stories for anything. It is worth the price of your magazine just to read his stories. Next to E. K. Means I liked "The Texan," and I agree with Mr. Pelky that we don't want to leave the poor fellow out in the woods with a rose in his hand, so give us a sequel to it. I don't agree with one of your readers, who said the ALL-STORY WEEKLY was the same as any other magazine but for a few stories in it. I think no other magazine can come up to it. The ALL-STORY WEEKLY and *The Argosy* are the only two magazines I've read since I got the first copy of them. Give us some more *Semi-Dual* stories, and also some more by the author of "Steamboat Gold" (George Washington Ogden). Well, I've my little say, and will close now.

P. L. YATES, JR.

402 N. Twenty-Ninth Street,
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